

Should I Bring in Other Passages?

It was a great pleasure to teach Chronological Bible Storying here at NBTS. Thanks to all of you who made it so rewarding. It was especially exciting to read your reports about your own use of it in ministry. God so obviously is using the CBS method to give Nigerians a good understanding of his Word and to change their hearts. We praise him. I also give you heartfelt thanks for the generous gift of traditional clothing for my family and me. We wore them the very next Sunday and were very well received.

"Should I refer to other passages of Scripture to answer questions that I cannot answer from within the story that I've just told?"

As I read your reports, I realized that many of you struggled with this question: "Should I refer to other passages of Scripture to answer questions that I cannot answer from within the story that I've just told?" You wanted to be faithful to my example and instruction, yet you also wanted people to have a correct answer from the Scripture. Let me use some examples to say a little more about this issue.

Jide's Ride to Lagos

When Jide left the seminary to visit Lagos during the break, he asked God to give him a chance to witness while traveling on the public transport. Soon Jide started a conversation with a man riding beside him. He learned that the man was from Jos and was called Niyi. Niyi asked what Jide had done the previous week. Jide told him, "I've been listening to many stories and learning to tell stories." "Why don't you tell me one?" Niyi said, so Jide told the story of "The Test of Abraham" that he had learned in class. When Jide finished, Niyi asked, "Why would Abraham be willing to sacrifice his son? Was he a bad man?" "No," Jide explained, "Abraham had come to trust God and have a relationship with him. God had promised that through him the whole world would be blessed." Niyi sighed, "I wish God would bless me. I think he must be far, far away. I've never believed that anyone could really know God personally."

Jide silently prayed for God to guide him as he replied, "I do know him personally—and so can you." "How?" Niyi asked. Jide had no assurance he would ever see Niyi again or that others would talk with Niyi about his salvation, so Jide shared several stories and verses from throughout the Bible. Through them Niyi could understand how to know God personally. Jide was a faithful witness in the situation God provided. It was right to go beyond the story of how God tested Abraham.

Amos' Visit to the Village

After finishing the storying class, Amos was excited. Three Muslim families in the village had listened very well when he told his two practice stories to them. "Tell us more stories!" the children had cried, and the parents had nodded in agreement. So Amos had gladly agreed to return. He went back to the story of the creation of the spirit world to begin laying a solid foundation. These Muslims would need much truth from God's word, so he carefully chose the stories that he would tell. Later he took Taiwo along with him as he told about the creation and the sin of Adam and Eve.

"How did their disobedience affect their relationship with God?" Amos asked the families.

"Their relationship with God was broken," the oldest Muslim man replied. "Now we cannot know God. He is distant and no man can know him." Amos's heart leaped with excitement as he thought about his own relationship with God through Jesus.

"I have good news for you, Baba," he replied. "In the coming stories God will reveal how man can be reconciled to God." "That is not what our wise ones say," the old man replied. "But we will hear your stories."

Amos replied, "Just remember that from the beginning God desired fellowship with the people he created." As Amos and Taiwo walked home, Taiwo asked, "Why didn't you quote Scriptures from the New Testament and tell the old man about Jesus? You could have explained how to know God and led him to be saved right then!"

"Perhaps," Amos admitted, "but he has heard the teaching of Islam all of his life and is only beginning to understand the true God. You heard him say that he is not convinced that man can be reconciled to God. If I tried to lead him to follow Jesus today, he would have a hard time understanding. We might have had an argument. And if he said "No" to trusting Christ today, he would forbid us to tell any further stories to him and the others. We will pray that story-by-story God will open his heart—and the hearts of the others--to understand the truths of God's Word. When they are ready, God's Spirit will lead them to himself." As they walked along, God gave Amos peace in his heart that he had done the right thing by referring back to the creation story and not jumping ahead.

Samson and the Discipleship Group

As soon as Samson and Ruth saw the storying method used in class, Samson wanted to try it. So he announced that the next week his discipleship group would consider the story of the raising of Lazarus. When the group met, he told the story and led the dialog. They answered his questions gladly. Then a man asked, "What was Jesus referring to when he said that 'I am the resurrection and the life'—that Jesus would rise from the dead?"

Samson responded quickly, "You cannot ask that question. You may only talk about things in this story. Jesus did not rise from the dead in this story." Another asked, "Martha said to Jesus, 'I know that whatever you ask of God, he will give you.' Is that why Jesus later taught us to pray 'in his name'?"

Samson replied, "We are not talking about what Jesus said later. We are discussing the raising of Lazarus only." No one else asked a question. The discipleship group ended with prayer and people left without saying much more.

Later Samson and Ruth discussed the discipleship meeting.

"They did not ask very many questions," Samson said glumly. "They did ask about a prophecy of resurrection and about praying in Jesus' name," Ruth reminded him.

"Yes," Samson agreed, "but those are not in the story. We cannot discuss any questions outside of the story or use any verses outside the story! You remember how our lecturer refused to jump ahead in the story."

"That is true," Ruth said, "but remember that he was modeling how to use it with unbelievers who need a firm foundation. They may not know how the story ends. Jumping around may confuse them or rush them to make a decision before they have enough understanding." Samson thought about what Ruth had said. He did recall that the lecturer had told them that in discipleship it was good to link the stories of prophecy with stories in which those prophecies were fulfilled. This involved answering questions by referring to later stories and other verses. As he thought about the two who had asked about resurrection and prayer, he realized that they knew the story of Jesus well. He did not need to fear that they or the others in the discipleship group would be rushed to a premature decision. Their questions arose because they already had a good understanding. He shook his head in regret. "Next week I think I'll try the storying method again," Samson told Ruth later, "but this time I'll remember who it is I am teaching and what I'm trying to accomplish. I won't use the method the same way I would with a storying group of unbelievers."

May God give you wisdom as you share His truth through stories. He is their author and our Master Teacher, so seek to follow his leading in all situations.

With warmest regards, Grant Lovejoy