

There is Power in the Story: How the Stories of the Bible Work in Our Hearts

God inspired more narrative in the Bible than any other type of literature. He knows that Bible stories can transform lives, but do we know how they work? In this workshop Peter Mead will help us understand how stories work, how to benefit from them ourselves, and how to better share them with others to lead people to transformation.

Peter Mead is the director of Cor Deo, a mentored study and ministry training program in Chippenham, England. Peter is on the leadership team of a church plant and teaches preaching at Union School of Theology. He studied at Multnomah Biblical Seminary before getting his Doctor of Ministry degree under Haddon Robinson at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the area of expository preaching. Peter is the author of *Pleased to Dwell*, *Foundations*, *Lost in Wonder*, and BiblicalPreaching.net, and contributed in the area of preaching to the Ministry Essentials Study Bible. He is married, with six children.

*We live life in a swirl of stories.
The Bible stories change our swirling hearts. But how?*

I. Bible Stories: The Majority Literary Type!

- A. The most common type of biblical material
- B. The “overarching” or “supra-genre”

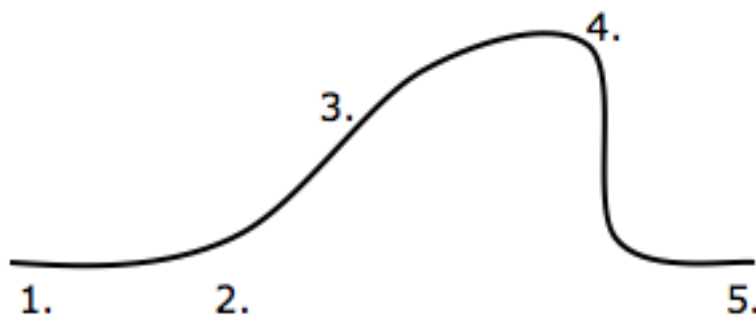
II. Stories: Why So Many?

- A. The incarnational nature of stories ... and God.
- B. The engaging nature of stories ... and God.

III. Understanding Narrative. How do stories work? How do they work in our hearts?

- A. Elements of Narrative
 - 1. Setting – humans relate to humans
 - i) Historical
 - ii) Geographical
 - iii) Situational
 - 2. Narrator
 - i) Detached observer

- ii) Theological commentator
- 3. Characters – the gripping power of identification
 - i) Perfect examples to follow
 - ii) Perfect examples not to follow
 - iii) Flawed humans
- 4. Plot – the gripping power of an unfolding story



B. Understanding Plot – the dynamics of an unfolding story

- 1. Setting
- 2. Tension Created (Conflict)
- 3. Tension Develops (Crescendo)
- 4. Tension Resolved (Climax)
- 5. Resolution / Denouement

IV. Preaching Bible stories to our own hearts ...

A. Hear and feel the story

- 1. Trusting the storyteller

2. Re-image and re-present the story

B. Case Study – Luke 18:9-14

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Recommended resources

Search on “story,” or “narrative,” on BiblicalPreaching.net – there is plenty on the site!

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic, 1981)

Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety* (Kregel, 2007)

Torrey Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It* (Baker, 2003)

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Appendix

10 Pointers for Preaching Stories

1. It was written as a story because story is powerful – **tell the story!** (People gladly read a good book twice, or watch a good movie twice. Don't apologize for telling a familiar story. Don't assume people know it and merely talk about it. Tell the story!)
2. **Interpret carefully.** Narratives are easy to read, but often difficult to interpret and preach. Remember to pursue the author's idea and purpose, don't just look to "find a message."
3. Remember to **check the written context** for the narrative. A story typically sits in a flow of stories that are making a bigger point.
4. Be diligent to **observe every literary feature**, it's all there by design. (Look at the plot – especially the tension and where it is resolved; as well as characters, repetition, narration, dialogue, etc.)
5. **Remember God** is a key character in every biblical story. Don't preach a story as if it is merely a human-interest story with a helpful moral for us. In the parables, Jesus is teaching in light of people rightly responding to Him and His programme.
6. **Introduce wisely.** Don't introduce the message with the text, but rather surface a need in the listeners to draw them into the text.
7. Allow all the details to **reinforce the main idea** of the story, rather than moralizing the details and preaching multiple disconnected points.
8. **Experience it, don't just analyze it.** It is tempting to analyze the story as if it is from an epistle. Don't. Instead try to preach so that the story forms in the minds and hearts of the listeners. Help the image form in their imagination!

If you can see it, they will see it,

and if they see it, then they will feel it,

and if they feel it . . . it might even make a difference in their lives!

9. **Apply specifically.** Apply the idea of the story in specific and tangible examples that are relevant to our story today.
10. **Be creative** in your preaching – consider whether first-person preaching may be more effective, whether a visual aid would help, whether a contemporary paraphrase might recreate the impact of the story, etc. (If you are creative, do it well – better to be understated than "too much.")