



BIBLE FRESH: ALLOWING GOD TO SPEAK THROUGH BIBLE STORIES

BY IVY BECKWITH, PH.D.

Last week I spoke to church groups in both Dublin, Ireland and Belfast, Northern Ireland. As I worked to get them to see Bible stories in fresh and powerful ways, I asked volunteers from each group to share their favorite Bible story and why that particular story spoke to them. It was fascinating to hear my workshop participants mention a variety of Bible stories (many more Old Testament than New Testament, making me wonder if we are sometimes reluctant to see the lives of Jesus and the apostles in terms of story), and to hear the ways in which these ancient stories spoke to them. Hearing their stories about Bible stories reinforced for me how personally powerful these stories are, and caused me to lament the way those of us who do education in the church may have inadvertently stripped them of much of their power.

Stories of all kinds have the power to transform us, but biblical stories being infused with God's spirit have the power

to transform humans in the most profound life changing and world changing ways. And because children love stories, they can be especially open to the powerful themes and to the power of God's spirit shining through these stories. Entering creatively in the biblical stories is an important factor in the positive spiritual formation of all children. But we have to be careful not to do things which rob these stories of their power.

An interesting phenomena sometimes happens when we teach Bible stories to 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. As we introduce them to the story of the day, we often hear comments like: "Not that story again." "That's boring." "We've heard this story before." They seem to have gotten the idea that we need to hear these stories only once, and then we know everything there is to know about them. How did

they get this idea? I think it is because we have put so much emphasis on peeling away the layers of the story to get to the take-away point or the life application, that we've inadvertently taught kids that after hearing it once, they never need to

hear it or think about it again.

Instead we should be teaching them that Bible stories are about many things, and as we

enter into them through the lens of our own life contexts, God teaches us life changing truth. It is at that intersection where spiritual transformation takes place.

As we engage children in Bible stories we need to "let the story stand" and spend our classroom energy on retelling the story through a variety of creative activities, helping children feel the story through reflection, contemplation and through asking their own questions about the story. We need to give them the opportunity to play with the Bible

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stories, turning them on their ends and enabling them to look at these stories from different angles and perspectives. When we do this, these ancient, God-infused stories will never lose their power and ability to interest children and adults alike.

The title of the workshop I led in both Dublin and Belfast was “Bible Fresh.” As I talked

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of giving Bible stories to children in this way, I hoped that I would re-awaken an interest in a new way of looking at Bible stories in the workshop

participants as well. We all need to be reminded that God’s stories are new every time we enter into them because the context of our lives is always different, and God always has something new to teach us.

These beautiful ancient stories always have more than one thing to teach us.

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