Tell Me the Story

Storytelling Techniques

by

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Gladys Alyward sadly turned from the door of the China Inland Mission. They informed Gladys that their testing showed she was too old (twenty-six) and too uneducated to be a missionary. This did not stop Gladys. She knew she would be a missionary to China because God had called her to go.

And go she did! Gladys offered her services to an elderly missionary lady who welcomed the idea of a young lady to help her in the tiny mountain town where she was starting a new work. Gladys saved her money to buy a train ticket from England to China. She was soon on her way.

The women tried to spread the Gospel in the village but the people fled from them in fear. One day Gladys had an idea. The ladies opened their home as an inn for the weary mule-drivers who sought lodging each night for themselves and their mules. They offered good food, a clean bed, and entertainment! Gladys, had learned Chinese from the cook. She would tell Bible stories as the weary men ate their dinners. They listened intently to these wonderful new stories about the one called Jesus.

The men carried the stories to their families and the people they met along the way. Soon everyone knew of the inn where you could hear wonderful stories that changed people’s lives. Eventually Gladys was accepted by the community and God gave her many opportunities to share the Gospel with the people of China.

Many people had considered Gladys Alyward to be a poor candidate for missionary service. Yet over the years, she was perhaps one of the most influential persons involved in spreading the Gospel to the people of China. People saw her flaws; God saw her worth. God sees your worth also. Will you allow Him to develop your potential?
**STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES**

Storytelling is one of the most enjoyable and least intimidating forms of public speaking. Even the most timid storyteller will find he becomes so wrapped up in telling a story that he soon forgets to be afraid. Everyone, no matter how old he is, loves to hear a story.

Stories, most likely, have been popular since the days of Adam and Eve. They probably spent many an evening recounting the story of creation. Their children may have begged to be told how they chose the name of each animal or what the beautiful Garden of Eden looked like.

Storytelling played an important part in the early church. Hundreds of years ago most people could not read the Bible stories for themselves so the clergy used storytellers to tell and act out the Bible stories. Eventually the storytellers moved out of the church buildings because so many people flocked to hear them. Since they were not in the church, the storytellers felt free to tell stories other than Bible stories. Some became actors and the theater was born.

Other storytellers traveled from village to village and stood in town squares and spun tales of adventure and wonder. Then they would pass their hat to collect enough money to buy a little food to get them on their way to the next town.

**The Purposes Of Storytelling**

Storytelling is a wonderful art that is meant to be shared with others. Stories need not be word perfect or memorized. Story presentation is not as critical and demanding as other forms of speech yet Storytelling serves many important purposes. Let us look at some of these purposes.

**Storytelling develops the imagination.** A story allows the listener to go places, do things, and meet people that he never would in real life. Imagination gives the mind wings. A story allows you to mentally create the most elaborate and splendid settings, the most interesting characters, and the most spine tingling adventures. The storyteller paints the scene and the listener sees it with his mind's eye.

A good storyteller can paint a vivid picture in a child's mind that is more splendid and creative than any flat visual could possibly be.
Storytelling widens the listener’s horizons. A story can teach the listener about life in another city or another country. It helps him understand what other people are like, how they feel, how they live, and how they think. It can give the listener new ideas that have never crossed his path before.

Storytelling gives enjoyment. Listeners delight in hearing stories. A good story can transport the listener to another world. It can lighten his mood. It can lift his spirits.

Books tell stories, but some people do not like to read. Television tells stories, but TV eliminates the most important part of the Storytelling process: imagination. Being told a story allows the listener to sit, absorb the words, and use his mind to create.

Storytelling helps solve problems. Listening to the conflicts that trouble the characters in a story and hearing how they handle the conflict can help the listener learn valuable lessons. He may learn not only what to do, he may also learn what not to do. Without even realizing it the storyteller may be giving valuable advice. Aesop’s fables were full of advice on how to live and how not to live. These lessons ended the story with the expression, “...and the moral of the story is . . .”

Children today face problems at home, at school, and at play that are hard to imagine. They need real solutions. They need values to live by and heroes to admire and emulate. Children’s Church is a wonderful place to present Biblical truths and principles. Whether you are telling a Bible story or a supporting story, you can use the means of storytelling to instill truth and inspire desired actions. You can give the children principles by which to live and heroes to admire.

The Types Of Stories

Fiction. Fiction is a story that might be based on real life but is not a true story. Fiction need not be based on real life. Stories that fall under this category are Fairy tales, Folk Tales, Tall Tales, Animal stories, Fables, Myths, and non-true stories.

Some of the supporting stories in our materials are fiction. They are not true stories, but they can teach important lessons that back up the Bible story being presented.

Nonfiction. Nonfiction stories are true and actually happened. Stories that fall under this category are Biblical, Historical, Biographical, Autobiographical, and Missionary stories.
It is always good to emphasize the fact that a story is true when you tell it. So much of what children learn in school and on TV is fiction. They need to be told that God’s Word is true.

**Custom Fitting A Story To The Children**

Select a story suitable to the occasion. Know the occasion for which you will be presenting the story. Here are some questions to answer to help you find a suitable story. When, where, and why are you telling the story? Is there a theme you need to follow? How much time will you be allowed? What do you hope to accomplish? All of these questions will supply you with the answers to finding the appropriate story.

Select a story suitable to the age group. Stories are not just for children. People of all ages love stories. You should try to suit the story to the listeners. You will accomplish more if you tell a story that is fitted to the age group's specific needs and interests. Let us take a closer look at each age group.

Our materials can easily be used for many different age groups and for many different situations. Whether you are teaching Sunday School, Children’s Church, or a children’s club, if you consider the age of the children, you can adapt the materials to suit their needs.

It is also possible to combine several age groups together. If you are doing that, aim the story level at the older children. The younger children will enjoy the story and the older ones will not feel put down.

- **Toddlers**  
  Ages 2-4

  **Interests:** Toddlers are interested in familiar things like parents, brothers and sisters, pets, friends.

  **Needs:** They need simple stories with just a few characters, familiar objects, people, and places. Teach one simple lesson at a time and teach it in a simple way. For example, toddlers love to name animals that God made and make the sound of each animal.
• **Beginner**   Ages 5-8

**Interests:** Beginners like stories about familiar people, places, and ideas. They like repetition, rhyme, and rhythm.

**Needs:** Tell stories that teach simple lessons such as telling the truth or sharing with others. Give one idea at a time like kindness, obedience, sharing. Tell stories that deal with the simple fears they may have. They never tire of hearing a well-loved story.

• **Primary**   Ages 8-11

**Interests:** Primary age children are old enough to begin noticing other people and other ways of life. Their world is expanding. They have fantastic imaginations.

**Needs:** Tell stories that introduce new places and ideas. Stretch imaginations by starting with the familiar and moving to new things. Provide action stories, and exciting Bible stories. You can deal with fears such as family and school problems.

• **Junior**   Ages 11-13

**Interests:** Juniors are interested in action and adventure. They know there is a world beyond theirs and they are interested in it. They are looking for someone to imitate and admire.

**Needs:** Tell stories filled with new people and places. Give them heroes that are worthy of admiration such as Bible heroes, missionaries, preachers, presidents, and others who have achieved. Tell stories of courage, honesty, perseverance, and bravery.

**STORYTELLING FOR TEENS AND ADULTS**

This next section on storytelling for teens and adults will not fit into Children’s church, however it is included for your knowledge.

• **Teens:** Ages 13-18

**Interests:** Teens are interested in friends, dating, changing relationships, and the future.
Needs: Tell stories that are realistic and deal with real problems such as peer pressure, family relationships, morality, and resisting drugs. Provide stories with situations that deal with achievement, acceptance, and decision making. Teens love humor.

- **Adults** Ages 18 and Up

  **Interests:** Adults are interested in family, work, success, and health related matters.

  **Needs:** Tell stories of achievement, dealing with family members, and coping with life. Also tell stories that add some wonder and imagination to life, renew zeal for life, add validity to ideals once held, and renew the desire to dream.

- **Senior Citizens**

  **Interests:** Senior Citizens are interested in many of the same things as younger adults: family, health, home. They also have interest in the good old days, their future care, and death.

  **Needs:** Tell stories that affirm their worth and the importance of simple successes. Stories about the good old days and family are enjoyed.

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**The Parts Of A Story**

**The Introduction:** Give the basic information.

Most stories begin by giving information that is necessary for the children to understand the premise of the story. The introduction is usually when you tell the time and location of the story. However, not all facts are revealed in the introduction. The author may withhold some facts for later to create a desired effect.

The introduction may also be the time when we are introduced to some or all of the characters. We may be given a few facts about them or we may be plunged right into the middle of the situation. The introduction should not be long. In a short story the major amount of time is devoted to the body and climax.

A good storyteller weaves the important facts into the fabric of the story so the listener learns vital information and yet is hardly aware he has been informed.
The Body: Develop the story.

The majority of the story time is spent in the body of the story. The plot and conflict are presented and developed. The characters are faced with the conflict and begin to react to each other and the problems they face. Twists and turns occur causing the story to gain interest.

What will happen next? How will the characters react to this news? Why did such a thing come about? All these and many other questions will go through the mind of the listener as he becomes absorbed by the events unfolding before him.

The Climax: The high point of the story.

The climax is the most vital part of the story. It is the place where everything gets exciting. All events lead to this point and all problems demand to be answered. The listener holds his breath in anticipation of the outcome.

The climax is the emotional and intellectual high point of the story. The characters have confronted the problem; the conflict must be resolved. Finally a solution must be reached.

It is the job of the storyteller to build a mood of excitement and suspense. The listener should sense the end is near by the way the storyteller presents this portion of the story. Mood and tension are built and maintained through facial expression, bodily movements, voice inflections, volume and rate of delivery. The storyteller must convey a sense of urgency as the story reaches this crucial moment of resolution.

The Conclusion: Wrap up the story.

The conclusion is short and to the point. The conflict has just been solved. The characters now give their final reactions. All the loose ends are explained. Final plans may be briefly presented.

Now the story is over. Spending too much time on the conclusion takes away from the enjoyment of the story. Only a short amount of time should be spent before “and they lived happily ever after” is declared. (Of course not all stories end exactly that way, but you get the idea.)

The invitation should be right on the heels of the conclusion. Now is the time to drive home the message of the story and ask for a response from the children. The invitation should be closely tied with the story and the conclusions drawn in the story.
Preparing Your Story

Know Your Story.

Weekly stories have been provided for you. Read your story. Then read the actual Bible account of the story. Continue to review the story until you feel comfortable with it.

Decide where each part of the story, discussed above, occurs. To help you remember the story, you can briefly write down, in your own words, what happens in each part of the story. This is called blocking out the story.

Read the story often so you will be completely familiar with what happens, the order in which it happens, and what the characters say and do.

Determine the Message or Main Theme.

What exactly is the story saying? What is the purpose? Be sure you understand not only the story but the aim of the message of the story.

In A Closer Look you have been given a weekly Life Lesson. This is the main theme of that lesson.

Determine the Mood.

Determine the overall mood of the story. Is it somber, upbeat, humorous, tense, dreamy? Are there mood shifts? Note any mood shifts in the margin. You can also add a note stating the nature of the mood change.

Look For Other Points of Interest.

Note any special points of interest. Is there action? Humor? Does a certain sentence suggest a natural gesture like pointing or spreading out your hands? What actions could you or the children helping use? What words do the characters say that are especially memorable? Use these memorable phrases. Tell the children what the character said, then tell them to repeat the phrase with meaning. This helps the children to remember what was said.
**Underline Important Words.**

You should mark your story when you first begin to study it so that, as you study it, key words will impress themselves on your mind, correct phrasing will automatically fit into place, and important ideas will be clear to you. You do not need to memorize the story, however, you need to know it so well you will need little prompting at story time.

Underline words of importance. Not all words should be underlined. Only underline words that are important to the comprehensive interpretation of the story.

**Important words:**

- **Nouns** -------- Who, what or where
- **Adjectives** ---- Describe the Noun
- **Verbs** -------- Words of action
- **Adverbs** ------ Describe the action

**Add The Action.**

Now is the time to decide which parts of the story should be narration and description and which parts should be acted out by you or the children. Not all stories will use the children. Some stories may be mainly description.

Plan words and actions to use, but don't memorize the story. Let if be spontaneous. The children can be the characters in the story. They can be objects.

For example: the crossing of the Red Sea. Select 3-4 children to be Israelites, 3-4 to be Egyptian soldiers, 4 to be the Red Sea. Have the “Sea” stand two on one side and two on the other facing them. Have them extend their arms and do waves.

Tell the Israelites to act worried when they see the Egyptians far off. Then tell how God made the Pillar of cloud to settle and the Egyptians went to sleep. Have them lay down. When Moses puts out his rod, have the “Sea” lift their arms up and have the Israelites walk across. Then have the Egyptians wake up and pursue. Have them fall in the middle and the “Sea” close up around them. Everyone goes back to their seat and you finish up the story.

The children love this and will remember it.
Children also love to see you act out a story or a portion of a story. Use your body, voice, face, and actions to become the characters in the story. How exciting this can be. If you want to be a great storyteller, don’t depend on visuals, learn how to use your body to tell the story.

Don’t be afraid to be someone else. Don’t be afraid to do something you normally wouldn’t do. The children will be so caught up in the story that they won’t think it strange at all. In fact, they’ll love it!

Gather Props and Costumes.

If a story suggests some simple props or costumes, you can choose to use these items. Start early and gather the items. Props are not necessary, but are nice for a change of pace. Every few weeks you might try to think of something you could bring to include as you tell the story.

When you use visuals, make sure they are not stagnant. Hold a picture up for a few minutes, then lay it down. Don’t have so many visuals that you are constantly worrying about which one comes next and are so busy shuffling them around that you have a hard time concentrating on the story.

Remember, visuals are just for emphasis and clarity, not a crutch for poor storytelling.

Practice Orally.

It is always best to work in front of a mirror for several practice periods to watch yourself and your techniques. Tell the story aloud so you will become accustomed to hearing it.

Some parts of the stories involve using children. You cannot practice this part, but you can practice what you will say to them, how you will give them stage directions on where to stand, what to do, and what to say. Use your imagination.

Use The Story Lesson On The Platform.

Keep your lesson handy so you can glance at it as needed. Mainly depend on your memory when you tell the story. Check on Bible references. Try not to read the story, but to tell it with expression. This helps the story to be more interesting. The story need not be memorized word perfect.
A key word or short outline can be very helpful in reminding you of what comes next, what actions you plan to use, and where you read verses to the children. A key word outline is a simple way to see your story at a glance.

**Presenting Your Story**

**Make the Words Your Own.**

Even though you did not write the story, while you are telling it, it should be yours. Paint vivid word pictures as you describe settings and characters. Make the story as interesting as possible. Set the mood. Experience the emotions. Think about how the characters must have felt.

Storytelling is a more relaxed form of speech. Stories need not be word perfect or memorized. This allows you the freedom to be creative and use your imagination. Embellishment is fine, just be careful not to depart from the story line or conclusions drawn. Being very familiar with the actual Biblical account will keep you on track.

**Use Eye Contact.**

Look the listeners directly in the eye when giving the narrative and descriptive sections of a story. Tell these sections of the story in a natural, conversational manner. Of course, you may need to change tempo and mood as the story calls for it.

When it comes time to tell the story, set the lesson aside as much as possible and concentrate on making the story interesting. Live it, enjoy it, embellish it.

**Be Energetic.**

You want to keep total attention. If the story is interesting and lively, the children will follow every word. If you use the techniques for good storytelling, you should not have a problem keeping the children’s attention.

Your energy level determines the interest level of the listener. If you are not interested, the listener will not be interested either. Enthusiasm is contagious and soon the listener will be immersed in the story. When telling a story, give it all you have. Enjoy yourself and you will be a good storyteller.
**USE YOUR BIBLE.**

When telling a Bible story, make sure your Bible is clearly visible. Read from it. Tell the children that the story you are about to tell is from God’s Word, the Bible. That means it is not a make-believe story. It is a true story of an event that actually happened long ago.

**ACT OUT THE CHARACTERS.**

Act out your characters. Give each character a personality, voice, stance, and gestures. In many cases, you can include the children in the storytelling process. If a story has a section that lends itself to inviting several children up to help you, then do so. Tell the children you have selected how to act out the characters. Give them lines to say. It need not be word for word from the Bible but a loose translation of what the character may have said. This is fun for all the children and makes the story extra memorable.

Have fun telling the story. Let the listener experience the story as he sees the characters live the story. The listener will not think it looks strange for you or the children to act out the parts. Instead it will make the story more enjoyable and exciting. Even adults enjoy a story with good characterization.

**APPLY STORIES TO LIFE.**

A story can be an extremely effective tool in teaching a lesson or making a point. As the character learns something important about life, the listener is learning along with him.

Make sure applications are clearly stated. You want the children to understand the lessons you are teaching and the truths you wish to convey. You receive clear conclusions to impart to the children in the provided lessons.

Do not muddy the meaning by using words and concepts that are beyond a child’s comprehension level. Keep it simple in wording and in concept. The end of each story time should bring the message to salvation and lead into the invitation.
RESPECT YOUR AUDIENCE.

For some strange reason many people think that when you tell a story to children you must talk down to them (baby-talk) or the message will not get through. “Now boys and girls . . . ” Children are not stupid. Even very young children can understand English when spoken in normal tones. And children do not enjoy it when they are treated like babies. The older children will especially decide the story is not for them if you do so. It will embarrass and alienate them. Never be guilty of talking down. Everyone in the audience is a human being and deserves to be treated like one.

Instead, tell the story as if you were talking to intelligent young people. You are! Children today are accustomed to quick-paced, straight forward presentations. The “Mister Rogers” approach is fine for the very young, but it is always best to aim the story level at the oldest child present.

DO’O AND DON’TS OF STORYTELLING

DO Make It Interesting.

Keep the pace lively. Use your imagination to liven things up. Use visuals, illustrations, and examples now and then. Act out stories. Use the children. Ask questions to review previous lessons. It is good to vary your style of presentation now and then to keep the interest.

DO Allow The Children To Enjoy Children’s Church.

Children’s Church is a time when the program is geared specifically for the children and children like to have fun. So keep it fun.

However, never be guilty of wasting valuable time. Have your program planned. Keep discipline so everyone can listen and learn. Use the time wisely. Children’s Church is not just a time to fill while the adults are in service. It is a valuable teaching time for young people.

You can use Children’s Church as a time to learn how to sit quietly and listen. They will need this when they move on to main service as they grow older.

Every once in a while you may wish to model the program after a “big people’s” service. Use a church format for the order of service. Lead in a few easy but adult hymns. Select ushers to take the offering.
DON’T BE SO FRIVOLOUS THAT THE MESSAGE IS LOST.

Children’s Church can be fun, but it is not silly. When you get to the story time, let the children know you expect them to listen carefully. It is a time when you want to get across a serious message. Keep a balance.

DO EXPECT THE CHILDREN TO BEHAVE.

The Storyteller or Children’s Church Director is responsible for discipline. The workers will take care of individual problems as they occur, but overall it is your job to maintain control. The children should be taught to raise a hand to ask a question or give an answer. They should not call out answers.

Never try to out-shout the children if they become loud. This only causes more commotion. It is better to stop and wait in complete silence while looking at the offending parties. This calls unwanted attention to them.

You can correct in a firm, kind voice. Don’t make threats you can’t or won’t follow up on. The children will know it. If you say the next child who disrupts will be escorted out, then you must do that. But be careful you don’t make harsh statements in anger. Remember, the children who act up the most are the ones who need to hear your message the most!

If a child has a problem sitting quietly, seat them next to a worker. Before hand train your workers to be aware and teach them how to handle situations that arise.

Eye contact is a good means of control. Looking a child in the eyes says to them, “I see you.” Don’t be afraid to stop and ask for quiet if necessary. Then expect it to get quiet! Sometimes calling down one child by name who is causing a distraction will help the other children to realize you mean business.

Instead find constructive ways to correct without excluding the troublemakers. Always start out with telling the children how you expect them to behave. That way they know what is expected of them.

Never try to talk or tell a story over children talking. You need to have control. If you truly cannot control the children, then look around in your church for a lady who was a school teacher or is just no-nonsense enough that she knows how to quiet down a crowd. Ask her to come help you out for awhile. Have her open in prayer and then sit near the front.

No one needs to be mean, but when the children understand that goofing around will not be tolerated you will be amazed that things will quiet down.
DO GIVE A CLEAR MESSAGE, INTENT, AND PLAN OF ACTION.

Children need things stated clearly and plainly. So what is your major message, intent, and plan of action?

For the unsaved child:

Message - God loves you and wants to forgive you of your sin.

Intent - You need to accept Christ as your Savior.

Plan of Action - You need to come forward and get saved.

For the Christian child:

Message - God has a plan for you.

Intent - You need to obey and follow God’s plan.

Plan of Action - Here is a practical thing you can do to obey and follow God.

Not every message is the same. Not every plan of action is the same. But you want to understand and get across the week’s message and plan of action. The Life Lesson is your weekly “centerpiece” as your message and plan of action.

PUBLIC SPEAKING TECHNIQUES

Any time you stand before a group of people of any age, you should strive to do your best to keep their interest. Use the time you have been given to teach in a responsible and valuable manner.

Following are a few suggestions on basic speaking techniques. Using correct speech techniques will give you the confidence that you are prepared and able to accomplish the task set before you.
Be Composed

Confidence and poise are qualities for which every storyteller strives to achieve while performing. If you are a beginning performer and do not feel that you possess these qualities, FAKE IT. No one can tell the difference between actual poise and pretended poise. The only way someone else will know is if you give yourself away.

Before a performance, do not allow yourself to discuss or think about being nervous. The more you dwell on your nervousness the more nervous you will continue to become.

Instead, spend the time constructively. There are ways to get your mind off fear and enable you to concentrate on giving a good performance. Review your introduction and story outline. Check on props and costumes. Remind yourself that you have diligently prepared and will do the best you can.

Spend some time in prayer asking the Lord to calm your heart, establish your thoughts, and help you to do your best. The Bible states in Isaiah 26:3, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee.” Smile and act composed. Eventually your body will respond by calming down and you will be able to think clearly.

Following later in this book will be a section on Stage Fright for the truly frightened.

Establish And Maintain Eye Contact

Eye contact is a basic form of communication in itself. It establishes a means of contact and communication between the storyteller and the children. It tells the listener that you see him as an individual.

Eye contact attracts and holds the attention of the children. When you look directly into the eyes of a person, it automatically causes him to keep his eyes on you and focus on what you are saying.

Eye contact is a form of feedback. It allows you to receive information instantly and adjust to the children’s mood. If they do not seem to understand a point, you can clarify the subject. If they seem to look bored, you can step up the pace and try to win back their attention.
Eye contact is an excellent form of discipline when working with children. Often you need not even say a word to quiet things down. Pausing to look a chattering child in the eye can do wonders. When they realize you see them, they may automatically settle down. (For the real talkers and fidgeters, you have workers who should be prepared to take action.)

Eye contact also tells your audience that you are honest and confident in your purpose. A person who will not look others in the eye is often viewed as dishonest or fearful. When you look the listener squarely in the eye you are sending him the signal that you are truthful and have confidence in yourself and your subject.

So what is eye contact? It means that you need to look directly into the eyes of the people sitting in front of you. Look from one person to the other letting your gaze rest on them for about the duration of at least one whole phrase of what you are saying.

You do not want to look at the children in a set order such as starting with the front row and working systematically around the room row by row. Rather, look in a random way. You can look at several people on one side of the room, then shift your gaze to the eyes of people on the other side. Then maybe look to the back. You should not have to spend much time thinking about this.

The main thing is to look people directly in the eye. Do not look over heads, at the floor, out the window, or at the ceiling.

### Speak Loudly And Clearly

Your goal is to be heard distinctly by everyone in the room. If you cannot be heard you might as well save your breath and the children’s time.

The size of the room will determine how loudly you must speak. A small room might only require a relatively normal speaking volume. An extremely large room might require a sound system. Remember that a full room will require more volume than an empty room. Generally a storyteller should strive to project his voice without depending on a microphone even though one is usually available. It is fine to use a microphone. It will help to save your voice.
One should never have to shout to be heard. Shouting at children is offensive. It is also hard on your voice. On the other hand, do not whisper. In private you may speak softly, on the platform your goal is to be heard.

Clear, distinct pronunciation is imperative. Do not run your words and sentences together. Make sure each word is distinct enough to be understood. Tape record or video yourself as you practice, if you are able. Listen carefully and note any slurred words. Note if you drop ending sounds such as “ing.” Note any blended words. Example: “Are you gonna . . .” instead of saying, “Are you going to . . .”

Always speak at an even rate. Sometimes a storyteller tends to rush when he speaks because he is nervous. As a result the story is hard to understand. When an audience member has to struggle to catch what is being said, he will soon give up and begin to think about something else.

The children have never heard what you are about to say. They need a little time to absorb the words and ideas. By speaking at an even rate you allow your message to sink in.

If your story is at a point that has the feeling of excitement and speed, you should pick up the pace a bit but make sure you are not speaking so quickly that you will not be clearly understood. A good storyteller can give the feeling of a quick pace by increasing the volume and energy level yet only quicken the rate a slight amount.

**Maintain A High Energy Level**

Now Hear This! Energy is one of the most important factors in holding the children’s attention. Your enthusiasm level shows your interest in the story and the program. It creates the mood needed to achieve your objective.

Lack of enthusiasm indicates to an audience that the program is not very important to you nor are they. There is nothing more boring than a storyteller who blandly drones away in a monotone voice. He might as well sit down and save his time and yours. It is your job to catch and hold the children’s attention. Energy and enthusiasm are powerful tools that can help you achieve this goal.

You have the task of conveying your message to the listeners. The children will only receive the message if you can keep their attention long enough to convey that message. The more energy and enthusiasm you radiate, the more interested the children will be.
This does not mean that you have to run and shout to keep attention. If you are out of control, soon the children will be so worked up that they are out of control. Energy is not loss of control mentally and physically, it is harnessing and using your enthusiasm to attract and keep attention.

Energy makes a program. It gives vitality to the content, a gleam to the eye, a tautness to the body, a lilt to the voice, and a keenness to the facial expression.

What is energy? The dictionary calls it, “A force, a power, or a strength.” A storyteller with energy seeks to speak, move, and communicate with power and strength. It means giving it all that you have. It means doing it “heartily, as unto the Lord.”

**Use Good Bodily Response**

Gestures, facial expressions, vocal variety and posture convey an unspoken message along with your spoken words. It is said that when we speak we give two speeches: one that is heard and one that is seen. These silent communicators can add to or detract from your message. A wise storyteller effectively uses proper bodily response to enhance his story.

**Posture**

Good posture is very important. One of the first things the children will notice about you, even before you reach the platform, is your posture. It tells the children how you feel about yourself.

Poor posture says, “I am shy, I feel inadequate, and I lack confidence. I do not want others to look at me.” It can also say, “I am bored.” It makes the storyteller look as if he does not have enough energy to hold himself upright. This is not the impression a storyteller wants to make on his listeners.

On the other hand, good posture makes a storyteller look alert, confident, and full of energy. Good posture gives the impression of poise, composure, control, and enthusiasm. Posture can convey the message, “I am happy to be here. I have something important to tell you. I am sure you will want to listen to what I have to say.”
**Gestures**

A good storyteller communicates with his body to reinforce his words. Because the body is such a strong communicator of feelings, you must be careful that your body is not telling the children one thing while your words are stating another. If you stand to speak with your shoulders slumped and tell everyone how excited you are, they will be more apt to believe your shoulders than your words. Body language should enforce your message.

Years ago storytellers used elaborate hand and body gestures to express each emotion they portrayed. Perhaps you have seen a production of a play done in the Melodramatic style. Today we view this style as a spoof because the gestures seem so overdone and phony. This style is no longer used, except in a play purposely performed in the Melodramatic style. However, you should not go to the other extreme and totally eliminate gestures.

New storytellers are often so nervous that they are afraid to use gestures. To achieve a natural look you need to do some planning. Eventually, as you become more comfortable performing, you will discover that you no longer need to plan gestures, instead they will flow naturally from the meaning of your words. Until that time comes, it is fine to plan.

A gesture should look natural. It should seem to flow from the meaning of what you are trying to convey. A gesture is an outward expression of an inward feeling.

Each gesture should originate from an inward feeling. Think about what you are saying. The meaning of your words will determine which gestures you will use. Ask yourself these questions. Which ideas create a natural desire to gesture? What types of gestures would emphasize or point up the meaning of what I am saying? What gestures would express my inner emotions about the subject?

Keep in mind that a gesture is not limited to hand movement. The whole body can gesture. A gesture could be pointing at the children or an object, it could be shrugging your shoulders and spreading your hands out in a questioning manner, it could be taking a stance that visually illustrates your emotions such as slumping or drawing yourself erect, or it could be an openhanded plea. There are many gestures you can use.
Every time you practice, practice your gestures until they look and feel like a natural part of your delivery. Watch yourself in a mirror to be certain each gesture fits your words. Make sure each gesture is used at the correct time in the story. Practice until all gestures look and feel natural.

When you gesture with your hands, be sure to raise them up to about waist level. Do not be afraid to move enough for the gesture to be clearly visible to the children. Gestures should be simple but definite. Halfhearted gestures look strange and are ineffective.

Do not overuse gestures by flinging your hands and arms around with every word you say. When not using your hands, they should hang loosely by your side. Do not clasp your hands in front or in back of your body, do not place them in your pockets, and do not play with your hair or clothing.

**Facial Expression**

Facial expression is a powerful tool of communication for the storyteller. Your face is the canvas upon which the emotions of your heart and mind are painted. While words vocalize an emotion, the face visualizes the emotion.

The face and eyes are sometimes referred to as the windows of the soul. Others can often tell a great deal about how you feel and what you are thinking by the expression on your face. A smile says you are happy. A wide-eyed look can show fear. A jaw dropped open can show astonishment. A protruding lip says you are pouting. All without saying a word.

In everyday life you might not want everyone to be able to read your thoughts and feelings, but in storytelling it is desirable. An expressive face can often convey an emotion more effectively than words. Let this work for you.

Facial expression is, perhaps, the strongest nonverbal communicator you possess. Determine to take advantage of this powerful communicator. As the children listen to you speak, they watch your face. Body language can often accurately reflect your emotions, but gestures are not always noticed by all children. On the other hand, the face of the storyteller receives the most attention. Why not use this ever-present communicator to its fullest extent?

For example, if you were telling the story of Joseph's coat, you could say, “So Joseph's father presented the beautiful coat of many colors to Joseph. How beautiful! But wait! How do you think his brothers felt when they saw that coat? (Pause, put your hands on your hips and pout. Really stick that lip out.) “Man, doesn't that make you sick? Joseph thinks he's sooooo special!”
The children will not only hear you say that the brothers were jealous, they will see the emotions the brothers felt.

Watch yourself in a mirror as you practice. Notice whether you have good expression. Do the expressions you use put across the idea you want? A mischievous smile, an angry scowl, or a puzzled look can put across your intended meaning faster than words.

Of course, an expression should not be forced. As with gestures, natural facial expressions result from thinking about your words, allowing yourself to feel the corresponding emotions, and believing the words as you speak them.

**Vocal Variety**

Another important factor in expressing your message to the children is your voice. Verbal expression is also very important to the storyteller. The way you say a word, the words you choose to emphasize, and the shades of meaning you give your words all contribute greatly to audience understanding.

Nothing is more boring than a storyteller who drones on in a monotone voice. Lack of vocal variety tells the audience that either you lack confidence in yourself and your preparation or you lack interest in your subject. A good storyteller does not want to convey either of these messages to his listeners.

Words create vivid impressions in the listener’s mind. The manner in which you speak the words can help make the words more vibrant and memorable. When you were younger did you ever sit, crossed legged, in a darkened room with a bunch of friends and swap scary stories? Can you remember the hushed tones, the long pauses, the building of suspense as the storyteller’s words came faster until he reached the horrible end? Did the hair on your neck stand up? Would it have been scary if the words had been spoken in a normal tone, at the exact same rate, with no feeling placed on any of the words? No.

Use your voice to paint word pictures, helping to make each idea and concept you present as meaningful, interesting, and concrete as possible. Some words have their meaning built into the way they are spelled. For example, buzz. If you say the word, holding out the z sound, it sounds very much like a bee buzzing. Another example is the word long. If you say, “It took a looong time,” the listener gets the feel of a passage of time. Think about your words, many of them can be made to express their meaning by the emphasis you place upon them.

Work on adding interest to your voice by varying your rate of delivery, your volume, your pitch, your inflections, and your word emphasis. Again, think about what you are saying. Your words will determine how you say a word or a phrase. The feeling you wish to convey to the listeners will help you decide how a line should be delivered.
As an experiment you can choose almost any sentence and by changing your pitch, rate, volume, inflection and word emphasis, you can make the sentence mean many different things. Let us examine these five areas and how they can be used to convey your message.

**Volume**

Volume refers to the loudness or softness with which you speak.

Loud — Stress, anger, excitement

Medium — Normal, conversational

Soft — Calm, secret, suspense

**Rate**

Rate refers to the speed at which you speak, the amount of time it takes to say words, phrases, and sentences.

Rapid — Excitement, urgency

Medium — Normal, confidence

Slow — Calm, sorrow, confusion

**Pitch**

Pitch refers to the height or depth of the tone.

High — Alarm, rage, extreme joy

Medium — Normal

Low — Reverence, awe, despair
Inflection

Inflection refers to the upward or downward movement of the pitch. Inflection is achieved by changing the pitch as a word or sentence is being spoken.

Rising — Wonder, surprise, flattery

Falling — Certainty, authority

Circumflex — irony, sarcasm

Circumflex means to bend a sound. In other words to change the direction of a sound as you are speaking. The inflection may start upward and then drop or vise versa.

Emphasis

The words you choose to emphasize in a sentence and the places where you choose to pause influence the children's perception of what is being said. They can change the meaning of the entire sentence. Let's examine these two elements of emphasis.

Emphasis Through Pauses

One way to achieve emphasis is by using a pause. Pausing for a second or two, at just the right moment, can focus the children's attention on what you want them to remember. A pause can have a powerful impact on the children. In Communicative Reading, by Agger and Bowen, they state, “A pause is a purposeful, ‘live’ silence, which is charged with meaning. A good pause reinforces, emphasizes, and thrusts home meaning.” They go on to say, “Why does the pause assist in communicating meaning? It is the major punctuation mark of oral communication.”

Examine your story. Where could a pause be used to give dramatic emphasis? Where could a pause be used to assist in clarifying the meaning of the message? Where would oral punctuation be most effective?
Emphasis Through Words

In every sentence there are words that carry more importance than others. You will want to “point up” these words by giving them verbal emphasis. Emphasis is achieved by saying words with more force or by varying your volume, pitch, rate, or inflection to make the word stand out from the other words. Words can also be further emphasized by using corresponding gestures and facial expressions.

You determine which words to emphasize by deciding the importance of each word. Some words are very important and should receive the most emphasis. Some words are of secondary importance and receive secondary emphasis. Many words carry little importance, in the sense that you do not want the listeners to pay special attention to them. These words are spoken in normal, conversational tones and are not focused on at all.

Nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives tend to be the most important, falling in the category of first or secondary importance. Of course not all words in these categories need special emphasis.

Many things factor into your choice of word emphasis. Think about the story you are using. Are there any places where extra emphasis would add to the clarity of the message? Are there words or phrases that you want the children to especially remember? Will added emphasis make a word more vivid?

Try speaking the sentences below. Three of them are statements and three of them are questions. Each time you read a sentence emphasize the bold print word. Notice how the meaning of the sentence changes each time you change the word you emphasize.

We like you? We like you.
We like you? We like you.
We like you? We like you.

Characterization

Characterization is often used in Storytelling. It involves taking a character from a story and giving him human characteristics such as a voice, a stance, and a way of moving. It allows a Bible character, who seems to be only so many words on a page, to transform into a living, breathing human. This section will concentrate on helping you to portray believable characters.
The Uses Of Characterization

**Storytelling.** Storytelling makes good use of characterization. When you tell a story, since the script is not usually memorized, you are able to experiment with how a character acts and what he says. The words can change as long as the story stays basically the same.

The storyteller acts out all the characters that speak. These characters may be male, female or even animals.

Story characters can be larger-than-life, or, in other words, a bit exaggerated. It all depends on the story and the age of the listeners. The younger the listener, the more he will enjoy a character that is overdone and stereotyped.

**Dramatic Readings and Poetry.** Dramatic Readings and Poetry call for a more realistic portrayal of a character. Most interpretative readings are performed for adults. Adults like to see realistic, believable characters. The characters in Dramatic Readings and Poetry can be somewhat stereotyped, but they must also be given personalities to which an adult can relate. Be careful that a character does not appear hokey. Create characters that are like people you really know.

The interpreter portrays all characters that speak both male and female.

**Acting.** Characterization is extremely important to an actor. The actor must create a totally believable character. A stereotype is not sufficient. The actor must create a complex character that possesses mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual qualities. He must give his character humanity. A study in characterization can assist the actor as he attempts to become his character by helping him to understand some of the basic human qualities upon which he can build.

In Acting the actor portrays only one character of his own gender and must “stay in character” throughout the play. An actor does not give description as a narrator would, he does not portray more than one character, nor does he speak directly to the children.

Characterization, on the other hand, is at the core of acting. An actor does not just portray himself saying lines, he portrays the character from the script. That means one of the actor’s main jobs is to create a character. By studying the script and using your imagination you can take some of the ideas presented here and create a memorable character.
Understanding Your Character

Below is a list of things you should know about your character.

**External Qualities.** Determine the character’s gender, approximate age, physical characteristics, and mannerisms.

**Internal Qualities.** Determine the character’s personality, motivations for actions, typical reactions, and moral beliefs.

**Check the Script or Literature.** Find any clues that the author may have written into the script or Bible story. If any of the above qualities are mentioned, jot them down on your character analysis sheet. These are qualities you know for certain.

Ask a few questions as you read the script or selection. What does my character say about himself? What do other characters say about my character? Are there any hints about personality or mannerisms in the selection?

**Use your imagination.** Often many important facts are missing from the literature. It may be a bit like putting together a puzzle. Think about the facts you do know about your character. From these facts you should be able to make up traits, both external and internal, for your character. Keep your imaginary facts believable and reasonable. Soon everything will fit together.

There are two reasons to fill in the blank areas of your character’s life and personality. One reason is that it will help you to portray the character’s physical qualities, thus making the character more acceptable to the children. The other reason is that it will help you understand your character’s emotions, logic, and motivations. This will help you to give a convincing performance.

When you are telling a Bible story, you will want to be very careful not to stray from the Bible version or to add incorrect details. But you can fill in the blanks a bit with common sense traits.

**Watch others.** Since you want your character to be as close to reality as possible, you should spend time watching people. Note the externals such as how they move, how they laugh, or any habits they may have. Note the internal traits such as how shy people act, how outgoing people act, how different people express emotions, how people react to other people and situations. Take what is believable for your character. Do not make a character so much like someone that he would recognize himself.
Basic Character Stereotypes

Below are listed some standard ways in which humans move, stand, and speak. By using some of these mannerisms you can create a character that is relatively realistic. If you use different combinations of character traits for each character you portray, you should be able to create many different characters.

Men

Gestures — Bold, angular, away from the body

Stance — Feet firmly planted, shoulders squared

Voice — Strong, deep, punch words

Women

Gestures — Smooth, graceful, closer to body

Stance — One foot slightly in front, easy stance

Voice — Higher, softer, melodic, expressive

Elderly

Gestures — Slow, slight tremor, thoughtful

Stance — Feet apart, slight stoop

Voice — Slight tremor, higher, thinner, slow

Children

Gestures — Exaggerated, fidgets, awkward

Stance — Shuffle feet, varies with mood, shifts

Voice — High, wide tone variety, may whine

Shy

Gestures — Close to body, uncertain, halfhearted

Stance — Stoops a bit, hesitant, downcast eyes

Voice — Short, soft answers, hesitant
Prim

Gestures — Precise, looks down nose

Stance — Erect posture, fussy hands,

Voice — Clear articulation, perfection

Fat

Gestures — Large movements, away from body

Stance — Feet far apart

Bad Guy

Gestures — Angry facial expression, sneers

Voice — Harsh tones, sarcastic

Good Guy

Gestures — Square shoulders, good posture

Voice — Clear, speaks out, speaks kindly

Animals

Gestures — typical of how that animal moves

Voice — Stereotype the animal to human reactions

Example — Snake: Hunched, sly looks, hiss in voice

Example — Kitten: dainty, gentle moves, purring voice
Characterization Practice Tips

The practice procedures you use will be dependent on the type of character you are creating and the degree of reality needed for the style of presentation you are using. For storytelling you do not need to go to elaborate means to create a character. Instead you will simply suggest a character by changing your voice a bit and perhaps adding a physical trait like slumping your shoulders or putting your hands on your hips when that character speaks. Each character should have something to let the children know instantly which character is speaking.

Listed below are some general practice tips to use when creating a character.

Use a mirror. It is always good to practice a character in front of a mirror. This allows you to see if you are realistically portraying the character. Watch movement, facial expression, and gestures.

Add all traits from the script and your imagination. First start with the story and then incorporate the traits you have decided to use for your character. Make sure you are consistently using the same mannerisms each time you portray the character.

If you are doing a story that requires you to create and portray several characters, watch as you practice each character. Give each one a distinct voice, stance and mannerisms. Practice saying each character’s lines the way they would say them. Take the time to fully develop each character. This helps the children to quickly tell the difference between characters. Do not be afraid to experiment.

Making the character realistic. One of the most important things you should remember to help you in creating a realistic character is to think of the character as a real person. Instead of simply using several stock mannerisms to give the impression of the character, try to put yourself in the character’s place.

If your character is shy, instead of saying, “He will not look people in the eye and I’ll have him cower a bit,” ask yourself, “How would I feel in this situation? How would I react if someone said that to me? How would my shyness affect the way I move and speak?” Then use the answers to motivate each action, each glance, each word, each mannerism.

However, if you want to add a bit of humor to this part of your story, you could use a stero-type.
For example: Samson and Deliah. (Since this can be a sensitive story for young ones, a light touch can make it easier to tell.) Make Samson a He-man with a deep voice ans shoulders back. Make Deliah a fawning, sweety-sweet, high voiced fem who bats her eyes and says things like, “Oh, Samson. You are sooo strong!”

Never be irreverent with God’s Word, but sometimes a light touch helps convey the message of a touchy story. Just think through what you will say and do before hand. Present it tactfully.

**Remember to stay in character.** An inexperienced storyteller often starts out looking and sounding like the character, then slowly goes back to his own voice and mannerisms as the line progresses. Guard against this. From the first word the character says until his last word, you should sound like the character. Staying in character will become easier as you spend time practicing the character.

When you are not “in character” you can be yourself and give narration, description, etc. But when you are portraying the character, stay “in character.”

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**OVERCOMING STAGE FRIGHT**

_The Music Stand_, a catalog of performance related objects, sells a T-shirt that has this definition of stage fright printed on it: “Stage Fright: The unreasonable fear of performing for an audience that is only waiting to laugh at, jeer, and mutilate you for anything less than a perfect performance.” Many storytellers feel this is true.

Whether you are involved in Public speaking, Storytelling, or Acting, you may find that you experience stage fright. This is quite normal. Even the most experienced storyteller or actor has to deal with fear often in his career. Fortunately there are methods of reducing fear and improving your confidence.

Generally, the more you speak, the more comfortable you will become. Give it time. Speak often. Always be prepared.
Sidetrack Fear From The Start

Put an immediate stop to fear. Every time you experience fear as a result of thinking about telling your story, stop and pray for confidence. Then quote a verse or two that reminds you that God is with you and will help you. Refuse to dwell on your fear.

God supplied you with a wonderful and powerful tool called the mind. Your mind can be your best friend or your worst enemy. The choice is completely up to you. Putting away fear is a conscious mental effort you must make if you hope to overcome stage fright. Use your mind to banish the butterflies.

There are many verses in the Bible that tell how to handle fear and that help give the Christian strength and courage in time of fear. II Timothy 1:7 says, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” Pick your favorite verse and memorize it. Repeat it often and allow the Lord to calm your fears.

If you put an instant stop to fear every time it arises, you will have gone a long way in teaching your mind and emotions that you do not have to be fearful.

Remember Your Purpose Is To Present Christ

A Christian’s message is of eternal importance. People need to know about Jesus Christ and Salvation. If you do not tell them, they might never hear. Remind yourself that the message is more important than any fear you might experience. Acts 4:20 states, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

If you are performing a secular piece of literature, you might think your story has nothing to do with sharing the Gospel, but it does, even if the story is totally secular. How can that be? Every time you stand before an audience and every time you learn more about communication you are preparing yourself for future opportunities that the Lord may bring your way.

Draw On Your Power Through Prayer

When you stand to speak, you are not alone. The Lord is always with you. Hebrews 13:5b says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” It is a great comfort to know the Lord is right beside you.

Prayer also has a wonderful calming effect. It allows you to take your mind off yourself and concentrate on the presence of God. This helps you keep things in perspective. Isaiah 26:3 says, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.”
Have Confidence In Your Preparation

If you have devoted many hours to practice and have done your best, your efforts will show. You can rely on your memory to have safely stored away the information you have diligently placed there. You can be sure your delivery will go smoothly because you have practiced until the story is polished and ready for presentation.

However, if you have not done your best, you will have twice as much fear. You will not only be afraid of the children, you will also have the fear of forgetting your material and fumbling over lines. Therefore, it is important that you spend the necessary time in preparation. It is foolish to be memorizing or studying your material minutes before you perform. Fortunately for storytellers, you need not memorize the story. But you must be very familiar with it!

Colossians 3:23 tells us, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto man.” A Christian should do everything to the best of his ability. That includes the little things like work and preparing for church. And not only should we do our best, but we should also do it with a willing heart. When the Bible states, “The Lord loveth a cheerful giver,” it does not refer to money alone. It also refers to the manner in which we give our time and talent.

II Timothy 2:15 says, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” If you study and prepare earnestly, the Lord will approve of and honor your efforts by helping you do your best job.

Act Confidently During Your Presentation

You might feel some anxiety before a performance. This is normal. There is, however, a big difference between being keyed up and panic. The way to control and avoid panic is to force yourself to remain calm.

Scientists tell us that the mind and emotions have no way of knowing if what you are thinking about is real or imagined. If you think about something sad, you will begin to feel genuinely sad. Therefore, if you act and think confidently, you will appear confident and eventually will become confident.

Understand Your Audience

Some storytellers think of the audience as being the “enemy.” You might feel as if it is “them against you.” The truth is usually the opposite. The audience is friendly.

First, the audience has come to be informed, inspired, or entertained. If you do not do your job well you will have failed them. They have put out the time and effort to come to hear you and they do not want you to fail.
Second, they will feel uncomfortable if you act as though you are uncomfortable. Your fear will translate to them and will make them feel uneasy. With children, when they sense fear, they will take over the situation. They want you to be in control. They want you to succeed.

Third, they are people just like you. They know how difficult it can be to stand before a crowd. The majority of them would never even consider doing it. They most likely admire the fact that you have the courage to speak.

Often storytellers are nervous about the size of the audience. They sometimes feel that a larger audience is more intimidating. Here is something to think about. When you sit in an auditorium, do you feel like a crowd of people? Of course not. You only feel like you, one person.

The same is true for all audience members. When you stand to speak, you are speaking to a group, but you reach them one at a time. Whenever you speak, basically, you are speaking to one person. If you keep that fact in mind, the fear of crowds should lessen considerably. Instead of worrying about talking in front of all those people, concentrate on communicating with the listener one on one.

Have A Plan

Suppose something does go wrong? Things do happen that are out of your control. The wisest thing to do is spend a few moments during your preparation time thinking about how you would handle a problem, if it should arise. After you have made a plan dismiss it from your mind so you will not continue to worry about things that may never occur. While you cannot anticipate every problem, here are some of the most common things that could happen.

- **You trip:** If you trip, keep your composure. Smile and continue on to where you were going. Put it out of your mind during your performance. If you continue to act normal, the audience will soon forget it. Go on as if nothing happened.

- **There is an interruption:** If there is an interruption of such a nature that would not cause the performance to stop, such as a noisy child or people moving around, you must concentrate. Look in another area of the audience and focus completely on what you are saying. If the audience has also been distracted, you should raise the volume of your voice and your energy level a little. This will cause the audience to look back to you and enable them to refocus on you. Then you can go back to your normal delivery.
As the adult and storyteller, you will most often need to control the situation. However, it is a very good idea to have workers spread out amongst the children who have been trained to be aware and to handle problems.

If the interruption is such that you must stop, remain composed and review in your mind where you stopped. If you are able, resume your story where you stopped, if not, go back to the last major point. If you cannot remember where you were or if you were near the beginning, then begin again. Do not think about what happened. Focus on the story and go on.

• **Remember this**: Keep your composure. Reestablish your concentration. Do not give up. It is not the end of the world. Everyone makes mistakes.

**Points To Ponder**

Read Exodus 4:10-12 and Jeremiah 1:6-9. God asked Moses and Jeremiah to go speak for Him and they both told God that they were not able. They were both afraid they could not do the job. In both cases God told them they could do what He asked because they were not the ones doing the job, God was.

The same is true for you. As a Christian your power and ability must come from God. If He has allowed you to be in the position to speak, then He will do the job through you. All God asks of you is a willing heart and your best effort.

Don’t worry about being the best storyteller in the world. Don’t compare yourself to anyone else. Start simply and add new techniques as you feel you have mastered others. Do your best and with time and practice and performance, you will improve!

II Corinthians 4:7 tells us, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Be a usable vessel.
COUNSELING

We have included 12 *Your Gateway To Heaven* tracts. These tracts are easy to use. Below is the method to use with them. You can have a training session for your workers.

The end of the Bible story time should lead directly into the invitation. Train your workers to be aware of what is going on during the invitation. They should be ready to come and take a child to a quiet area where they can be counseled. It may be best for two counselors to go if only one child is being dealt with so there is no issue of safety. One counselor can sit quietly outside of the child’s eyesight so they will not be a distraction.

Counselor’s should have the tracts with them or know where they can quickly find the tracts and pencils.

Men should deal with the boys, women with the girls. You can use women to deal with boys and girls, but not men to deal with girls. Unless it is your Pastor.

**Leading A Child To Christ**

**Introduce Yourself. Ask The Child’s Name.**

Tell the child your name and ask their name. If you know the child and they know you, this is not necessary.

**Ask Why The Child Came Forward.**

This will establish if you need to present the plan of salvation, deal with assurance, or pray for a need in the child’s life. Just because you know the child, do not assume you know whether or not they are saved.

**Refer To The Bible.**

It is important to quickly establish the fact that what you are about to tell the child is from the Bible, God’s Word. Even if you are using the counseling booklet, “Your Gateway To Heaven,” mention that the verses are from God’s Word.
Romans 3:23 says,

*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*

The Bible says that we are all sinners. I’m a sinner. You are a sinner. We are all born sinners.

Romans 6:23 says,

*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Do you know what the word “wages” means? It means payment.

If your mom or dad goes to work, do they get paid for what they do? Yes. The payment for work is money. They deserve that payment because they did the work.

The Bible says the payment for sin is death. Death means separation from God for all eternity in Hell. And we deserve that payment because we have all sinned.

But the rest of the verse says, “but the gift of God is eternal life.”

You see, God didn’t want us to have to pay that payment. He didn’t want us to be separated from Him, so He gave us a gift. The next verse tells us what the “gift” is.

John 3:16 says,

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

God’s gift to us is Jesus Christ. You see, God loved you so much that He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, down to earth to live and die on the cross so you wouldn’t have to pay the payment of sin.

But God’s gift is just like any other gift. In order for it to be yours, you have to receive it. You have to take the gift.

If I had a gift in my hand and I said, “Here, this is for you.” But you didn’t take the gift, would it ever be yours? No. You have to take it. The same is true with God’s gift.
John 1:12 says,

But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.

So how do you receive Jesus Christ? Can you take Him by the hand and take Him home with you? No. The next verse tells us how to receive Jesus.

Rev. 3:20 says,

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in.

If I were to come to your house to visit you, I would knock on your door. You would open the door and ask me to come in. You would be receiving me into your house.

Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart and life. He wants to take away your sin and become a part of your life. But you have to open the door of your life and ask Him to come in.

Would you like to ask Jesus to forgive your sin and come into your life?

• If they say Yes: Proceed.

Then I would like you to pray with me.

I will say a line then you repeat it out loud after me. But when you say it, mean it in your heart and say it to the Lord.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, I know I am a sinner.

Please forgive me of my sin.

Please come into my heart and life.

Thank you, Jesus. Amen
Did the Lord forgive your sin and come into your heart?

How do you know?

Remember the Bible says in Rev. 3:20, *If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in.*

Did you open the door of your life and ask Jesus to come in and forgive your sin?

Did you mean it?

Then what did He have to do? He had to come in.

The Bible tells us if you ask Jesus to forgive your sin, He will do it. He never tells lies. He always keeps His word.

- If they say No: Never force a decision. It would do no good. If they say no they are not ready, then tell them you will pray for them because this is the most important decision they will ever make. Tell them they can think about it and make the decision tomorrow. Tell them they don't have to be in church to pray and ask Jesus to forgive their sin and come into their life.

**Fill Out A Decision Card.**

Get the child’s name and address. Indicate on the card the type of decision made. It is always good to get this information so you can share it with your Pastor or Youth leader.

If you are using “Your Gateway To Heaven,” tell the counselors to fill out the Birth Certificate in the middle of the booklet and a decision card. Then they should stop and return the child to the group. It takes too long to go through the entire booklet at this time. Keep the booklet, give it to the Pastor with the child's name and address, and use it for follow-up at a later date.
Do’s and Don’ts of Counseling

Don’t Deal With More Than One Child At A Time.

If at all possible, there should be one child for one counselor. If you have several children it is harder to deal directly with each one. You will also find that children tend to parrot the first child. When you ask, “Why did you come forward?” you will hear identical answers. One on one counseling is best.

Do Control The Counseling Session.

Some children love to talk. If you allow it, they may ramble on and on. When discussing the verses, make statements. The Bible says we are sinners. You do not need to ask, “Have you ever sinned?” The Bible says they have, so it is safe to merely tell them, “The Bible says you are a sinner. We are all sinners.” Keep the ball in your court.

This does not mean they cannot ask questions or respond. It means you must be careful to direct the session to keep it on track. Since you only have a short time, use it wisely.

Do Keep Your Explanations Simple.

If the child is not from your church, they may be unfamiliar with many words and concepts you take for granted. Do not attempt to use fancy theological terms. Do not go into great detail. A child’s perceptions are simple. The Gospel is simple. Present it in such a manner.

Do Offer To Pray Aloud With All Who Make Decisions.

Remember that this may be all new to the child and they may need some help in knowing what to say.

Say one line at a time. Tell the child to repeat it out loud after you, but to say it to the Lord and mean it in their heart.
Do Ask Them To Pray Out Loud.

This allows you to make sure they hear and understand you. If they pray silently and don’t understand what you said, they may be too shy to ask you to repeat it. Then they leave the room confused and have not made a solid decision. Say only short, simple lines that are easy for the child to understand and repeat.

Do Be Ready To Back Track And Answer Questions.

If a child seems unclear, don’t be afraid to repeat and re-explain.

After The Child Has Prayed, ASK If Jesus Came Into Their Heart.

Don’t tell them they are saved. You do not know if they were sincere. Some children come forward because they feel it is expected or just to see what is going on. If they were not sincere, they were not saved. It would be wrong for you to say, “Zap, now you are a Christian.” If they did not mean it, then they should be able to say to themselves, “I didn’t mean it. I guess I am not a Christian.” This will give them the opportunity to respond again when they really are ready.

Do Pay Attention To The Response When You Ask If Jesus Came Into Their Life.

You want the child to leave with a clear understanding of what occurred. Below are the typical responses you will get. Not all of them are desired responses.

- “I feel it.” - This answer sounds good, but we do not base Salvation on feelings. What happens if they don’t feel like a Christian tomorrow? We base Salvation of what God’s Word says. That is fact, not feelings.

- “I don’t know.” - You do not want a child to leave the counseling room confused. They need to know or there will be no sense of security. It is not enough that you told them they are a Christian. They need to know the Bible says they are saved if they were sincere.
• “Because the Bible said if I ask Jesus to come in, He would.” - Wonderful! This child understood. But do not be surprised if you rarely get this answer. Most children do not have the answer you want to hear right away.

Don’t Say, “No, that’s wrong.”

When a child gives you an undesired response, do not tell them they are wrong. Instead refer to Rev. 3:20. Explain what it says. If they asked Jesus to come in and forgive their sin, and if they really meant it, then the Bible says He will come in.

Dealing With Assurance

Even children who are brought up in church may question if they are a Christian. It is important to understand how to deal with the area of assurance. Lack of assurance is a trick of Satan to cause a Christian to lead a defeated, ineffective life.

Present The Plan Of Salvation.

Always present the plan of Salvation, even when dealing with assurance. Go through the verses. Then ask if that is what they did when they accepted Christ into their life. If not, you may be dealing with an unsaved child who needs Salvation.

Discuss Why The Child Questions His Salvation.

You may talk to a child who says, “I am a Christian, but.” Ask a few questions to determine the problem.

• “I Feel Guilty. I’ve Done Something Wrong. I Don’t Act Like a Christian.”

When sin enters a Christian child’s life, they often wonder if they are saved.

Ask the child if they felt they understood and meant what they did when they asked Jesus into their life. If they say no, ask them if they would like to pray again and really mean it this time. Then discuss confession of sin and God’s forgiveness.
If they say yes, they did mean it, discuss confession of sin, God’s forgiveness, and avoiding sin in their life.

Remind them that when they were born they became a part of their earthly family. Sometimes they do things wrong, but no matter what, they will always be their parent’s child.

When they asked the Lord into their life, they were born into God’s family. They are now God’s child. They will still sin, but they will always be God’s child. God will always love them. When they do things wrong, God wants them to say they are sorry and act more like a Christian.

Verses to use: I John 1:9, Isaiah 55:7

• “I Don’t FEEL Like A Christian.”

This goes back to trusting in emotions rather than God’s Word.

Ask the child if they asked Jesus to forgive their sin and come into their life. If they did, the Bible says in Rev. 3:20, If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. God tells us in the Bible that if we do our part of asking for forgiveness, God will do His part to forgive us. God always keeps His promises. We need to trust God to do what He says He will do.

Verses you can use: I John 5:11-13, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:8-9

• “I Don’t Remember Accepting Christ.”

Children who are brought up in church often make salvation decisions at an early age. Sometimes they do not even remember making this decision. All they know is Mom says they made a decision.

Salvation is based on personal experience. If a child cannot remember making the decision, perhaps it is best for them to pray again. It is best to make sure. This is not saying that they did not accept Christ, it is just good to remember such an important decision. Then they can be sure. Praying again will give them something to remember.

Discuss The Child’s Particular Need.

Show them the Bible verses listed that deal with their problem. Pray with the child.

It Is Okay To Pray Again For Salvation.

It may be best to have the child pray again for salvation. This is especially true if they can’t remember doing it, or they just want to make sure. It will give them a definite time of decision to remember and a feeling of security.