



“How Would Jesus Tell the Story?” Effective Story Telling In Our Ministry to Children

By [Rob Neves](#)

“For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it. I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say.”

John 12:49-50

To the best of my knowledge, Jesus didn't make any mistakes. I not only believe this to be absolutely true, I have staked my eternal salvation on the validity of that fact. What does that fact mean when we consider Christ's every movement? Did He have the luxury of random and un contemplated words and actions, or was He keenly aware that we would cling to His every recorded thought and deed? I believe that because of his full knowledge of our actions, Jesus not only did not make mistakes, but rather, He had to be purposeful and deliberate in His every interaction to assure He would be the perfect servant, the perfect teacher, and eventually the perfect sacrifice. As we read in the beginning of John's Gospel,

“In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make.”

we see evidence of the purposeful and deliberate planning God used in creating everything... the stars, the sun, the earth, mankind and even the story. It is my belief that Jesus, being as purposeful and deliberate in everything He did, was fully aware that the message and the medium would have to cross the globe, be shared in hundreds of languages, have to span the passage of centuries, and be of vital importance to billions of people he loved enough to die for. Do you think Christ would leave that message to chance, or do you think that he would be just as purposeful, deliberate and perfect in His plan for the medium as He was for the message? Do you believe that the stories He told were meant to be understood only by the people of ancient Galilee, or do you think He was just as aware of our needs when he chose to tell stories? If you believe that he would have treated the choice of how to leave the message with the same divine knowledge, power, love and wisdom that he treated every other decision, action or word, what does it mean that He chose to tell stories?

Jesus was limitless in His power, resources, wisdom and love. If He wanted to, He could have left the messages on the back of our hands. He could have etched the message in the side of mountains as was done for Moses. He could have rearranged the whole universe to have the stars spell it out in the night sky... But He didn't. He told stories. Of the billions of options available to Him, our Lord purposefully and deliberately, in all of his infinite power, glory, wisdom and love chose stories. He left us the tools to do the same.

This workbook looks at the story as a tool to pass on wisdom and love, to invite and to explore the divinity that each of us can experience in our relationships. The 3 practices we see evident the examples Jesus left us are as follows:

a) He Used Examples:

He allowed for comparison, foreshadowing and personal investment in the characters and story line of the example.

b) He Created Links:

He created links from the examples to real life situations. Situations that people not only understood but had sensual or sensorial, emotional and physical comfort with. He used the language of the people and invited them into the learning by asking questions.

c) He put the unknown into context:

By relating the unfamiliar to the well established knowledge base of the audience, He was able to bridge the gap between the two.

As current research shows us more about how children learn, we see the validity of these same strategies applied in modern teaching approaches and widely acknowledged best practices. The question remains was it random chance or deliberate and purposeful?

Examples:

The Gospels are filled with parables and analogies. If we look at the story as a tool we see that while the value of the words in these parables may vary from person to person, the format remains constant and as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago. It is important to be sure of what the ONE thing you want to teach before you start. Christ used many items to describe His message, but He was consistently singular in his approach. The Kingdom of God is like a house, a banquet, a man scattering seed, and a vine, it was never like a man scattering seeds at a banquet in a house covered in vines. The next feature present in many stories is the reoccurring theme. Quite often we see similar occurrences present in three stages, these reoccurring themes allow us to foreshadow or speculate the outcome, compare traits and values and develop a gray scale for morality. Whether it is the Three Little Pigs, Three Bears or the Three Servants with the Talents, many of the stories we learned had a reoccurring theme that was presented (in variations) three times. We can follow the same format by ensuring that the message (the ONE thing) is presented three times in the story we present. The other consistently present facet was the opportunity to associate or personalize the experience. Each of us when hearing a story identifies with a character in the story. It is this association that helps us to fill in the blanks. There is a wealth of information that the audience needs to provide to make the story a shared experience.

Links:

Christ used links within the stories to describe the message more clearly. In the stories Jesus used, He talked about things that the audience not only understood, but had real life experience with. In the story of the man sowing seed (Mark 4:1) we hear the story of man who experiences varied returns on his investment of time and seed. In our over fed society, this is of little relevance, but in the time of our Lord, your crops return had a direct bearing on how hungry you and your family would be for the next year. It stirred them emotionally, they can relate to the work, hope and expectation of returns, the sacrifice needed to nurture unresponsive soil, the grim realization that the growth is out of your control once you have done all you can to foster it. These links when vividly imagined stay in your mind as real as the vividly recalled events they are linked to. This is done frequently by asking the audience to fill in the blanks.

In Matthew, Jesus asked for a coin. Then He asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" Jesus knew that everyone in that crowd wanted something different out of His answer. Some wanted permission to evade taxes; others wanted fuel for their fire of entrapment others still had hoped for a call to bear arms against the roman occupation. In fact that question, like many questions, was a statement looking for verification. By answering the question with a question, people were able to interpret the answer for themselves. With our children we can do the same thing in our stories. By asking them the questions that fill in the blanks, the story not only moves more quickly, it becomes more clearly focused on the individual experiences of the audience. These links to vividly imagined events help children experience the example.

Context:

Relating the unknown to the well known is the fastest way to accurately describe the properties, characteristics, expectations, functions and qualities of an object, action or event. This happens so frequently and with such precision that in some cases the story outlasts the original use (caught red handed). In Matthew 19:24 we see Jesus using this tool when asked about rich people entering heaven. The Eye of the Needle (a small man gate in Jerusalem) was not built for camels, and while it would be unlikely that a camel would pass through it (It would mean losing all excess baggage, going through on it's knees, and need be prepared for struggle and frustration) it isn't impossible. Out of context this passage is a message of doom for those blessed with financial wealth, in context it is a warning of the challenges of being in this world but not of it. In the scripture passage below, we see how Jesus describes "openness" to experiencing the Word. I believe that if Jesus were just to describe the Kingdom, as He knew it, we would not be able to understand it. We have nothing to compare it to. Cognitive dissonance makes it difficult for us to understand things that are unlike or in opposition to things we already understand or believe. This is extremely evident in young children, where apparently conflicting facts are not only unaccepted, they are infuriating. Have you ever witnessed two toddlers arguing over who's father is big? Matthew 13:10-13 His disciples came and asked him, "Why do you always tell stories when you talk to the people?" Then he explained to them, "You have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others have not. To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But to those who are not listening, even what they have will be taken away from them. That is why I tell these stories, because people see what I do, but they don't really see. They hear what I say, but they don't really hear, and they don't understand.

Putting It ALL Together:

Luke 21:25-36

Strange things will happen to the sun, moon, and stars. The nations on earth will be afraid of the roaring sea and tides, and they won't know what to do. People will be so frightened that they will faint because of what is happening to the world. Every power in the sky will be shaken. Then the Son of Man will be seen, coming in a cloud with great power and glory. When all of this starts happening, stand up straight and be brave. You will soon be set free. Then Jesus told them a story: When you see a fig tree or any other tree putting out leaves, you know that summer will soon come. So, when you see these things happening, you know that God's kingdom will soon be here. You can be sure that some of the people of this generation will still be alive when all of this takes place. The sky and the earth won't last forever, but my words will. Don't spend all of your time thinking about eating or drinking or worrying about life. If you do, the final day will suddenly catch you like a trap. That day will surprise everyone on earth. Watch out and keep praying that you can escape all that is going to happen and that the Son of Man will be pleased with you.

In this example we see Christ using the story in His teaching. He “puts it all together”. Jesus tells them what the lesson will be, He uses the story (a link to their modern times) to describe the lesson, He then tells them what implications this message has for their lives. Using this same pattern we can apply the same steps to any lesson we want to share with the children of God... even the youngest ones. By following the progression through the [worksheets](#), we take the scripture passage and develop a story to wrap the gospel. The wrapping story needs not be real or reasonable; it needs to contain elements that are familiar to children. See the following as an example [The BIG Plan](#)

If we can take these words of a foreign land, describing a foreign world, left to a foreign people and bring them into the lives of our children, the message becomes a personal invitation to faith experiences through interaction.

Workshop:

The article above is the introduction to a workshop given by Rob Neves.

"This workshop explores the teaching strategies described in Christ's interactions in the Gospels and teaches your team how to use those same strategies how to share the Word in the world today. By using the translation template, we can wrap our scriptural text with a story that lends context and practical meaning. For example, imagine you are Lazarus. You have been dead for 4 days, and now your friend Jesus raises you from the dead. On Monday, when you do back to work, how do you explain why you weren't at work on Friday? The challenge of sharing the words of a different time, written in different place, left in different language and describing a different world doesn't need to be intimidating."

To contact Rob Neves for more information about this workshop, please email him at rneves@porchlight.ca

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