

Reading to Children / Jesus the Storyteller

Ros: My daughter Sally is a real bookworm.

Rachel: What's a bookworm?

Ros: Someone who likes to read and read...who just loves reading books! My Sally is like that...she would rather read books than do almost anything else!

Rachel: Well, she must be a good reader.

Ros: Yes, she is now. But I think it all started when she was just a little toddler. She loved stories and always wanted me to tell her a story...or read her a story.

Tammy: Welcome to Women of Hope. Ros and Rachel have come today to talk with us about how we can help young children to be interested in reading when they're quite young...so they can be good readers as they grow up.

Carol: Being able to read is so important in the modern world isn't it? Most jobs require people to be able to read. So starting young is a good thing.

Tammy: That's right...and most parents want their children to learn to read, and to enjoy reading don't they? ...even if they're not good at reading themselves.

Ros: Yes...and there's a lot you can do as a mother, or the person caring for a young child, to help them to want to read from quite an early age?

Rachel: But isn't it just up to the schoolteachers to teach children to read?

Ros: Well yes, they do most of the teaching once a child is old enough to go to school, but parents can start getting their child ready for reading long before that.

Rachel: I'm a mother...I have a little boy. So how can I do that?

Ros: Do you know that just talking and listening with him will lay a good foundation for him to learn to read? When you talk and sing with your child you're teaching him the sounds of your language, and you're helping him to be interested in what's happening around him. This will make it easier for him to learn how to read.

Rachel: I talk a lot to my son, is that the right thing to do?

Ros: Yes...it's never too early! Talk to him whenever you're together about what you're doing and tell him stories. You can make up stories any time.

Rachel: What about getting him to talk to me? He's just learning to say quite long sentences now.

Ros: Yes, that's important too. Ask him lots of questions. Encourage him to tell you what he's doing. As he gets better at talking he'll use more and more words. It's all good practice for him.

Carol: It's good to have you with us today on Women of Hope as we talk about helping our young children to learn to read.

Tammy: They were just talking about how important it is to talk with your young child...have interesting conversations with him. All this helps him develop good language, so that when he begins to learn to read, he's ready. He'll know the meaning of many words, and how to use them in the right places.

Carol: Ellen, you mentioned telling your child stories. I used to love telling my children stories when they were little. I think I enjoyed telling the stories as much as they enjoyed listening.

Ros: Yes. Telling stories to young children will help them learn to love stories. Telling stories about yourself...about their grandparents and other relatives is such fun...and they'll want to hear them over and over again. And there are sure to be some well-known stories from your culture that you can tell them too. Or you can make up simple stories if you like.

Rachel: That sounds easy, as long as my little boy will sit still for long enough.

Ros: Well, start with very short stories. Make it a special time when he sits on your lap or you sit with him once he's tucked into bed at night. He'll associate stories with feeling cozy and content. Make it a fun time for both of you.

Rachel: But can you read books to children when they're really young?

Ros: Oh yes...it's a very good thing to do. In fact, you can start looking at picture books and talking about the pictures to a young baby. You can say the names of the pictures and encourage him to copy you. Then you can begin to read very simple stories from picture books. Have your child on your lap or right next to you. Look at the pictures together as you read.

Rachel: I can do that...but what about a mother, or a carer, who hasn't learned to read themselves? What can they do?

Ros: That's a good question because I'm sure mothers who haven't had the chance to learn to read really want their children to learn to read well. A mother who can't read can do a lot to help her child learn to read.

Rachel: Really? How?

Ros: Well, we've already talked about telling stories...we can all do that! When a child hears lots of stories, they learn what happens in stories. They learn about beginnings and middles and

endings of stories...and how things can go wrong – and then be fixed! And when they start to learn to read, they already know something about what to expect in a story. And books with pictures... She can look at picture books with her child and they can talk together about the pictures... she could make up a story to suit the pictures. This helps her child to value and enjoy books. And maybe she can find older children, or other adults, who would be happy to read to her child.

Rachel: What if you don't have many books to read with your child?

Ros: Maybe there are other things around the house that have writing on them – things like food packets, labels on things, toys with words on them...you can point to these and say the words. And, when you're out walking or shopping you can point out the names of shops, labels for food, road signs and other things with writing on them and tell your child what they say. And here's a fun thing to do...make a small book of your own with paper or cardboard. You can make up a story about something special you've done together. Ask your child to tell you about it and you can write a simple sentence on each page. The child can then draw a picture for each page. Or you can draw a picture and he can color it in. I'm sure you'll find that he loves to sit with you and read your own book – over and over again. This will help him to remember your special time together and talk about it.

Rachel: What about rhymes and songs? Most mothers know some rhymes and songs. Will these help a child to be ready for reading too?

Ros: Yes, definitely...anything that uses words for fun can be helpful. Saying rhymes or singing songs together and doing the actions to help remember them is a lovely way of helping your child to learn new words. You can play games where you say or sing a bit and then your child can copy you – or say or sing the next part. This is really good language practice for him.

And of course if you have a book of rhymes or songs you can look at the words and pictures as you say, or sing them together.

Tammy: We're talking about ways to help children become interested in reading...and start to read. Ros and Rachel have talked about looking at picture books with a young child, saying simple rhymes and singing songs...

Carol: ...and they've also talked about making simple books from paper or cardboard if you don't have many books. Even if you do, it's a great fun thing to do. All these things will help your child to be ready to read and to understand how stories work.

Ros: Sometimes toys can be helpful too. Wooden blocks with letters on them or magnetic letters that stick on a refrigerator can help children become familiar with the letters of the alphabet. You can say the letters as you play with them together and make your child's name and other simple words.

Rachel: My little boy loves to sit down with a book and pretend he's reading. Should I let him do that even if he's saying the wrong words?

Ros: Oh yes... It's great that he likes to do that. It shows that you've taught him to like books...so he wants to be able to read them himself. Encourage him to use books that way. Eventually he'll learn the real words and be able to really read the stories.

Rachel: I'm looking forward to helping him learn to read. What advice do you have for me as I sit with him to help him be ready to learn to read?

Ros: Here are some good pre-reading activities...

Firstly, read to him as often as you can...and encourage others to read to him as well – his daddy, or any older children who might be visiting. Read their favorite books often. Here are a few hints to help you.

- Read slowly so he can imagine what's happening.
- Read books with words that are repeated and encourage him to join in.
- Point to the words as you read them.
- Talk about the books you read together.
- Encourage him to ask questions and to comment on the story as you read.
- If you can, take him to a library and borrow books. Let him choose books that he thinks look interesting.
- And set a good example by reading yourself. Children love to copy their parents don't they!

Rachel: Thanks for all these ideas Ros. I'm quite excited about helping my son to be ready to read. I know it's important and I want to do the things we've talked about. But I know that, before he's old enough to go to school, the activities should be fun...like playing a game together.

Ros: Yes...that's exactly right! Have fun and enjoy the stories!

Fran: All people have their precious stories that help them to pass on their beliefs to the next generation. What do you think are the important stories in your culture?... I heard a saying the other day. It went: 'Tell me a fact and I may learn... Tell me a truth and I may believe... Tell me a story and it will stay in my heart for ever.'

Tammy: Wow I love that Fran...welcome...

Fran: Thanks... Jesus Christ taught people about God, and one of the main ways was by telling stories. And though this was about 2000 years ago, his followers wrote them down, and we still love these stories today. We still tell them to our children. And they have deep meaning for adults too.

What were Jesus' stories about? What are your favorites, Tammy?

Tammy: I remember he told some stories about feasts and parties - maybe that's because I like celebrations!

Carol: Oh, I remember stories about nature - trees, birds, flowers, crops.

Tammy: And there were stories about good servants and bad judges...

Carol: ...and wandering sheep and lost coins...

Fran: Right - his listeners would understand the stories he told because they were part of their daily lives. Today I want to tell you a story that Jesus told; but first I need you to hear from God's word why he told it... (Luke 10: 25-37, based on GNB)

One day a teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus into saying something wrong.

'Teacher', he asked, 'what must I do to receive eternal life?'

Jesus asked him a question in return. 'What do you think God's Law says?'

The man knew the right answer; it was in their holy book. So he quoted: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'

Jesus replied, "You are quite right. Do this and you will live."

But the teacher of the Law was looking for a way out of this responsibility...so he asked another question: 'Well...who is my neighbor?'

Carol: Can I interrupt Fran? Because that sounds a good question to me. Most people want to care for their family, or maybe their clan or tribe. We might try to help the people who live close by, if they are in trouble...so didn't he just want Jesus to tell him who his neighbor was?

Fran: You're right...it is a good question - though I don't think he really wanted to know! Remember, he was trying to trap Jesus into saying something wrong. Well, Jesus answered by telling him this story! Here it is, from God's word. Are you ready to listen?

Once there was a man who was walking on a journey down the lonely mountain road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Some robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him, leaving him half dead. Now it happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the wounded man, he walked on by on the other side. Next a religious scholar came by; he saw the man but he too crossed the road and walked on.

Let's stop the story for a moment to make sure we understand. Who would you expect to show kindness to this poor man?

Tammy: Well, wouldn't it be the people who knew God's Law - people like this priest and the religious scholar? But they didn't! I imagine the Law teacher must have been feeling very uncomfortable at how the story was going!

Carol: And I think the wounded man in the story would have felt despair - if even these religious people wouldn't help, what hope was there?

Fran: Well, let's hear what Jesus said next...

There was another man traveling that road on a donkey. He was a Samaritan. (Now I should explain that most of their people despised and hated Samaritans, foreigners from a nearby country. They were their traditional enemies.) But when the Samaritan saw the poor man's injuries, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, cleaned and dressed his wounds with oil and wine, and bandaged them. Then he lifted the man onto his donkey, and took him to an inn. He made the man comfortable and cared for him overnight. The next morning he gave two silver coins to the innkeeper, saying 'Take care of him, and when I come back I'll pay you any extra that it costs.'

Then Jesus asked the Law teacher politely, 'In your opinion, which of these three acted like a neighbor towards the man who had been attacked?'

The Law teacher replied: 'The one who was kind to him'. (He could give no other answer could he?)

So Jesus answered, 'Now you go and do the same.'

And that's the end of this story from God's word.

Carol: I never get tired of hearing that story. Wasn't Jesus a clever storyteller? Listening, you would think, 'Oh good, the priest will help!' And then he didn't. And again, you would get your hopes up; and the religious scholar didn't help either. And when you thought there was no hope, the most unexpected person, the Samaritan, helped him so much.

Tammy: It always makes me smile to think of that tricky Law scholar, who thought he was so good. He was forced to admit that to really keep God's law you need to show love to whoever needs it, whoever they are...even your traditional enemy! I wonder if he realized that he didn't - he couldn't - keep God's law like this. None of us can, until we ask God to change our hearts.

Fran: Yes. And I'm sure all Jesus' listeners would have got the point. It's not knowing lots about religion that matters. If we really want to please God we have to act like God - showing love to everyone, even those we might think of as enemies. By ourselves, we are helpless to do that aren't we?

Tammy: I wonder how this Law teacher felt now? I wonder how you feel about helping strangers - or people from other groups - or even your traditional enemy?

Carol: Fran, you said something about God showing love to even his enemies. That reminded me of some words from the Bible. I'd like to read them...

'For when we were still helpless, Jesus Christ died for the wicked at the time God chose... God has shown us how much he loves us - it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us... We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son' (Romans 5:6, 8, 10; GNB).

Fran: That's such an important message Carol. Jesus took the punishment for all the times we acted like God's enemies, and now God welcomes us with open arms. He loves us so much. If we want to be God's friends, we simply have to put our trust in what Jesus did for us. And then we can begin to live to please God, by showing love to anyone who needs it, whoever they are.

What a difference that would make in our homes, our villages, our cities and in our world! There is such hope in this story!

Tammy: What a lot of meaning in such a simple story. I hope it'll stay in your heart as you think more about it.

If you have any questions, or if you would like to share something from your life, please contact us...

Fran: Goodbye for now - let's get together again soon.

Carol: And goodbye till next time. God bless you, my friend, and give you new hope.

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