Testimonies of *Simply The Story* Effectiveness and Impact

8-Year Old Tells Bible Story and Gives Deep Insights!

What! How can that be? A child cannot go deeply into the Word of God … or, can he?

It happened like this. One father we know is teaching the Bible to his whole family. As well, the children have begun learning stories. We asked if some of the children could come over and we could film them telling their stories. We invited them because we not only love hearing kids tell a Bible story, we are also interested in what the story means to them. So after filming this boy, we asked him questions and had a conversation with him about the story to find out what the story meant to him.

In *Simply The Story* we describe the learning of a story with understanding as “putting it into your Heart Pocket.” Is the story in this boy’s Heart Pocket? You decide.

Now that you have seen and heard this 11-minute story and conversation, we’d like to know what you think:

- Were there any times this boy processed ideas of his own?
- Would any of the observations he makes about the story apply to children? … or maybe even to adults?
- Can an 8-year old think deeply?
- Is this boy’s depth of thinking unique to him or do you think other children could learn Bible stories and find deep insights for themselves?
- Can questions be used to encourage the discovery process?
- If you saw this boy learning things about himself, what was it you saw?
- What might you have seen this boy learning or verifying about God from this story?
Well, what do you think? Is the Bible story in this boy’s Heart Pocket? We’d love your feedback on what you saw. info@SimplyTheStory.org

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**Video of 4-year old telling 20-verse story.**

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**How Old Must One Be to Hear From God, or to Speak to Him?**

As a family, we have been studying through the Bible and have just finished the plagues of Egypt. Our children, ages 3 and 5, intensely followed the story each evening. After each time we hear a story, we use questions that prompt lively discussion. The boys were especially amazed how during the plagues, Pharaoh continued to have a hard heart before God. We talked about how today we sometimes have hard hearts like that too.

Today over breakfast, I asked our 3 year old to pray and thank God for our food. He said “Okay,” but his expression surprised me. He had become very serious and somber. I could even say he looked sorrowful. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, letting it out slowly and thoughtfully and began to pray as I've never heard before. “Lord,” he pleaded, “Oh Lord . . . we need your help. We really, really need it!”

He then closed his fist and literally beat his chest a few times, over his heart and said, “Please Lord, please help me to not have a hard heart like Pharaoh! Please help me to obey my Mommy and Daddy and not have a hard heart! Thank you for this good breakfast. In Jesus' name, Amen.”

I was quite touched by his prayer and didn't realize that I was staring at him, smiling and nodding in agreement. When he looked up at me, he gave me the response we'd just taught the boys. It was the response to use when you are talking to one person but someone else mistakenly thinks you are talking to them. He said, “Oh, I'm sorry, Mommy! I wasn't talking to you, I was talking to God.” He then began eating up his breakfast while I sat thinking.
Once again I was surprised by the honest to goodness working of the Holy Spirit in such a tiny person's soul. As well, the spiritual insight coming from the mouth of a babe not only amazed me, his humble and sincere application convicted me. Lastly, I was blessed by the fact that he wasn't praying to impress Mommy. He wasn't saying what he thought I'd want to hear. This admission of need and plea for God's help was between my son and God alone. I was just privileged to listen in and hear what the Spirit had already done.

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This mom called our office a week after sending the first report as she wanted to tell something more. She excitedly explained that of their two boys, Isaiah, the 3-year old, was the challenge, the strong-willed one. She told how separately, in the last few days, she and her husband had felt called to explain salvation to Isaiah. The 3-year old listened. Then, over the weekend, she said, "I heard Isaiah very clearly explain to his 5-year old brother what you had to do to go to heaven."

"Only then," the mom said, "did I put all the events together. I realized that for the three days (after hearing about salvation), Isaiah had been unusually bubbly and full of happiness. But for some days before that, as we were talking in Bible study about the plagues and pharaoh's hard heart, he had been sad and withdrawn. In fact, we had seen that sadness, even before the breakfast prayer. Isaiah had been disciplined for something and had been crying. His dad had told him to go into the bathroom and get a drink and wash his face. Then both of us overheard Isaiah in the bathroom sniffling and saying, 'I don't want to have a hard heart. I don't want to disobey mommy and daddy. I don't want to be like this.'"

The mom said she realized that at age 3, Isaiah had been under conviction for days. His change in disposition and his excitement as he explained salvation to his big brother showed he had asked Jesus to save him from his hard heart, and now Isaiah knew he was forgiven and going to heaven!

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I guess 3-year olds have ears. "He that has an ear, let him hear." Is salvation just knowing information or is it a response of the spirit admitting our inadequacy and God's sufficiency? For all of us, at any age, I think what is needed is Listening and Responding!

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**Summer Sunday School Experience**

Last summer I taught in the Bible Story station for our Summer Sunday program for kids going into 1st grade through 6th grade. The kids are all in one room where a Bible story is told and some questions are asked. I was pretty amazed at what the kids did NOT know and the
answers that I heard. So, I thought, how great it would be if the kids could hear, learn and interact with stories using the STS method.

Our Summer Sunday School program is 14 weeks so I started in Jan to train 7 adults to be able to tell a story and do the questions. We met once a month for about 2 hours. We worked on nine Old Testament stories and 5 New Testament stories. I have to admit, I wasn’t sure we could pull it off.

I also met once and sometimes twice with the instructors for one on one training. This was very valuable. These teachers worked really hard on their stories and God blessed!

The results were amazing. Let me share just a little.

We had anywhere from 35-50 kids. The message time was 45 minutes but in reality we had about 35 minutes. We encouraged the kids to get a drink and use the bathroom before the story started!

When we would start the stories, you could hear a pin drop in the room. The kids were totally engaged in the story. Then we had them stand up and help us tell the story with words and actions. We did this instead of having them tell one another or having someone come up and do the story. This was followed with the lead through. They loved the opposite things. We did keep them to one or two per story. The discussion time was interesting.

In the beginning we got some silly answers, especially to what else could they have done but as the weeks went on the answers to all the questions got better and better and more personal. The kids began to think outside the box. When we were doing applications in Blind Bartimeaus, one little girl shared how lonely she felt most of the time. Another time as the story teller was asking question one of the boys shouted out, “What other choices did he have?”. So not only were they learning the stories but they were picking up on the questions.

The head of the children’s department asked her 5 year old granddaughter what she had learned that Sunday and she told the 13 verse Cain and Abel story perfectly. When asked what were the brothers names she said Ca nabel and something else. She missed the names but got the story. That works for me.

Another family shared that their twin daughters (3rd graders) would fight over who got to tell the story in their devotion time and the one that didn’t get to tell would sadly say, you didn’t leave anything for me to tell.

At the beginning of our story time we would review the previous stories and ask “What did we see God doing in this story or that story?” One little girl would be more than willing to answer and she would retell the whole story accurately. I’m not sure we heard her answer the questions but we loved hearing the story.
Asking the kids, “What did we see God doing in this story?”, was harder than asking “What happened in the story” but as we worked through this adventure, we realized the importance of asking the God question. After all that is what we wanted the kids to see God working in people’s lives.

I believe that these kids heard Bible stories told accurately, that they learned them and were asked questions that helped them see God working.

Carolyn

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**Family Devotions That Impact**

A missionary with two home schooled teenagers (12 an 13 years old) approached the leader of an upcoming 5 day workshop and asked whether the whole family could attend. The missionary knew that there would be 40+ adults attending, but he had no other option for his children's care and would have to drop out if they could not attend. The workshop leader agreed, which turned out to be an unusual blessing for the whole group. The two teenagers became better story tellers than most of the adults! The father showed appreciation for the workshop in relation to his ministry with nationals, but was most impressed with how it affected their family devotions. He said, "Before this workshop, myself or my wife would lead our devotions, but now I can assign a Bible story to one of my kids and they can take us through the story, ask good questions and make the applications."

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**Child and Theologian Connect**

Something neat occurred last Tuesday evening. By invitation I presented a story in a pastor’s living room in Philadelphia. Four families were represented: seven adults, one teenager, seven of grade school age, and one 4-year-old boy. They all learned Moses & The Rock (Ex 17:1-7), and everyone shared during discussion time.

One adult volunteered, "Seeing God promise to be with Moses as Moses stood before a hostile crowd reassured me of God's presence in my life, especially in moments of uncertainty."

All those of grade school age and the teenager joined in. The playing field stayed level. No one intimidated anyone else. Most interestingly, the 4-year-old participated, speaking up six times. Four of his comments were even on target with the subject!

At one point the small boy said, "The desert was hot." Then later he contributed, "Moses believed in God."
It is not just that the boy contributed six times. It is that this style of teaching I have adopted encouraged a 4-year old to stay connected to a teaching in which adults and teenagers participated! Indeed, the discussion factor, when done as outlined by STS, does appeal to all.

J.T. USA. Dallas Theological Seminary Graduate

Post Script: At lunch in a restaurant the next day, the pastor explained that he had heard that this way of presenting Scripture ministered to a wide range of learners. So, he thought that by inviting STS into his home with a mixed audience he could see its effectiveness first-hand.

He then expressed how pleased all the adults were that their children found as much relevancy in the technique and the Bible material as the adults did. The pastor ended by stating, "I want the church leadership to consider using STS in our church, especially the men's ministry.

Five Years Old and Spot On!

After being introduced to STS Bible storytelling this past year, I thought I would try it out at home. As part of family devotions each evening, I started doing something that I decided to call “Story Challenge.” I pitched this to my son Joshua (5 years old) as a contest to see if he could tell back to me the story that I was about to tell him. We told and retold the story many times over several days. He was hesitant to tell it back to me initially, claiming that it was too hard and that he didn’t remember anything. So, I skipped straight to the lead through, coaxing out of him the next line of the story, bit by bit.

Often times as we do that lead through, I throw in silly options and questions that provoke a "You're wrong, Daddy!" type of response. After I “bungle” the story, he tells me how the story was supposed to go.

On evenings when he is unwilling to do Story Challenge, I say, “That’s fine. You don’t have to do it. I’ll just do it with Mommy. Do you think Mommy can do it?” Regardless of his answer, I proceed to tell the story to my wife and have her tell it back to me. Sometimes my son covers his ears, indicating that he does not want to play. However, when Mommy leaves out a detail or misremembers the story, my son often perks up and corrects her.

Joshua got rather good at telling the story of Jesus Calming the Storm (Mark 4:35-41) and was able to answer my observation questions about the story because he knew the content of the story so well.

My wife and I have a lot of fun with this time on questions too, especially when Joshua gives outlandish answers. I asked him, “What else could Jesus have done to help the disciples
besides calming the storm like He did?” With a big smile on his face, my son replied, “Jesus makes a rocket appear, and Jesus and His disciples get in the rocket, and blast to the other side of the lake!” We had a lot of fun but we also were able to draw out observations such as “Jesus cares for us,” and “Jesus has power over nature.” These then turned into applications about trusting God.

I’ve had Joshua share the storm story in a couple of venues with adults to show that kids too can learn Bible stories, learn them accurately and share them with others. Hopefully this is an encouragement to adults to learn Bible stories themselves and teach them to their kids and grandkids. As for our family, we are now working on the story of the demoniac from Luke 8, hoping to share it with people around Halloween time. And my son is really eager for us to do the story of David and Goliath as a Story Challenge.

Karl, OMF serving in Thailand

Teenage Boys - “Not Bored!”
“When my sister and 3 teen-age nephews came to visit us from Washington, we used STS for our daily devotions, learning a Bible story everyday from the life of Peter. As they were leaving, my sister said, ‘I'm going to use this in my youth Sunday School class. They will like this.’

“One nephew said, ‘I really like studying the Bible this way! I never got bored.’”

M.B. Missionary in SE Asia

Stories Touch Teachers, Who Teach Children
“After being trained in STS, we no longer look at stories just as stories, but we are able to pick out the deeper meaning for our lives as we minister to children and put it together with them.”
Q and Janice Child Evangelism

Father of Teenagers. He and They Trained in STS
"I am very thankful for STS as I have seen my two teenage daughters quickly learn it and now are teaching it and using it with others."This is a powerful tool unfolding the infinite riches of God’s word and its applicability to our lives.

"I am also using this in our family devotions as well as at work. I am encouraging all my friends and associates to learn and use this incredible resource." N.F. GA, USA

“No One Cracked Jokes”
“Thursday night God opened the door for me to return to the prison I visited last year. These
were different boys than the ones I told a story to last year, but their problems were the same. This time we did the story of Jacob going back to Bethel to live and to build an altar to God. (Gen 35:1-5).

“Amazingly, the boys opened their hearts and responded honestly to the Bible story and the applications. We discussed what the idols were in their lives. Most responded, money, some said drugs, and one boy said family. I asked why those idols were more important to them than God.

“One young man said he thought it was good for Jacob to bury the idols, in case it didn’t work out with God, Jacob would be able to find the idols.

“Towards the end Mike, 15-years old, shared about his son and how much his son didn't know him. Gratefully the mom brings the son for visitation. We discussed what kind of role model Jacob was to his family and then what kind of role model Mike wanted to be for his son.

“Mike continued opening up about his fear of being released in 10 days. How would he be able to make it on the outside? All he knows is drug dealing, and he did that well.

“Together, the other boys, Youth for Christ volunteers, and I brainstormed about some specific steps Mike could do.

“Once again, the response by the volunteers as we were leaving prison was the same as last year. ‘I can't believe how much those boys opened up and shared!’

“One volunteer noted, ‘No one cracked jokes or disrupted the meeting and Mike is usually the one causing trouble!’

“Please pray for Mike and the others. None of them like being in prison, but they just don't know how to live outside of prison.

Andowan, CA, USA

Missionaries Have Kids Too!

An OMF missionary who attended an STS training in Chiang Mai brought her son along to the workshop. This is what happened with her new-found information ...

“The first thing nine year old Bobby did when we got home was to tell the national couple we work with one of the "stories" we had learned in Chiang Mai.
“We have also been starting each school day with having him tell me one of the stories he remembers and then we practice making observations together...a precious way to start our school day!!

“Thanks so much for the training!! I told him to pick one of the stories, that I would learn it in the national language and then teach it to him. The first one we are going to learn is Elisha and the widow.

“After dinner the other evening, we sat around the table with our national co-workers and did a story with them along with the observation/application. It was a great way to fellowship!!”