

ROUNDabout

Winter 2009–10



The newsletter for Gather 'Round leaders

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

What's the point of wondering? Recent letters to our "Ask Anna" column on the Gather 'Round website have asked for help with the "I wonder" questions that follow the Bible story. This type of question appears mostly in the sessions for younger children, although youth and adults are also sometimes asked to wonder and imagine. Some have complained that these questions do not lend themselves to the kind of discussion that adults need.

Wondering can seem counterintuitive, especially for adults. We've learned to jump right into the intellectual heart of the subject at hand. But activating our imaginations serves a few purposes as well.

Questions in the upcoming quarter ask us to put ourselves in the place of Zechariah and Mary as they encounter the angel Gabriel. We thirst with the Samaritan woman, and share the anguish of Mary and Martha over the death of their brother Lazarus. We connect with the stories in a different way when they touch our hearts and our senses and this is as important for youth and adults as it is for children.

A pause for reflection helps adults as well as children get in touch with feelings and thoughts about the story. Introverts need time to think in order to feel capable of contributing to a discussion—and it's not a bad idea to encourage extroverts to do a little quiet pondering as well.

So don't hasten past that wondering time. Give God's spirit time to connect with each of the participants in your group.

—Anna Speicher,
Director and Senior Editor

Accept the invitation

This quarter takes us on a fast-paced biblical journey that begins with Advent (November 29) and ends with the first Sunday in Lent (February 21). The Advent sessions help us experience once again the meaning of Jesus' birth. Then we quickly move into John's gospel stories where we are invited to come and see what Jesus is all about. "If we accept the invitation, we'll find ourselves walking with Jesus and his first disciples, eavesdropping on strange and wonderful conversations," writes Sue Clemmer Steiner, author of the quarter's Bible insight essays.

We'll overhear Nicodemus's strange nighttime questions, and the Samaritan woman's words at the well; we'll hear Jesus describe himself as the bread of life, good shepherd, and light of the world. We'll witness the miracles of water turning into wine, little barley loaves being multiplied, and a man regaining his eyesight.

Primary writer Rose Mary Stutzman writes, "Seeing these John texts from a child's perspective has helped me connect with the essence of our humanity, our deep yearning for God's life-giving love. This yearning shows up in vivid images of living water, new birth, abundant wedding wine, bread for hungry travelers, and a shepherd's tender care. If shared in a creative, imaginative way, these images can fill the hearts and minds of children in ways that give life and hope. I pray that this quarter will be a living stream of story and song that will draw both teachers and children closer to God, the source of love, the source of life."

Enter the biblical story

Biblical storytelling is not about entertainment, nor about fitting the scriptures into our experience. We don't need to add humor or dialogue—the power of the scripture will grab the heart of the listener. God's story stands well on its own when told in a way that listeners are invited to enter into it. Through good storytelling, children and youth come to love the stories and the God of the stories as revealed in the Bible.

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Check www.gatherround.org for a PDF of a letter to parents about the Winter Talkabout.

Copy and distribute this to each family when you give them their Talkabout.



Look ahead to Spring

Winter quarter ends February 21 and Spring quarter begins February 28. In future years, the spring quarter will always begin on the first Sunday in March.

When we enter a story we become part of it. Entering the story requires careful preparation and reflective response time. Biblical storytelling is holy work. Here are some things to keep in mind as you prepare to share God's story each week:

1. Give the story your full attention. Remember that the biblical story is the center of the session, not the teacher or the learner. Listen for God's voice, and trust God to speak to you and through you, and through the listeners.
2. Take time to reflect on the story. Silent reflection after the story gives your group time to embrace the mystery of God together. Then, when you wonder about the story together, you move beyond the facts and the information to what truly forms us as Christians—deeper conversation about the mystery and greatness of God and God's great love for us. It is this shared experience of the holy that forms and unites the Christian community.
3. Respond to the story. The biblical story provides the basis for the session's response activities. Participants respond to the Bible story in different ways. Some suggested response options are more active while others are more reflective.
4. Integrate the story. Invite group members to share what they learned in their response activities. This will help them integrate the story into their lives so they will leave the session having been shaped by the story.

Teaching tip

Remember, the session does not end for the teacher until the last participant has left. Surprising things can happen after the bell rings: Shy or introverted people tend to share their deeper insights when they are alone with the teacher. Being available to listen to the message that God revealed to a child, youth, or adult is a holy, awesome privilege that you won't want to miss!

Find more tips on biblical storytelling and suggestions for responding to the story on pages 106–110 of the Gather 'Round Handbook.

Copy and distribute to all teachers and leaders.

PDF at: www.gatherround.org

Winter 2009–10 Talkabout • The Word Among Us

Look for "The Word Among Us" with the Winter 2009–10 Talkabout. Each weekly card relates to a different Bible story from this quarter. Families will enjoy following the discussion and activity suggestions and reading the trivia items. A weekly prayer is provided for use as a table grace or in family devotions. Order one Talkabout for each family with children in Sunday school.



www.gatherround.org

Free sample sessions, Bible texts, and more at www.gatherround.org

