

TEXT VERSIONS OF STORIES:

Day 1:



בראשית

HOW GOD MADE THE WORLD

Genesis 1-2

In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. But at first the earth was shapeless and empty, and everything was covered with thick darkness.

Then God said, "Let there be light!"

And there was light. God saw that it was good, so he separated it from the darkness. He called the light 'day' and the darkness 'night'.

Then God made the sky, stretching it out over the earth like a great tent, and he gathered the waters together in one place so that dry land appeared. On this land he set plants and trees growing, and it all seemed very good.

Then lights were put in the sky like great lamps, the sun, the moon and the stars, to mark the seasons and to make night and day.



Into the sea God put all kinds of fish,
and birds to fly above them in the air.



“Have young,” he said to them all,
“and fill this land of mine to overflowing.”

Then he said, “Let the dry land be filled
with animals, with those that walk and
creep and jump and run.” And it all
seemed very good.



At last God said, “Let us make man in
our own image and likeness.” So mankind
was made:

*in the image of God created he him; male and
female created he them.*

And the human creatures he had made
were special, because they were like God.

They were put in charge of all the
things that now filled the marvellous new
world. And God blessed them.

“Rule over the earth and its creatures,”
he said. “They are for you.”

Then God looked all around and saw
that his creation was very good indeed. It
had taken six long days to make it, so on
the seventh day he rested.

That is why the seventh day of the
week is a holy day, because it is when God
rested from all his work.

Day 2:



ESTHER

Esther

Queen Vashti, the wife of King Ahasuerus, was in disgrace. Her husband had summoned her to one of his gorgeous banquets and she had refused to go. She was holding a banquet of her own, for the women of the court. Besides, all Ahasuerus wanted to do was to brag about her beauty.

But her refusal was seen as a terrible insult. The nobles feared that all their wives would start pouring scorn on them. And so Vashti was punished and sent away. Ahasuerus took a new queen called Esther. She was very young and very



beautiful and she was Jewish. Her parents were dead and she had been brought up by a cousin named Mordecai.

Esther did not enter the king's presence for twelve months. The rule was that a new wife had to be prepared and made as attractive as possible with perfumes and costly oils. When the time came she was allowed anything she wanted, to take with her to the court. In her modesty, Esther asked for nothing, and this pleased King Ahasuerus. He put a crown on her head and proclaimed a holiday. She was his favourite.

Meanwhile, Mordecai discovered that there was a plot to kill the king. He told Esther, she told her husband, and the men were hanged. This was all written down in the royal diary.

At court there was an arrogant, boastful man called Haman. Everyone had to bow down to him because Ahasuerus favoured him highly, but Mordecai refused.

Haman was furious. It was not enough to kill Mordecai, he said. He would kill every single Jew. And he persuaded the king to send out orders for this to be done. The cruel commands were copied out and sent all over the kingdom. All Jews were to be killed, young and old, men, women, children.

When Mordecai heard about it he wept and tore his clothes. He could not go into the royal court himself but he sent a message to Esther, begging her to plead

with the king, to change his mind. But the royal laws were strict. Ahasuerus had many wives and none, not even Esther, could go to him without being sent for. The penalty for disobeying this was death.

But Mordecai would not give up. "If you say nothing," he warned, "the Jews may be saved some other way, but you and your family will die. Perhaps you are in this royal court for a purpose. Speak to the king."



Esther was convinced. "I will break the law and tell him," she said, "and if I die, I die."

But she was patient. For three days she fasted and prayed, and she prepared a banquet for the king, in honour of Haman, his favourite. The foolish man went around boasting. "I'm the only one Queen Esther has invited to her feast," he said. "But I hate the sight of Mordecai sitting at the palace gate. I'll have a gallows built, to hang him on." And that is what he did.

That night Ahasuerus could not sleep. So he decided to read the royal diary. There he discovered that Mordecai had saved him from two murderers. He

wanted to thank him. So he sent for Haman. "What should be done for a man whom the king wants to honour?" he asked. Haman thought Ahasuerus was talking about him. "Let them lead him through the streets in a royal robe on a royal horse," he said. But he was ordered to do this for Mordecai, whom he hated. When the procession was over he went home and wept, he was so jealous.

The banquet took place, and only then did Esther tell the king that she was a Jew. Only then did she ask him to spare her people. And she told the king how the cruel plot against them was all Haman's doing.

Ahasuerus wasted no time. Haman was hanged on the great gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and Mordecai was brought before the king and given his own ring. Thanks to Esther's pleading, new royal commands were sent all over the kingdom. These said that if anyone tried to attack the Jews they were allowed to defend themselves. And they did.

There was much rejoicing when the news was known and Mordecai went away from the royal court wearing a crown, dressed in purple fit for a king.



Day 3:



THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10

One day, a clever lawyer who had been listening to Jesus' stories decided to try and trick him. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do if I want to live forever in God's kingdom?"

"What does it say in the Scriptures?"
Jesus answered.

"It says that you must love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. After that you must love your neighbour as much as you love yourself."

"You are right," Jesus told him. "Do this and you will have everlasting life."

But the lawyer wasn't satisfied. "Who is my neighbour?" was his next question.

And Jesus told this story.

There was once a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, and on a lonely stretch of road some robbers attacked him. They stripped him, beat him up, and went off leaving him half dead.



Now as it happened a priest soon came along the same bit of road. But when he saw the poor man lying there, he simply crossed over to the other side. Some time later another priest, a Levite this time, also came walking along. He did exactly the same thing, just crossed the road and continued on his way.

Eventually a Samaritan rode up. Now Samaritans despised Jews, so this was someone you wouldn't expect to be any help at all. But when he saw the man, pity filled his heart. He went straight over to him, poured oil and wine onto his wounds, and bandaged them up. Then he lifted the man onto his own donkey and took him to the nearest inn where he looked after him all night.

In the morning the Samaritan took out his purse and gave the innkeeper some money. "Take care of him," he said, "and if you spend any more than this, I'll pay you when I come back."



At the end of the story Jesus asked, "Now which of these three people was 'neighbour' to the man who fell among thieves?"

"The one who showed mercy to him," the clever lawyer replied.

"Then go and do the same," said Jesus.

Day 4:

He said too that God's kingdom was like treasure buried in a field. If a man digs it up he hides it again. But then he goes off and buys the whole field, so that he can own the treasure too.

And Jesus said the kingdom of God was like a merchant looking for the best pearls. When he finds the most beautiful one of all, the pearl of great price, he sells everything he has to buy it.

People who find God's kingdom, Jesus said, do not hide the good news away, just as people with a lamp don't cover the light with a bowl, or put it under a bed. They put the lamp on a stand and let it shine out, so that everyone can see.

Jesus told many stories about things that were lost. He wanted the people to know how much God loved them, and how he would go on looking for them until they were found. So that if a woman with ten silver coins loses one she will light a lamp and carefully sweep her house



until she finds it again. When she has found it she will call her friends and neighbours to share in her joy. In heaven, Jesus said, the angels rejoice too, when a sinful person says they are sorry.

Often, he said, people reminded him of sheep, wandering and lost, not knowing where their shepherd had gone. If a man had as many as a hundred sheep, he told them, and one got lost, he would look everywhere until he had found it. And God would rejoice more over that one sheep than over the ninety-nine others who had stayed close to home.



Day 5:

Jesus told another parable about the ways people listened to his words. This was the story of the sower. Once, he said, a farmer went out to sow some seed. He went all over his land, scattering it from a basket. Some fell by the roadside where birds swooped down and gobbled it up.



Some fell on rocks where there was not enough soil, and as soon as the plants sprang up they withered away again. They had no deep roots, so the hot sun scorched and killed them. Some of the seed fell among thorns so as soon as the plants grew they were choked.



But some of the seed fell on good soil and from this the farmer got a fine crop, many times greater than the seed he had sown.



Jesus explained this story to the people. He told them that the seed was really his message about God's kingdom. Sometimes the devil snatches the words away, like the birds by the roadside. Sometimes a person will hear the message with great joy but then forget about it, almost at once. These people are like the plants with shallow roots. The thorns that choked the plants are the worries and cares of the world that crowd out the word of God so it can't grow. But the seed that fell on good soil is like someone who hears the word and understands it.

Lost Sheep Pictures – for Zoom session on Day Four (images from <https://globalworship.tumblr.com/post/142971501190/jesus-as-good-shepherd-in-non-asian-art>)

The Lost Sheep, by Daniel Bonnell, USA

The Good Shepherd, Jesus Mafa, Cameroon

The Lost Sheep, Bridi Barth, Switzerland

