

Tell It Again!

Telling God's Story to Young Children



TRAINING MANUAL

A Step-by-Step Guide



Tell It Again! Sharing God's Story with Young Children

A workshop for preschool teachers

Focus

This workshop explores the unique (and wonderful!) characteristics of preschool kids. It aims to help teachers use their understanding to build on young children's eagerness and love of repetition through the telling of Bible stories.

Time

1 hour and 15 minutes

Room Setup

- Arrange the room so that people can gather around tables that seat six to eight. To create a welcoming atmosphere, play music for young children in the background as participants arrive.
- You might also want to put a workshop outline at each participant's place—or hand the outlines to people as you welcome them to the workshop.

Preparation

- If you plan to open with devotions, prepare your own or use the suggestion in step 1.
- Read through the workshop to catch the flow.
- Photocopy a set of handouts (see back of this guide) for each participant.
- Gather additional materials needed for participants (Bibles, paper, pens).

1

WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS

Goal

Become acquainted with each other and receive motivation from Jesus' teachings about children and his interactions with children.

Time

15 minutes

Supplies

- Bible
- Workshop Outline (Handout 1, p. **), one copy per person
- Picture of a preschool child you know and love

Welcome everyone and thank them for joining you for this workshop about preschoolers—and how to tell them stories from the Bible. Express your enthusiasm about their passion for nurturing faith in very young children. By way of introducing yourself, share a bit of your own experience (and love) for little ones. Spend a minute or two reviewing the workshop outline together.

Continue your time together with devotions—feel free to develop your own! Or read the following two Scripture passages that highlight Jesus' respect for and eagerness to be with children: **Matthew 18:1-6** and **Mark 10:13-16**. Remind the group that Jesus placed a high value on children and their faith in him. He also suggested that we have something to learn about ourselves and our faith by observing children. In addition, Christ charges us to lead young children—taking care not to inadvertently cause them to stumble in their faith.

Offer a brief prayer asking the Spirit to speak to your hearts and teach you how to learn from and lead the children entrusted to your care and teaching in the church.

Show the group the picture of a preschooler you know and love (pass it around for a closer look). Tell everyone a bit about your little character and why he or she is so special to you. Then invite everyone to think of one young child who fills that place in their own lives. Encourage participants to take pictures out of wallets and purses to illustrate!

Ask the group to spend five minutes introducing themselves to each other around the table and talking about (and sharing pictures of) the preschoolers they're thinking about. Ask participants to pay special attention to what the little ones named and described around the table have in common with each other.

2 LEARNING AND GROWING

Goal

Take a closer look at the intellectual, social, and spiritual characteristics of young children.

Time

15 minutes

Supplies

- Preschool Kids: Learning and Growing (Handout 2, p. **), one copy per person
- Easel, newsprint, marker (optional)

After giving the table groups time to introduce themselves to each other and to compare notes about the young children they chose to describe, call the large group back together. Spend a few minutes debriefing. What were some common characteristics of the little ones they pictured and talked about? What are two- and three- and four-year-olds like? How do they think? How do they relate to people? How do they think about God? Invite responses from the group. Make a list if you wish.

Distribute Handout 2 and explain that you'll be taking a closer look together at how young children learn and grow—noting their unique intellectual, social, and spiritual characteristics. Work through the handout together, offering examples from your own experience with young children. Invite the group to share illustrations from their experience as well. And don't limit it to teaching experiences and illustrations! Parents, grandparents, other caregivers also have a great perspective on young children and their emerging faith.



As people suggest characteristics that surfaced in their small groups, you might want to keep track of them by writing a running list of words and phrases on an easel or whiteboard.

3 STORYTELLING DO'S AND DON'TS

Goal

Learn and apply key storytelling do's and don'ts that help to build on the way young children learn and understand stories from Scripture.

Time

15 minutes

Supplies

- Telling God's Story to Young Children: Some Do's and Don'ts (Handout 3, p. **), one copy per person

Does knowing more about how young children think and learn influence the way we tell them stories from the Bible? Yes—big time! You might want to offer a gently negative example of a children's sermon you've seen presented or a Bible story you've heard someone tell in a way that flew over the heads of the kids (and made its point, instead, with the adults who were listening in).

As teachers and leaders of young children, we have the privilege—and responsibility—of introducing them to God and God's love for us through Jesus. It's important that we teach and tell well—so as not to create confusion and puzzlement in the minds of young, concrete thinkers. When we do create confusion or lead little ones to form wrong conclusions about God, someone else will have to clear things up and help kids re-learn what we thought we taught!

Distribute Handout 3 and spend some time working through it together. Work from top to bottom, addressing the do/don't pairs together. As in the previous step, invite the group to offer examples from their own experience that illustrate or verify the recommended ways to tell (or not to tell) young children stories from the Bible.

You'll notice we're making a big deal about the first "don't". . . **Don't moralize!** That's because we Christians in the Reformed tradition believe that the Bible is first of all *God's story*. So we read (and tell stories from) the Bible in a way that focuses first of all on who God is and what God has done for us. In other words, the main characters in Scripture are not people; nor is the Bible intended to be a how-to manual for good behavior. If you tell young children stories from Scripture that focus on God, his greatness, and his love for his people, they'll get it! And teaching them about grateful living will follow as they are able to understand it and grow into it.

4 GO TELL!

Goal

Practice sharing a Bible story written for young children.

Time

30 minutes

Supplies

- Bibles (one per person or several to share)
- Paper and pens
- 52 Scripture Stories to Tell Young Children (Handout 4, p. **), one copy per person
- Set of *God Loves Me* storybooks (optional)

Explain to the group that, given what you've learned about little ones and the way they think, not all Bible stories are equally appropriate to use with preschoolers. Distribute the list of 52 stories as you explain that the editorial staff at Faith Alive (made up of teachers and theologians) has judged that these core stories provide a good beginning for introducing young children to the sweep of the Scripture narrative. (Although young children don't have a strong sense of chronological order, the stories are listed that way, drawing from the Old Testament and the New Testament.)

Give participants a chance to look over the list. Then ask everyone to choose one of the stories that they might enjoy telling to a group of three- or four-year-olds. Distribute Bibles, paper, and pens or pencils; explain that they'll have the next ten to fifteen minutes to write their selected story in a way that will engage young children and teach them the story's essential truth about God. Ask the group to limit their stories to 250 words. Suggest that they refer back to the do's and don'ts handout as they work.

When everyone has finished writing, provide time for participants to read the stories to each other around the tables. If there's remaining time, ask each table to select a story to present to the whole group.

Give the groups these basic questions to ask themselves by way of evaluating each story:

- Is the story written so that a young child, who thinks very concretely, will understand and learn from it?
- What parts of the story (including specific words or phrases) could be simplified even more?
- What does the story teach us about God?



If your church library or nursery has a set of the *God Loves Me* storybooks written for two- and three-year-olds, you might want to give participants an opportunity to look through the set. Perhaps they'll enjoy comparing the way they've written their selected stories with the way the *God Loves Me* author has presented them. Be sure to stress that there's no "right" way to tell a particular story—as long as it's told in a way that respects the child's ability to grasp the story events and its truth about God.

Conclude your time together with prayer—for each person in the group and for the young children with whom they'll be sharing the life-giving story of God's great love for us. Or, if you prefer, ask the groups to close with prayer at their tables. You might suggest that each person share with the group one request that pertains to his or her ministry to children before joining hands around the table to pray for each other.

Note: *God Loves Me* books are available from Faith Alive Resources (1-800-333-8300; www.faithalivere-sources.org). In addition to the set of 52 books, Faith Alive offers the following smaller sets of books: Easter Stories (3 books); Christmas Stories (4 books); Favorite Old Testament Stories (10 books); and Favorite New Testament Stories (10 books). All of the books in the set of 52 are also available as individual purchases. You might want to consider giving each participant a book from the set as a parting gift after the workshop.

Workshop Outline

Step 1: Welcome and Devotions

Goal

Become acquainted with each other and receive motivation from Jesus' teachings about and interactions with children.

Notes:

Step 2: Learning and Growing

Goal

Take a closer look at the intellectual, social, and spiritual characteristics of young children.

Notes:

Step 3: Storytelling Do's and Don'ts

Goal

Learn and apply key storytelling do's and don'ts that help to build on the way young children learn and understand stories from Scripture.

Notes:

Step 4: Go Tell!

Goal

Practice sharing a Bible story written for young children.

Notes:

Preschool Kids . . . Learning and Growing

Here's a quick overview of some of the characteristics you'll observe in the young children you love and lead. It leaves much unsaid—and is certainly no substitute for getting to know kids firsthand. But it will give you some insight into what you may anticipate from preschoolers intellectually, socially, and spiritually.

Intellectual Characteristics

Young children

- think very concretely and literally, not abstractly or figuratively as youth and adults can. To a preschool child, things are as they appear to be.
- are not capable of reasoning or organizing abstract faith concepts along logical lines.
- learn through their experiences at home, church, preschool, and with caregivers.
- learn with their whole bodies. They love to taste, touch, move, explore, smell, watch, and wonder.
- are beginning to develop some literacy skills; some can write their own name, recognize the letters of the alphabet, and count to twenty.
- love to use language to please adults; “right answers” do not necessarily indicate comprehension.
- enjoy being told stories and read to. Repetition is an important way to learn!
- are often easily distracted from staying “on task.”

Social Characteristics

Preschool kids

- are blissfully egocentric; they see the world through their own eyes only.
- have a difficult time understanding another person's perspective or point of view. (Recent research suggests, however, that they're beginning to tune into the emotions of others and to demonstrate empathy.)
- are self-centered, yet are significantly influenced by others, especially mom, dad teachers, and other significant adults.
- are on the verge of experiencing a wider world of people; many young children still want to play alone and must make a real effort to participate in meaningful play with other children.

Spiritual Characteristics

Children at this age

- have a growing sense that God is very special and real.
- tend to have a literal concept of God, perhaps as a grandfather figure who lives “up there.”
- readily accept what you say about God.
- sense that God loves them and cares for them.
- enjoy Bible stories, especially about Jesus; want stories repeated . . . and repeated!
- can develop attitudes of trust and love toward Jesus and God.
- do not yet have a built-in control (conscience) that nudges them toward right behavior for its own sake; generally do the “right thing” out of fear of punishment or to win approval.
- sense that church is a good place to be.
- recite simple prayers; in some cases may add own ideas to form personal prayers.

Telling God's Story to Young Children: Some Do's and Don'ts

Here are some basic guidelines for telling Scripture stories to very young children in a way that respects and builds on how they listen and learn:

Do's	Don'ts
<p>Do keep the focus of the Bible story on God! Bible stories are first of all about God and what God has done for us. People aren't the main characters.</p>	<p>Don't moralize! It's not about teaching kids to do what's right, or about manners and morals. It's about who God is and what God does for us, his children!</p>
<p>Do keep it simple! Use words and phrases young children will understand. Keep to the story line and story details of Scripture.</p>	<p>Don't add extra-biblical names or story details. You don't need to embellish the story to make it more "interesting" or "appealing" to kids.</p>
<p>Do keep it concrete!</p>	<p>Don't use analogies or abstractions that are beyond the grasp of young children.</p>
<p>Do keep it interactive! Invite kids to imagine themselves into the story, to ask questions about it, to act it out, to wonder about it, and to retell it in their own words.</p>	<p>Don't let Bible story time become a one-way-street . . . "I read, you sit still and listen!" Don't give kids the feeling that they have nothing to teach you from the story.</p>
<p>Do use pictures and props that enhance your storytelling.</p>	<p>Don't let visuals interfere with the storytelling or distract kids from the narrative. Good storytelling trumps visuals!</p>
<p>Do tell Bible stories over and over and over! Young children love repetition.</p>	<p>Don't</p>

And do have fun listening and learning together!

52 Scripture Stories to Tell Young Children

Old Testament stories:

1. **Blue and Green and Purple Too!**
(The story of God's colorful world, based on Genesis 1:1-19)
2. **It's a Noisy Place!**
(The story of the first creatures, based on Genesis 1:20-25)
3. **Adam and Eve**
(The story of the first man and woman, based on Genesis 1:26-31)
4. **Take Good Care of My World**
(The story of Adam and Eve in the garden, based on Genesis 1:28; 2:18-20)
5. **A Very Sad Day**
(The story of Adam and Eve's disobedience, based on Genesis 3)
6. **A Rainy, Rainy Day**
(The story of Noah, based on Genesis 6:1-8:22)
7. **Count the Stars!**
(The story of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah, based on Genesis 12-17)
8. **A Girl Named Rebekah**
(The story of God's answer to Abraham, based on Genesis 24)
9. **Two Coats for Joseph**
(The story of young Joseph, based on Genesis 37-41)
10. **Plenty to Eat**
(The story of Joseph and his brothers, based on Genesis 42-45)
11. **Safe in a Basket**
(The story of baby Moses, based on Exodus 2:1-10)
12. **I'll Do It!**
(The story of Moses and the burning bush, based on Exodus 2:11-4:23)
13. **Safe at Last!**
(The story of Moses and the Red Sea, based on Exodus 14:1-15:21)
14. **What Is It?**
(The story of manna in the desert, based on Exodus 16; Numbers 11:7-8)
15. **A Tall Wall**
(The story of Jericho, based on Joshua 6:1-21)
16. **A Baby for Hannah**
(The story of an answered prayer, based on 1 Samuel 1)
17. **Samuel! Samuel!**
(The story of God's call to Samuel, based on 1 Samuel 3:1-18)
18. **Lions and Bears!**
(The story of David the shepherd boy, based on 1 Samuel 17: 34-37)
19. **David and the Giant**
(The story of David and Goliath, based on 1 Samuel 17)
20. **A Little Jar of Oil**
(The story of Elisha and the widow, based on 2 Kings 4:1-7)
21. **One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven!**
(The story of Elisha and Naaman, based on 2 Kings 5:1-16)
22. **A Big Fish Story**
(The story of Jonah, based on Jonah 1-3)

23. **Lions! Lions!**
(The story of Daniel, based on Daniel 6)

New Testament Stories:

24. **Jesus Is Born**
(The story of Christmas, based on Luke 2:1-7)
25. **Good News!**
(The story of the shepherds, based on Luke 2:8-18)
26. **An Amazing Star!**
(The story of the wise men, based on Matthew 2:1-12)
27. **Waiting, Waiting, Waiting!**
(The story of Simeon and Anna, based on Luke 2:21-38)
28. **Who Is This Child?**
(The story of Jesus in the temple, based on Luke 2:41-52)
29. **Follow Me!**
(The story of Jesus and his twelve helpers, based on Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-14; John 1:43-51)
30. **The Greatest Gift**
(The story of Jesus and the woman at the well, based on John 4:3-30, 39-42)
31. **A Father's Wish**
(The story of Jesus and a little boy, based on John 4:43-53)
32. **Just Believe!**
(The story of Jesus and a little girl, based on Mark 5:21-24, 35-43)
33. **Get Up and Walk!**
(The story of Jesus and a man who couldn't walk, based on Mark 2:1-12)
34. **A Little Lunch**
(The story of Jesus and a hungry crowd, based on John 6:1-13)
35. **A Scary Storm**
(The story of Jesus and a stormy sea, based on Luke 8:22-25)
36. **Thank You, Jesus!**
(The story of Jesus and one thankful man, based on Luke 17:11-19)
37. **A Wonderful Sight!**
(The story of Jesus and a man who couldn't see, based on Mark 8:22-26)
38. **A Better Thing to Do**
(The story of Jesus and Mary and Martha, based on Luke 10:38-42)
39. **A Lost Lamb**
(The story of the Good Shepherd, based on Luke 15:3-7)
40. **Come to Me!**
(The story of Jesus and the children, based on Mark 10:13-16)
41. **Have a Great Day!**
(The story of Jesus and Zacchaeus, based on Luke 19:1-10)
42. **I Love You, Jesus!**
(The story of Mary's gift to Jesus, based on John 12:1-8)
43. **Hosanna!**
(The story of Palm Sunday, based on Luke 19:28-38)
44. **The Best Day Ever**
(The story of Easter, based on John 20:11-18)
45. **Goodbye—for Now**
(The story of Jesus' return to heaven, based on Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11)
46. **A Prayer for Peter**
(The story of Peter in prison, based on Acts 12:1-19)

47. **Sad Day, Happy Day!**
(The story of Peter and Dorcas, based on Acts 9:36-43)
48. **A New Friend**
(The story of Paul's conversion, based on Acts 9:1-20)
49. **Over the Wall**
(The story of Paul's escape in a basket, based on Acts 9:20-25)
50. **A Song in the Night**
(The story of Paul and Silas in prison, based on Acts 16:16-40)
51. **A Ride in the Night**
(The story of Paul's escape on horseback, based on Acts 23:12-35)
52. **The Shipwreck**
(The story of Paul's rescue at sea, based on Acts 27)