

7 Gifts

for church & home

Summary Gift Five

Awesome Stories
and God Encounters

INFORMATION & DISCUSSION GUIDE

Why Awesome Stories are so important

Stories give our children the scaffolding needed to encounter God. Stories act as milestone marker pegs in the child's journey upon which they can hang their faith.

A 2010 Princeton University Study discovered using MRI scans that stories link the brains of the storyteller and the listeners. During a story, the brain activity of all of the people involved becomes synchronised, identical activity-wise. When the storyteller has activity in the insula, an emotional brain region, the listeners do too. Basically story listeners experience the story in the exact same neurological pattern that the storyteller does. A story then is literally a shared brain experience.

Stories help us form memories, they bring a group together and make experiences more fulfilling. Neuroscience studies have proven that stories are integral to forming memories. If we want our children to be shaped spiritually then we need to help them share our christian experience. They need to hear Bible stories, stories of the universal church, stories of your denomination, stories of your local church but most importantly your story.

A compelling story is like music in a noisy world: it makes us want to stop and listen. Melanie Green and Tim Brock argue that entering a good story "radically alters the way information is processed." Green and Brock's studies shows that the more absorbed readers are in a story, the more the story changes them. They argue that, "To the extent that individuals are absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world, they may show effects of the story on their real-world beliefs."

Stories spark emotions. We have an intuitive, emotional side as well as a deliberate, rational side to our character. Too often as a church we only try and connect with children on a rational level but this isn't enough to actually change how people behave. Storytelling gives leaders a way of inspiring children to experience God like never before with their emotional and intuitive sides.

Children use stories to make sense of things. Children being caught up in God's Story is the result of thousands of interactions and experiences and it becomes the 'lens' through which they interpret the world around them. This biblical world view is built up story by story and then through their application and experience of living this story in their world.

Children learn from stories. Stories give children the space to discover the implicit meaning of what's being said, enabling them to learn, discover and own what they need to do for themselves. Sharing emotive stories inspires children and helps them learn more quickly what it means to live in God's Story.

As our children hear these stories, experience them and form memories, they are more likely to be immersed in and shaped by God's story and find their place in it!

Stories give our children the weapons they need to defeat the dragons and let me tell you there are many dragons that are real and are wanting to bring our children down!

Children also need to Encounter Jesus otherwise they will have a head knowledge but not the heart knowledge and it is the heart knowledge that ensures that our children are here to stay. Regular God encounters are more formative on our children's spirituality than any other practice or event in our children's lives. These encounters can't be scripted but we as parents and mentors can help create the space and event where this happens.

It is important that our children are given the time and space to encounter Jesus. Our entertainment gadget saturated society has intruded into our families lives and they have become busy and noisy. There is a danger that we fill our home and church spaces so full that there is no time for our children to hear the still small voice of God. Children encounter Jesus in different ways and the Gracelink curriculum has been specifically designed to help our children encounter God at home and at church.

We also need to encourage children to respond to God in their own unique way though various rituals and practices. It is through the rhythm of these rituals/practices and traditions that we are able to place children in touch with God's redemptive activity. It puts our children in a place where life in Christ may be made known, recognized, experienced and participated in.

Children also need to spend time in nature play outdoors to encounter God in all his wonder and beauty.

What can CHURCHES do?

Provide awesome Sabbath Schools that uses total hour learning as found in the Gracelink Curriculum.

1. **TRAIN YOUR TEACHERS SO THAT THEY GET THE MOST OUT OF GRACELINK AND ITS TOTAL HOUR LEARNING CYCLE.**
2. **RESOURCE FAMILIES WITH GRACELINK MATERIALS AS FOUND ON THE WEB AND IN THE PAMPHLET.**
3. **RECRUIT BOTH MEN AND WOMEN MENTORS TO BE LEADERS IN SABBATH SCHOOLS. THESE MENTORS ARE IMPORTANT IN THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN.**
4. **MAKE SURE THAT THE GRACELINK AT HOME RESOURCES ARE BEING USED DURING THE WEEK BEFORE SABBATH SCHOOL.**
5. **MAKE SURE THAT CHILDREN EACH WEEK GET A SENSE OF GOD'S BIG PICTURE AND THEY KNOW HOW THE WEEKLY LESSON FITS INTO THAT.**

What can FAMILIES do?

Tell awesome stories. Stories give our children the weapons they need to overcome life's obstacles.

1. **TELL BIBLE STORIES (ONE EACH NIGHT BEFORE BED IS A GREAT TIME FOR THIS).**
2. **TELL STORIES ABOUT THE EARLY CHURCH.**
3. **TELL STORIES ABOUT YOUR DENOMINATION.**
4. **TELL STORIES ABOUT YOUR LOCAL CHURCH.**
5. **TELL STORIES ABOUT HOW YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED GOD OVER THE YEARS.**

5 Questions for Boards and Churches to Discuss/Brainstorm

1. HOW CAN WE BEST TEACH OUR PARENTS THE ART OF READING AND TELLING STORIES TO THEIR CHILDREN? WHAT RESOURCES DO WE NEED TO PROVIDE TO HELP THEM DO THIS?

2. HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR SABBATH SCHOOLS AND GRACELINK CURRICULUM BETTER FOR OUR CHILDREN?

3. HOW MANY MEN DO WE HAVE IN OUR SABBATH SCHOOLS AND HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE GOOD MENTORS TO REGULARLY INTERFACE WITH OUR CHILDREN?

4. HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT GRACELINK GOES HOME WITH OUR CHILDREN DURING THE WEEK?

5. HOW CAN WE HELP OUR CHILDREN TO ENCOUNTER GOD AT CHURCH AND AT HOME?
