

FIVE STEPS TO LEARNING A BIBLICAL STORY

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Virtually all our Christian “scriptures” were told before they were written down, so we are following tradition when we “tell”. Scripture told will have people’s attention immediately and far more powerfully than read. Here is a method for internalizing scripture. To prepare to enter into this method, do the following:

PREPARATION: Re-format the words of the scripture so you can see the “scenes” or paragraphs and notice a main sentence and related phrases or couplets. Spread it out (on computer or by hand) so it makes sense to you.

1. LISTEN

- Pray, inviting God to speak to you through the Word today.
- Read the passage *aloud* to yourself, perhaps 3 times in a row.
- Talk to yourself and describe the story to yourself (ie. “So Jesus comes to the home of his friend, Martha and she...”). Use your own language, as if it just happened before your eyes. If it is a piece of wisdom, you could say something like: “In this first paragraph, they are talking about how Jesus was there in the beginning with God. In the second one, he is life and light...”
- Read one line off the page aloud to yourself. Put the page down and say it aloud. Do the same with the next line. Put the page down and say the 2 lines. Complete a paragraph or section in this way, saying it to yourself until you are unsure of a word. Check it out and put the page down again. Put the page down and say the whole passage to yourself, even when you know you are making mistakes. Do not consult the page.
- Consult the page and talk to yourself about the things you noticed: (ie. “Oh look – ‘the light SHINES in the darkness’, but the ‘darkness DID NOT OVERCOME it’: the first is in the present and the second in the past. Interesting.”) Coach yourself as if you were your own student.

2. LEARN

- Look for VERBAL THREADS – words that are repeated throughout. Highlight them with colour, if you wish.
- Notice the FORM (for example: couplets that echo one another, question/answer, Healing Story form, etc)
- What are the sights, sounds, smells in this passage?
- Ask yourself: When have I been in the position that this person is in? How did it feel?
- Go to a resource to learn some HISTORY and COMMENTARY on this scripture. When you find out the background, you might gain an entirely new perspective on it. The resource might be a biblical interpretive book, a web site like “WorkingPreacher.org” or TheTextThisWeek. (Notice that this is not Step 1. Your own response should come first)
- Avoid your usual conclusions about the “message”. God’s Word to you can and should change over time.

3. LIVE WITH: (Methods for Remembering)

- Meditate on the passage. One way to use a form of prayer developed by Ignatius of Loyola is to watch the scripture “movie” unfold in your mind. Now become one of the characters in the story and play it out. Switch characters. This will help you gain a deeper sympathy and situate all the characters, furnishings, roads and towns believably when you tell.
- Draw a comic of the scenes of the story or draw little graphics on your page. Use colour if that helps you.
- Important: Walk and read or speak. This fires both lobes of your brain, aiding in long-term memory formation.
- Put a gesture to every key word - not so much for “acting”, but rather for your body to help your brain recall.

4. PRACTISE

Let go of most of the gestures, put down the page, and practise every day. It will become “internalized” within you, in the same way a song comes without effort after awhile.

5. PROCLAIM

Rehearse. Tell your scripture to a friend before you tell publicly.

Ask someone: “Would you like me to tell you a story?” when they tell you about a struggle. Allow God to put opportunities before you. Let scripture find its way into your praying. Gain a reputation for being the storyteller. Tell the story!

Matthew 22:34-40

Workshop

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees,

they gathered together,

and one of them,

a lawyer,

asked him a question to test him.

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

and with all your soul,

and with all your mind.’

This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it:

‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”