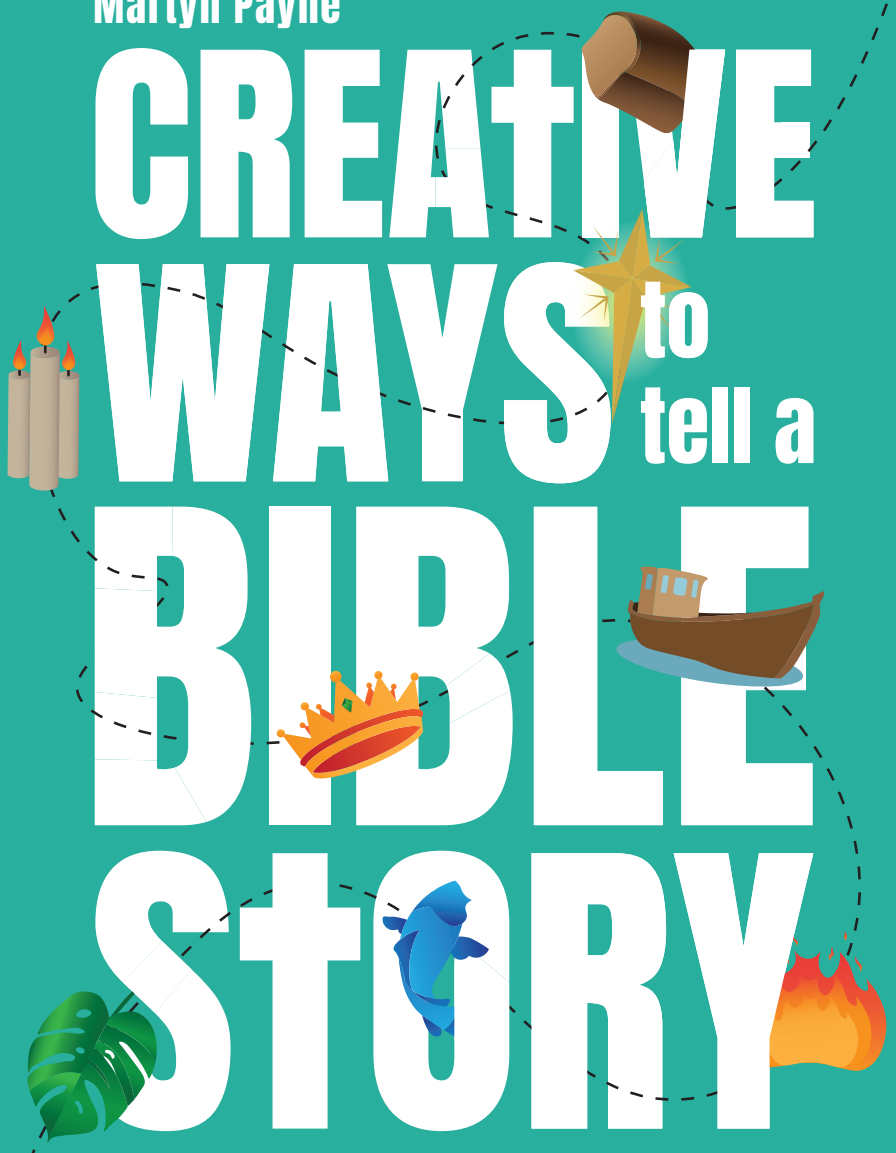


Martyn Payne

CREATIVE WAYS to tell a BIBLE STORY



Techniques and tools for exploring
the Bible with children and families



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A BIBLE STORYTELLER'S PRAYER

*Lord God of the Bible,
you have revealed your great love towards us
through the stories in this book.
Help us to pass on its prophetic messages with sensitivity;
help us to handle its timeless truths with reverence;
help us to open up its deep treasures with skill;
and help us to bring to life its powerful words
with enthusiasm,
always trusting to the inspiration and strength
of your Holy Spirit.
May we as storytellers be forgotten,
but you as the world's true story be remembered,
received and loved.
In the name of the greatest of storytellers,
your living Word, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen*



FOREWORD

As a storyteller I'm often asked to recommend resources that contain either Bible stories or practical advice on storytelling skills. I am delighted to recommend *Creative Ways to Tell a Bible Story* on both counts. It contains over 68 Bible stories, 17 ways to introduce them, 18 ways to tell them and 17 ways to help listeners reflect on and explore their meaning. Indeed, over 30 of these stories are further developed into a suggested three-term teaching plan. The book is well organised, easily navigated and useful for anyone at any level of skill. It provides a fresh approach to old favourites as well as much that is inspiringly new. I am particularly looking forward to including a Bible box in my own storytelling. I know that those responsible for children's talks on a Sunday morning will also appreciate this simple and effective idea. It is an invaluable resource!

What I appreciate most about this resource, however, is not the quantity of tools, techniques or stories covered. Nor is it even the quality of the presentation – though this too is very high. I am most impressed by the experience, passion and thoughtfulness that so clearly inform it. It reflects the gathered wisdom of Martyn's many years of team ministry. The introduction alone is worth reading for its affirmation of scripture and the high calling of biblical storytelling in helping people to discover and grow in God. It not only delivers on its promise to offer myriad creative ways to tell a Bible story, but also keeps the Author of life central in its focus. It is a welcome and trustworthy resource.

Renita Boyle

Author of *My Storytime Bible* and *Parachute Fun for Everyone*

INTRODUCTION

Why tell Bible stories? The Bible comes to us out of a storytelling culture. It is how Jesus taught. His stories got people thinking, asking questions and then trying to work it all out for themselves. It is arguably the best way to learn, and we see this happening in the way children suddenly understand something deep and personal for the first time. Stories allow just this sort of discovering to happen.

Each week, most of us who work with children and families through church groups use a Bible story. As Christians, we believe that the Bible is our special book and its stories can help us learn more about God, more about ourselves and more about what we are meant to do with our lives. However, the Bible raises as many questions as it answers, and Christians have different attitudes towards it, depending on their tradition and the teaching they have received.

So what sort of book are we talking about and how do we want children and families to fall in love with its stories? A key verse comes in Paul's letter to his young apprentice apostle, Timothy. Paul wants Timothy to be fired up with a love for the scriptures, so he writes, 'Everything in the scriptures is God's word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live' (2 Timothy 3:16). The RSV says, 'All scripture is inspired by God.' I wonder what 'inspired by God' means and what we want our children and their families to understand by this all-important word.

God works to make us the very best people we can be, with all our gloriously different personalities (see John 10:10). In this way, together

we might just begin to reflect the unfathomable richness that is the likeness of God. So this must also be true of the many writers of the story of the Bible. They weren't taken over to become robot secretaries; every word wasn't dictated to them. Rather, their own personalities, family backgrounds, perspectives and idiosyncrasies are also there as they express, to the best of their abilities, God's story as they saw it and God's words as they heard them. By God's Holy Spirit they wrote far more than they knew they were writing, while still remaining true to themselves.

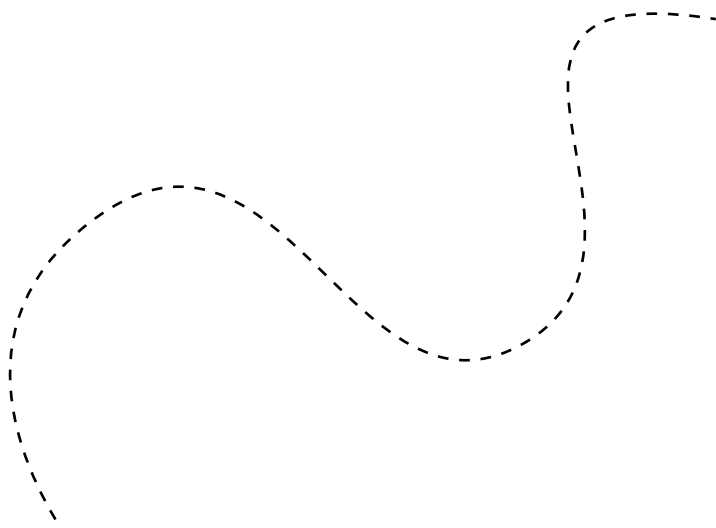
When we open the Bible with children and families, we need to recognise how the characters of the writers had an influence on what was written. These writers were fallible human beings who wrote down what happened to themselves, their families and their nation. They were limited human beings, trying to make sense of what God was doing, what God was like and what God was saying to them in their generation. It is therefore no surprise to find that they were influenced by their culture, by tribalism, nationalism and even paganism. Their view of God was not complete but, remarkably, although trapped within their own time in history and their own particular mindset, they were again and again gifted to see greater truths than they could have imagined on their own. Their history and geography meant that they often wrote about a God who was exclusively on their side – a God who delighted in the destruction of their enemies, whose nature they described with the military and triumphant metaphors of their day. Yet their writing was nonetheless inspired because, mixed in with this, there is something more: a movement towards a truer picture of a God of infinite mercy, who forgives his enemies, who is for the whole world and not just for a small collection of tribes – a God who is wonderfully inclusive, not merely nationalistic.

The Bible's stories are recorded by writers who, like you and me, were growing up into the knowledge of God. We are joining them on a journey to discover more of who God is, who we are and what we may become. This is what makes this precious story inspired. It inspires us to search for the truth of God and our own true self, fulfilled in

God. The inspiration of scripture often lies in between the words of the story, drawing us ever onward into the likeness of Christ, who is the true direction and fulfilment of all scripture.

Bible stories can inspire us to seek after God, to learn from others' recorded experiences of God, to try to step out of our own cultural and historical limitations and enter more fully into the mystery that is God, and to become all that we are created to be, renewed and restored by the love of God to us in Jesus.

Most of us need just one good idea to get us started, and this book has ideas in abundance. My prayer is that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the following wealth of creative ways to tell any Bible story will become tools for you to use as you open the Bible with the children and adults with whom you work.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book proposes a tried-and-tested approach to telling Bible stories.

There are three main sections:

- The way in: ideas for introducing a Bible story.
- The way through: suggested methods for telling the story.
- The way out: a collection of techniques for exploring the meaning of that story, including space for reflection about how to apply the story to our lives today.

In addition, in the appendices you will find:

- A selection of over 30 key words or phrases offering ways in which connecting threads might be explored.
- A suggested year's programme of Bible stories explored with ideas taken from the book.
- A chronological index of all the Bible stories in the text, which will enable users to find material for a particular session with children and families or for an all-age church service.

With each generic idea in the first three sections, there are linked examples using particular Bible stories so that the suggestions can be worked out in practice. The aim of each idea is always to offer a way to lift the Bible story off the page and into the hearts and minds of children and adults.

The pattern of introducing, telling, exploring and reflecting on a Bible story gives the story space to breathe so that everyone can hear God for themselves speaking from the Bible. It does not, on the whole, need a lot of props; nor is it dependent on craft activities, with all the preparation that they usually entail. The main preparation for this approach lies, rather, in getting to know the Bible story well.

The book can be explored in several ways.

- The Bible passages presented in the text as examples of ways to introduce, tell, explore or reflect on a story can be used as they are or as templates to help you create your own examples.
- You could select one idea from each of the first three sections to put together a tailor-made way to introduce, tell, explore and reflect on any Bible story of your choosing.
- When sharing Bible stories in church or in school, you could vary the way the story is presented by trying out new approaches drawn from the three sections.

By trying out different styles of introducing, telling, exploring and reflecting on the Bible, you will be developing your own gifts as a storyteller. In addition, by making sure that you always use one idea from each of the first three sections of the book, you will be keeping a check on the balance of your storytelling and helping your audience to reflect on the story for themselves and draw their own conclusions about applying it to their lives. By always including the key elements of introducing, telling, exploring and reflecting, we equip people with a framework that will help them to grow in their faith and to delight in the Bible throughout their lives.

Once you become more confident as a Bible storyteller, you may wish to develop this gift further, and the key words and phrases in the 'Making connections' appendix are designed to facilitate this. They offer connected themes across the Bible that you can use to shape new and exciting stories of your own.

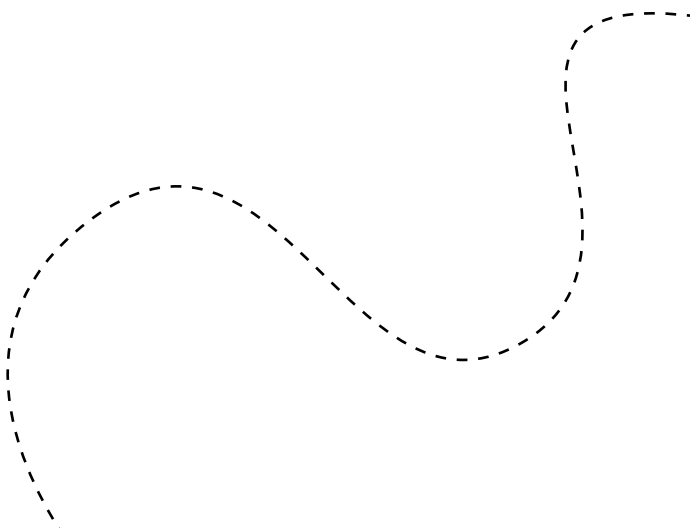
Finally, this book offers a programme of Bible stories for a whole year. This is designed to help people to see the big story of the Bible as a coherent whole. Each week's Bible story is unpacked in line with the principles found in the book – offering a way in, a way through and a way out of the story. Each of these in turn draws on ideas taken from the first three sections.



SECTION 1

Way in: introducing the story

To bring a Bible story to life, it is always helpful to start where people are. This immediately makes it easier for them to see the potential relevance of the story to their own lives and circumstances. The following ways into a Bible story work on this principle.



Getting into mystery

A box Bible

Using a box Bible as a way into the story has been a reliable standby for many storytellers in many situations. It never fails to hold children's attention, excite their interest and, most importantly, create mystery and wonder.

You need to make a box Bible from something that is the size and shape of a big book but is actually a storage box. Some craft shops sell cardboard versions of such boxes that will simply need painting or covering so that they look like a Bible. Gold card, lined to look like pages and stuck on to three of the four edges, can be very effective. You could even make a box Bible out of a box file.

This visual aid demonstrates very clearly that the stories 'come out' of this special book and come alive. By taking out a mystery object that will become your story, you are helping people to remember that the Bible is God's living word.

Young children in particular are always fascinated by what might be in the box, and to have something new come out, even week by week, always holds their attention.

Suggestions for items taking you through the Bible

- Creation: a small piece of green and blue modelling clay.
- The garden of Eden: a leaf.
- God's promise to Abraham: a star.
- Joseph's story: a piece of multicoloured fabric.

- The Passover: a piece of matzo bread or cracker.
- Places of remembrance from the stories of Joshua: a small stone.
- The battles in Judges: a mini pretend sword.
- David and Israel's other kings: a mini crown.
- The prophets: a small scroll made from doll's house stair banisters with some paper rolled around them.
- The birth of Jesus: a birthday candle.
- The stories of Jesus: a seed.
- Sheep stories and the story of the good shepherd: some cotton wool.
- The death and resurrection of Jesus: a cross.
- The gospel going off around the world: a piece of sail.
- The new heavens and the new earth: a gemstone.

When choosing a single prop for one story that you want to tell, try to pick something intriguing and not too obvious – something that will get the group talking. Remember that your choice could be an important hook, enabling them to recall the story for many years to come.



This resource offers a treasure trove of ideas for opening up a Bible story (the way in), telling the story (the way through) and exploring the meaning of the story (the way out), including suggestions for reflecting on how to apply the story to our lives today. Also included are over 30 key words and phrases providing ways in which connecting threads might be explored, and a suggested year's programme using the Bible stories explored in the book. A comprehensive index makes it easy to find material for a particular children's session, special event, workshop or all-age church service.



Formerly part of BRF's Barnabas Children's Ministry and Messy Church teams, **Martyn Payne** has a background in teaching, Bible storytelling and leading all-age worship, and is passionate about the blessing that comes when generations explore faith together. Currently pastor of a church in Essex, he's still telling stories!

'Engaging, interactive and reflective methods and ideas to bring Christianity to life with children and young people.'

Jane Butcher, former Barnabas in Schools team leader

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Cover illustrations by Ben Bloxham



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