

How to Outline a Bible Story

Follow the action of the Bible story text very carefully. First, pull out the actual action in the stories and list what happened in chronological order, as you would when telling a story.

Matthew 5:43-48

1. One day, Jesus was teaching His disciples and a big group of many other people, too. (I went back to 5:1 for the context.)
2. Jesus was telling them some common sayings they had always heard, and showing them what He said about those things.
3. They had always heard, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”
4. Jesus said something different.
 - a. They must love not only their neighbors, but even their ENEMIES!
 - b. They must BLESS those who curse them!
 - c. They must do good to those who hate them.
 - d. They must pray for those who spitefully use them and persecute them.
5. God gives us an example of how we should treat even those who don’t like us.
 - a. He makes His sun rise on evil people as well as good ones.
 - b. He sends rain for the just and for the unjust.
6. If we bless only our friends, we have no reward for that.
7. We should be perfect like our Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 18:21-34

1. Another time, Peter, one of Jesus disciples, asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone. He thought 7 times would be a lot.
2. Jesus said he should forgive 70 times 7.
3. Jesus told a story to show how we should forgive.
 - a. A man owed a certain king 10,000 talents (equivalent to 60 million denari).
 - 1) He couldn’t pay, so he & his whole family were to be sold into slavery.
 - 2) The man begged the king for mercy, for more time to pay.
 - 3) The king showed him mercy and forgave all his debt.
 - b. A fellow servant owed that same man a hundred denari, a much lesser amount.
 - 1) He grabbed the servant by the throat and demanded payment.
 - 2) The servant begged him for more time to pay.
 - 3) The man refused, and threw the servant into prison until he could pay.
 - c. Someone reported to the king what the man had done.
 - 1) The king was very angry because he was forgiven much, but he refused to forgive little.
 - 2) The king sent him to be tortured until he could pay his debt.

NOTE—You might have outlined it a bit differently, but the point is that you list the main actions in order, with appropriate subdivisions. For instance, I used subdivisions to show the various actions or words of different people.

NOW—Go back and add the proper emphasis in the right places to make the stories reflect the theme of the lesson (Bless, do not curse) in the fullest possible way. I am now going to copy the outlines and add those emphases, showing them in blue.

Matthew 5:43-48

1. One day, Jesus was teaching His disciples and a big group of many other people, too.
2. Jesus was telling them some common sayings they had always heard, and showing them what He said about those things.
3. They had always heard, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”
4. Jesus said something different.
 - a. They must love not only their neighbors, but even their ENEMIES!

- b. They must BLESS those who curse them! (Jesus said, BLESS, DO NOT CURSE.)
 - c. They must do good to those who hate them. (That's a way of blessing by our actions as well as by our words.)
 - d. They must pray for those who spitefully use them and persecute them. (Praying for someone is another wonderful way of blessing them.)
5. God gives us an example of how we should treat even those who don't like us.
- a. He makes His sun rise on evil people as well as good ones. (Isn't it a blessing that the sun shines? What a curse it would be if the sun did not shine!)
 - b. He sends rain for the just and for the unjust. (Isn't it a blessing that God gives us rain? What a curse it would be if there were no rain!)
6. If we bless only our friends, we have no reward for that. (Our friends will repay us with friendship. God wants us to bless others even when they will not pay us back. When we bless our enemies, God Himself will repay us.)
7. We should be perfect like our Father in heaven is perfect. (He blesses everyone.)

Matthew 18:21-34

1. Another time, Peter, one of Jesus disciples, asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone. He thought 7 times would be a lot. (He thought that was enough times to bless someone who hurt him.)
2. Jesus said he should forgive 70 times 7. (Literally, 490 times, but if we forgave someone that many times, we'd probably lose track, and that's the point. We should bless those who hurt us with forgiveness without keeping track.)
3. (Forgiving others is one of the best ways of blessing there is. So,)Jesus told a story to show how we should forgive.
 - a. A man owed a certain king 10,000 talents (equivalent to 60 million denari).
 - 1) He couldn't pay, so he & his whole family were to be sold into slavery. (That was an awful curse.)
 - 2) The man begged the king for mercy, for more time to pay.
 - 3) The king showed him mercy and forgave all his debt. (The king gave him a wonderful blessing he did not deserve.)
 - b. (He had been blessed with forgiveness of a huge debt. Now, he had a chance to pass on the blessing to others.) A fellow servant owed that same man a hundred denari, a much lesser amount.
 - 1) He grabbed the servant by the throat and demanded payment.
 - 2) The servant begged him for more time to pay.
 - 3) The man refused, and threw the servant into prison until he could pay. (He refused to bless the other man by forgiving him even a small amount. Instead, he cursed him by throwing him into prison!)
 - c. Someone reported to the king what the man had done.
 - 1) The king was very angry because he was forgiven much, but he refused to forgive little. (He had received a blessing, but he gave cursing,)
 - 2) The king sent him to be tortured until he could pay his debt.

Outlining a Bible story is useful in your own devotions and Bible study and especially useful in preparing Bible lessons. Try outlining the Bible story in preparation for your next Bible teaching time.