

Telling
the
Gospel

For Emmanuel Christian Church. And those three years with Luke.
Thanks for hanging in there!

BOB HARTMAN

Telling
the
Gospel

70 stories about Jesus to read out loud

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The Whole Story

Introduction

Strictly speaking, I suppose that this reading doesn't actually belong in a book called *Telling the Gospel*. As you will see, it starts well before the beginning of the book of Luke. But without it, the book of Luke doesn't make nearly so much sense.

I'm convinced that it's not only people outside of the church, but those within, as well, who don't have a clear picture of the Big Story. And without that picture, the individual stories lack context and meaning. There is an overarching narrative in the Bible – a story arc into which each individual narrative fits. And this reading is an attempt to tell that Big Story as simply and concisely as possible. I have used it in churches and schools and training events, and each time I have seen the light-bulbs go on and heard many people say "Aha!" and the "So that's how it fits together!"

Without this story, all that follows is at risk of being turned into a collection of moral tales and fables. In fact, I would argue that what I call the Aesopization of the Bible is to blame for much of the misunderstanding that people, Christian and non-Christian alike, have about this amazing book. So let's start here, with the Big Story, and let that story set the context for the stories to come.

TELLING TIPS: Most of the actions are done with the teller's hands. I have put them in parentheses after each line to help you along the way (I've almost done this piece enough times to remember what goes where, but I still find it helpful to have the cues). It's important that you teach the "chorus" to everyone first and run through it a couple of times with them. And make sure that you eyeball them the first couple of times you want them to come in, so they know how it works. And, yes, feel free to change or add to the actions.

Chorus:

Worship God (*hands raised in praise*).
Respect yourself (*hands on chest*).
Love one another (*hands clasped*).
Make good use of the world (*make shape of world*).

So God made the world,
And his voice was like a pair of hands (*put finger to mouth, then hold out hands*).

Day One (*one finger*): Light and Dark (*use hands to make two spaces*).
Day Two (*two fingers*): Sea (*wavy motion*), Sky (*make big arc with hand above*), and Space (*higher arc*).
Day Three (*three fingers*): Earth, hard as Rock (*fist*), and from the earth, green growing things (*with other hand, grow plant from behind*).
Day Four (*four fingers*): Sun (*sunburst with one hand*), Moon (*make crescent shape with two hands*), and Stars (*pick out stars with fingers*).
Day Five (*five fingers*): Sea Animals (*fish motion*) and Sky Animals (*bird motion*).
Day Six (*six fingers*): Land Animals (*bunny*). And finally, and best of all, Man and Woman (*a finger for each – one on each hand*), Adam and Eve, made in God's image.

And God looked at it all and saw that it was GOOD (*thumbs up*).
And he said:

Worship God,
Respect yourself,
Love one another,
Make good use of the world.

And on Day Seven, God rested (*head on hands*).

But then the serpent, a sly and crafty creature (*wiggly finger on one hand*), spoke to Eve (*upright finger on other hand*).
“So God told you not to eat that fruit? Well, I say, take a bite – and you will be just like him.”

So Eve took a bite (*upright finger on one hand bites hand shaped like apple – fist with thumb sticking out the top*).
And Adam did, too (*do the same – reversing hands*).

And suddenly everything was mixed up (*mixed-up hands*).
They were ashamed of themselves (*finger on each hand – look at each other and run from each other*).
They used each other (*fingers fight*).
They worshipped the world (*fingers bow – “man” finger bows down three times and says, “Power, Wealth, Fame”. Then “woman” finger bows down once and says “Shoes!”*)
And when God came calling, they did not worship him, they ran from him and hid (*fingers run and hide*).

So God came up with a plan – a plan for his hands – to make things like they were, and maybe even better, so that once again all would be good (*thumbs up*).

Worship God,
Respect yourself,
Love one another,
Make good use of the world.

He chose a man (*single finger*), a man named Abraham, and took him from his home to another land (*grab finger with other hand and move it*). “I will bless the world through your family,” God promised.
And he gave him a son called Isaac (*another finger joins first one*).
He gave Isaac two sons, Jacob and Esau (*two more fingers join*).
He gave Jacob twelve sons (*hands and toes gag: count Abraham's kin up to that point on your fingers – one man, then his one son, then his two sons, then you come to twelve sons – so you start counting on fingers, run out, then lift a foot in the air as if you are adding with toes*).
And when a famine came, he took one son and then the whole family to Egypt (*make a “Walk Like an Egyptian” shape*), so they would be safe.
And there the family grew – grew so large that Pharaoh became frightened and turned them into slaves (*hands holding bars*).
So God used his strong hand (*raised fist*) to set them free.
He made a way through the Red Sea (*parting motion with hands*).

He watered them (*hands water garden – watering pot*).
And fed them (*hands like feeding a child*).
And led them through the desert with Fire (*flame motion*) and Cloud
(*make puffy cloud shape with hands*).
And he gave them rules to live by. Rules that said:

Worship God,
Respect yourself,
Love one another,
Make good use of the world.

And finally he brought them back to the land he gave to Abraham (*move
finger with other hand again*), where everything should have been good
(*thumbs up*)!

But because they were also children of Adam and Eve, things got all
mixed up again (*repeat mixed-up motion*):

And they did things to shame themselves (*as before*).

And they used each other (*as before*).

And they worshipped the world (“*woman*” *finger bows three times and
says, “Power, Wealth, Fame”, and “man” finger bows once and says,
“Ferrari!”*)

And they ran from God and hid (*as before*).

So God called upon his “right-hand men” (*hold right hand high*):

Judges (*bring down gavel motion*) like Gideon and Samson,

Good Kings (*crown of two hands on head*) like David and Hezekiah,

Prophets (*hand from lips – outward*) like Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah,

To lead them back to him.

But the more he reached out to his people (*one hand reaches*), the more
they ran away (*the other moves away*).

And finally he had to let them go off to slavery again (*hands on bars
again*) – off to Babylon – for seventy long years.

He brought them back, at last (*one hand brings back the other*).

And then God went quiet (*“Shhh!” motion – finger to lips*), very quiet, for 400 years. It takes time to make a plan – a good plan, that is – and this one was a doozie!

If his people wouldn't come to him, then he would go to them. So he put on hands (*pretend to put on hands – like gloves*). The hands of a man called Jesus.

And he spoke through those hands and reached out through those hands.

And those hands were just like a voice (*finger from lips outward again*).

“Worship God,” he said. And his hands cleansed the temple of injustice and greed (*pushing-away motion*).

“Respect yourself,” he said. And his hands welcomed the outcast (*pulling-in, welcoming motion*).

“Love one another,” he said. And his hands healed the sick (*gentle touch*) and forgave the sinner (*holding motion*) and brought enemies together (*clasp hands*).

“Make good use of the world,” he said. And his hands stilled the storm (*violent hands, then still*) and turned water into wine (*pouring motion, then glass raised*).

His people should have been happy. Everything should have been good (*thumbs up*).

But because they were children of Adam and Eve, everything got mixed up again (*mixed-up motion*).

And they took those hands.

And bound those hands (*hands crossed*).

And drove nails through those hands (*finger in each palm – or hammering motion*).

And pinned them to a cross (*hands held out in crucifixion position*).

And when those hands were quiet and still, they folded those hands (*fold hands*) and put them in a tomb (*roll stone in front*).

One day passed, then two, then three (*count with fingers – 1, 2, 3*).

And because they were God's hands, no tomb could hold them. No power could still them forever.
So they rolled the stone away (roll stone away), and burst out of the tomb (*bursting motion with hands*).

And when he went to see his friends, Jesus said, "Don't be afraid, it's me. Look, see the nail-prints" (*show nail-prints – 1, 2*). "These are my hands" (*hold out hands*).

And before he left them, before he waved goodbye (*wave*), he put his message in their hands (*finger to lips to hands*). "Go," he said, "go tell everyone:

Worship God,
Respect yourself,
Love one another,
Make good use of the world."

And so they did,
From Judea
To Samaria,
To the ends of the earth (*point to a spot, then one further away, then one further still*),
To you and me (*point to audience and then to self*).

And now we are his hands (*hold out hands*)
To do his work.
And one day, when he returns, he will wipe away all that is mixed up (*mixed-up motion*), and every tear with it (*wipe tear from cheek*).
And the work of his hands (*hand held high*) and the work of our hands (*hand held low*) will make a new heaven (*two hands held high coming down*) and a new earth (*make shape of world*).

And we will worship him,
And respect ourselves,
And love one another,
And make good use of that new world forever.

Give yourself a hand! (*applaud*)

Questions

1. Are there any events you would mention that go unmentioned in this account? Why?
2. Are there any events you would describe differently? How?
3. Who do you think might benefit from hearing this account?