

1. The Bible, God's Word

Before we start

Have you ever wondered why you were born? Where do all the people on the earth come from, and where does the earth come from? There is a wonderful book that gives us answers on these and many other questions. This book is the Bible. It tells the story of God and the story of people. It tells that God loves people. In the Bible each one of us learns where we fit into God's story.

Tell, tell!

The Bible is very old and at the same time brand-new. In the Bible we read how everything began, but also how everything will end. The Bible tells about the way which God walks with people, and how God works with them. Even though the Bible was written so long ago, it still gives advice on the difficulties we face today and those that we might face tomorrow.

Now you probably wonder where this Bible comes from? Who wrote it? Why is it still so important today? (*Wait a moment.*)

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *biblia* that means "books". The Bible is not only one book; it is actually a collection of 66 books. These books are divided into the Old Testament, the story of the beginning of the world until before Jesus came to the earth, and the New Testament that describes Jesus' coming to the earth and the beginning of the first church. The New Testament ends where we are told how it will be when Jesus comes again.

These books of the Bible were written by approximately 40 writers, in different languages, and over a period of 1 600 years. Among these writers were kings, prophets, fishermen, a shepherd, a doctor and a tent-maker. Of course, they were not the only people who wrote about Israel's history and the life of Jesus. Later, these 66 books, of which there are still many examples today, were accepted as the true books of the Bible. That was because they all told one and the same story about God and people.

But how is this possible? How can so many people all write the same message, even though they did not know one another or read one another's books? (*Wait a moment.*) The answer is actually simple: These people just wrote what God placed in their hearts. It was through these

ordinary people that God introduced himself to the world. That is why we can recognise God’s voice in these books. You just know it is the Word of God! That is why we listen respectfully to the Bible and obey God’s will as he made it known in the Bible. *(Wait a moment.)*

When you read the Bible, you will see that it is a collection of different kinds of books. Therefore, we need to read each book in a different way. There are history books that tell us more about the time of the Bible, books with rules and regulations, beautiful poems and letters, and books filled with wonderful wisdoms that today still help us to live a righteous life. There are stories about wars and miracles, love stories, and precious messages of comfort. Together, all the books tell the story of God and how God works with people. The whole Bible tells us the good news of God’s plan to heal the broken world again. Another word for “good news” is “gospel”. That is why the four books that tell us about Jesus’ life on earth are called the Gospels.

God intended it that we read the Bible alone, but also in the company of other people. We must help one another to understand the Bible correctly. When we listen to the Bible together, and pray about the Bible together, the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Bible correctly. Then the Holy Spirit fills us with joy when we hear that God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son to take away all our sins and suffering. The Bible also teaches us how we should live. It promises to be a light on our path, to help us to see things that are wrong, and to teach us the truth about difficult things. In this way the Word of God can always renew and heal our lives.

I hope you get excited about reading the Bible. And I hope you will understand how important it is that you learn to know this book very well, and to live according to it. Our journey through the Bible will help you to understand exactly why you are on earth, and how you should live here. Be ready – it can definitely change your life!

Tell me, what do you remember?

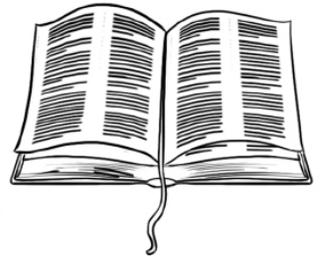
Start with one child and let the children take turns to tell what they had learnt from the Bible.

Let's think together

1. Where does the Bible come from?
2. Why is it important that we read the Bible?
3. How should we read the Bible?
4. What should you do if you read the Bible but do not understand it?
5. Can you guess who the writers of the four Gospels are?

Discover and learn

- ✓ Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. In this beautiful psalm king David tells why God's Word, the Bible, is so important to him. Read verse 9 to 16 in particular.
- ✓ Talk to your family about ways in which you can make the Bible part of your everyday lives. When are you going to make time to read and study the Bible?
- ✓ Learn and remember: "How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word." Psalm 119:9
- ✓ Pray every day: "Thank you, Lord, for my Bible. Teach me to listen to your voice."



2. God, the Creator

Before we start

You surely must have heard many different stories of how the earth came into being. How did it really happen? Why is the earth like it is, and what does it mean for us? (*Wait a moment.*) If we really want to know how the earth started and how everything fits together, we need to go back to the beginning, and be still before the One who made everything.

Tell, tell!

The Bible begins by telling us that God, our Father, made everything around us. All the different plants, birds, animals, yes, also the different types of rocks, the planets, and the sun: It is all the handiwork of our almighty Father. Can you believe that scientists yearly still discover new plant and animal species? We have not by a long way even seen everything that God has made, and we still need to learn a lot to really understand how everything works.

There is a good reason why the Bible particularly starts with the story of creation. Before you can know who you are, what you are doing here, and where you are heading, you need to understand who created you. You are not just here by accident, and everything that we can see, didn't just start by itself. That is why the Bible starts at the beginning. We need to see for ourselves where and how God's story began so that we can see where we fit into this story.

God made everything orderly, and according to his perfect plan. At first, there was absolutely nothing. Then God made the great universe. He did this by what he said, just by his word. God just spoke, and then everything was there! God first made light. Suddenly it wasn't dark anymore! God's word created light. After this, God divided the heaven and the earth and all the water. God let beautiful plants, trees, flowers and grass grow on the earth. Then God made the moon and stars to give us light by day and by night. To every star and planet, God gave a place in the heavens. God also made birds, fish, and insects. Then God made the land animals. Each one of these animals and birds, even the tiniest insect, and the fish that swim in the deep oceans, was wonderfully made and had a specific place in God's creation. But God left the best for last:

He made a human being. God made people to reflect, in a special way, something of his greatness and omnipotence on earth.

Have you ever paid attention to all the birds in your garden or town? What about the butterflies and other insects? There are so many varieties of plants and animals around us. Have you ever wondered why God made so many different big birds of prey, tiny mice, or speckled ladybirds? Why are there so many colourful flowers, so many huge trees, and so many different fruits? (*Wait a moment.*) Through his creation, God wanted to show his greatness. He could have decided to make only one mammal, two reptiles, and three different types of fruit – all in only two or three colours. We would never have known the difference, would we? But God, like a big artist, made the prettiest and most colourful world for his children, complete with autumn leaves, waterfalls, and snowflakes. He even prepared a beautiful garden – a very special home where the first people could live. In a wonderful way the whole of God’s creation sings a song about God’s greatness and goodness. Everything that has breath praises the Lord – that is what Psalm 150 says.

And then it was finished. God’s beautiful creation was complete. God smiled when he saw how wonderful and beautiful everything was made. He was satisfied with his beautiful creation. He enjoyed it. In six days God had made everything beautiful. And then, on the seventh day, God rested. God created a day of rest and blessed it. To be able to rest is also a gift from God’s hand.

Tell me, what do you remember?

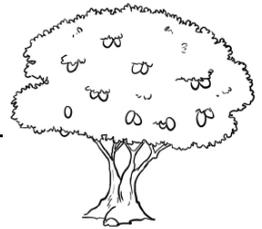
Let the children repeat the story to one another in twos. What did they see in their mind’s eye while they listened to the story?

Let's think together

1. How did you feel when you listened to the story?
2. Why did God make everything?
3. Why did God make man?
4. Through what eyes should we look at one another and at nature?
5. Do you think it is important to spend time in nature and to learn the names of animals, birds, plants and insects? Why do you say so?
6. On the seventh day God rested. What does it mean for us?

Discover and learn

- ✓ Read the story of creation in Genesis 1:1-31.
- ✓ Talk to your family: How can you worship God as a family by the way you spend his day of rest?
- ✓ Learn and remember: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Genesis 1:31
- ✓ Pray every day: "We praise you, Lord, you are the God and Creator that made everything. You made everything beautiful and good."



3. Humans created in God's image

Before we start

You have heard how beautiful God made the earth, but even the prettiest flowers, or most interesting animals, are not a patch on the crown, the best part, of God's creation. Do you know what that is? (*Wait for an answer.*) A human being is the most, most beautiful thing that God made! God made humans last of all, and then he relaxed and was content. "This person is very beautiful and very good," God said with a smile. Then God rested.

Tell, tell!

Why is a human being so beautiful and so special? What makes a human being different to all the other wonderful things that God made? The Bible tells us that God made man and woman in his image. All the other plants and animals in God's creation bear witness of God's goodness and greatness, but only men and women were made in the image of God. That means that we take a little after God. We can live in a relationship with God – we can love him, talk to him and listen to him. We humans also received a very special command from God: We must represent God here on earth. When other people look at us, they must be able to see something of God in us. Each one of the millions of people on earth today is meant to be an image bearer of God. Each one forms part of God's story and his great plan.

God gave people, his image bearers, the command to name all the plants and animals, something that we still do today. We must discover the wonder of God's creation, try to understand it, and use it responsibly. With what God gave us in creation, we also need to make pretty and new things – like beautiful works of art. In God's beautiful nature we have to act as God wants it, and look after and care for it as God would have done it.

Right from the beginning, God wanted to be in a very special relationship with people. He wanted to love them, and wanted them to love him. God wanted to lead them and care for them. He wanted to be like a father to them. He wandered with Adam and Eve around the

Garden of Eden in the cool evenings. God very much wanted to be so close to his children that they could feel his presence.

Of all things on earth it is only a human being that can talk, that can answer in words when God talks to him or her. That is why we people can worship God, why we can tell God in words when we are afraid or sad, can tell God we are sorry when we have done something wrong, we can thank God. We can pray and sing songs for God, songs of praise and worship. And we can tell one another about God.

Of course, God made many different kinds of people. He made men, women and children. He also made people of different nations and colours. God definitely likes variety! When you find yourself up against different people, you will see that not two of them look alike, and that everyone's characters are different. But all these different people are equal before God; everyone is created after his image. He loves everyone the same.

God made us all different so that we may also have special relationships with one another. It would definitely not have been so interesting if we all looked alike, and had the same opinions. God very much wanted us to have good friends on earth. And God also intended it to be that men and women could marry and together have children. God wanted them to make his love visible in the way they took care of each other and of their children. God's love and care should be seen in our relationships with one another and with other people.

You are definitely not here by accident; neither is your friend sitting next to you. Every person on earth has been created special and unique, and each one has the command to be an image bearer of God. God wants to use you to show something of his omnipotence and glory, something of his character, to others.

Tell me, what do you remember?

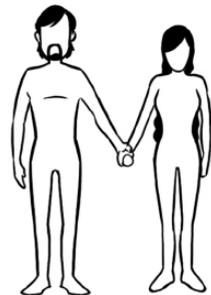
Start with one child and let them take turns to tell what they have learnt.

Let's think together

1. Why are we the crown of God's creation?
2. Why, do you think, did God make us?
3. Why, do you think, our relationships and friendships are so important?
4. How should we act towards people who look, think, and act different from us? What should we do if we disagree with someone?
5. What does it mean to be an image bearer and representative of God? What should we do, and what shouldn't we do?

Discover and learn

- ✓ Go and read the story of the first man in Genesis 1:27-31 and Genesis 2:4-25.
- ✓ Does your family have any house rules? Which house rules would be important to God? How can you be image bearers of God in your family?
- ✓ Learn and remember: "You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet." Psalm 8:6
- ✓ Pray every day: "Thank you, Lord, that you have a plan with my life."



4. Sin shatters everything

Before we start

God made the earth beautiful. The pretty garden where Adam and Eve lived, was perfect in all respects. The first two people needed nothing more. On top of that God was their friend. Every evening, he went for a walk with them in this beautiful garden, the paradise. But then things went wrong. (*Wait a moment.*)

Tell, tell!

Adam and Eve could really enjoy the beautiful garden that God gave them. It was part of God's plan. All the perfect plants and animals astonished them. There was an abundance of fruit that they could eat, but there was one tree, only one, in the middle of the garden, of which they were not allowed to eat. God himself commanded it. It was the tree of all knowledge. "If you eat of this tree," God said, "you will certainly die." God did not only give man the perfect world. He also gave them a choice and a will of their own. They could choose for themselves to love God unconditionally, and to trust him at all times. Their obedience would show that they loved God. (*Wait a moment.*)

One day, Eve was alone, close to the tree of knowledge. Suddenly, a voice spoke to her. Eve looked around. Who talked to her? It was the Evil One in the body of a snake that spoke to Eve. "Tell me," the snake said very friendly. "Is it true that you are not allowed to eat of the delicious fruit in this garden?"

Eve shook her head. "No, we may eat of all the trees. Except of this one. If we eat of this tree, we will die."

"That is not true!" The snake sounded surprised. "You will never die. When you eat of this tree, you will know everything. Just imagine, you will know everything that God knows! You will be like God, and will be able to decide for yourselves what is good or right! Come on. Eat some of the fruit, then you will see for yourself."

For the first time Eve looked carefully at the fruit. And suddenly she couldn't really understand why they were not allowed to eat these delicious fruits. Suppose the snake was right? Suppose they would really know everything? For a moment Eve hesitated, and then she picked a

fruit and ate it. She also called Adam and showed it to him. Here and then Adam too decided to eat some the fruit. (*Wait a moment.*)

When they had finished, Adam and Eve looked at each other. Suddenly they felt different. The day wasn't so bright and beautiful anymore. Deep in their hearts they knew that they had made a big mistake. They had listened to the snake; they were disobedient to God. They felt guilty. And suddenly they also realised they were naked. Adam and Eve were very ashamed. When God called them that evening, they hid away. They were afraid. They would never again hear God's voice without feeling ashamed and afraid. The peace that existed in God's paradise before, was shattered.

But God didn't want to leave them alone like that. He went to look for them. He called them. "Where are you?" God asked.

"It is all Eve's fault," Adam quickly defended when God wanted to speak to him.

"No, it wasn't me, it was the snake!" Eve answered. But God knew what had happened. Adam and Eve both made the wrong choice. Because God is holy, he had to punish this sin. Adam and Eve had to leave the beautiful garden. In future, Adam would have to work very hard to care for him and for Eve. Eve would suffer when her babies were born, and her husband would rule over her. From now on, life on earth would not be easy.

The consequences of sin are visible all around us. Sin spoiled the relationship that we had with God, with one another and with nature. We don't even have peace in ourselves anymore. Man can do nothing on his own to set this right again. But God can. He had another plan from the beginning. That is why God made them garments of skin and clothed them. And God promised that one day he would send someone to die on the cross for all the sin, suffering, and broken relationships. This promise gives us hope, even when we stand face to face with the consequences of sin.

Tell me, what do you remember?

Let the children repeat the story to one another in twos.

Let's think together

1. Why did God command Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden?
2. What is a temptation? How was Eve tempted?
3. What were the consequences of their disobedience? Are these consequences still visible today?
4. How can we know that God did not stop taking care of his creation and his children? What does that mean to you?

Discover and learn

- ✓ Read this story in Genesis 3:1-24.
- ✓ Talk to your family: How can we notice temptations? What should I do when I am tempted to do something wrong?
- ✓ Learn and remember: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"
John 3:17
- ✓ Pray every day: "Thank you, Lord, that your promises give us hope, even when we are still suffering the consequences of our sin."



5. A new beginning with Abraham

Before we start

After falling in sin, Adam and Eve had to leave the paradise. But God did not forget about them. He still wanted to be in a relationship with them and care for them. They were not alone. God wanted to show Adam and Eve, and all the other people after them, how gracious he is. He was eager to show them how they should live to be happy. But unfortunately many people chose not to listen to God.

Tell, tell!

The people on earth became more and more. Many of them did not think about God at all and didn't want to be part of his great plan. Therefore, God decided to select for himself a group of people, his chosen people. God was excited about his chosen nation! He wanted to teach his people how they should live and how they should worship him. He wanted to care for them, bless them, and be with them in a very special way. This is how God wanted to show all the nations on earth how wonderful it is to serve and follow him. In the end, all nations on earth would know God better by looking at the lives of his people.

God chose a man with the name of Abram to be the father of his nation. God wanted to bless Abram and his descendants. "I will make a covenant with you, Abram," God said. "I have chosen you. I want to be your God, and also the God of your children, and their children. You must serve me faithfully and obey my commands. I want to take care of you. In this way I shall show the world how great and good and almighty I am. Our special relationship will eventually be a blessing to the whole world." This contract or agreement between God and Abram and his descendants is called a covenant. God commits himself to his children in love.

But first God wanted set apart Abram and Sarai for himself. They had to be different to all the other people. That is why God commanded Abram, and his wife, Sarai, to leave Ur, the country where they lived. They had to move to a new country, a country that God would show them. God also changed their names. He wanted to make them new people. Their names would hereafter be Abraham and Sarah and their descendants would be known as the Israelites, God's people.

Descendants? Yes, Abraham didn't understand that. He and Sarah didn't have children. Of course, they very badly wanted children, but many years passed and still they did not have a baby. And yet, God promised to make him into a great nation. "Look at the stars, Abraham," God told Abraham one evening, "Can you count them? That is how many your descendants will be."

God kept his promise. What God promises always happens. That is what Abraham and Sarah learnt. Because, when Abraham was already 100 years old, older even than your grandfather, God gave them a son. They named him Isaac. Abraham circumcised Isaac, just as God commanded him. This mark on the bodies of Isaac, and all the other baby boys, was a sign that they belonged to God.

Abraham did not always understand what God told him, and he also didn't always understand what God's plans were. But Abraham did learn a very important lesson: He had to trust God and obey his commands. God was faithful. God took care of Abraham and of Isaac, and also of his son Jacob, and his children. "My blessing and care will be to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." This is what God himself promised. This promise still holds for all God's children, everyone who, by Jesus' death on the cross, are a part of his covenant people.

Tell me, what do you remember?

Start with one child and let them take turns to tell what they learnt.

Let's think together

1. Why did God want to choose his own people?
2. What does it mean to make a covenant?
3. What does it mean to be blessed?
4. What do God's promises mean to us today?

Discover and learn

- ✓ In Genesis 12:1-9 and Genesis 17 we can read the story of Abraham's calling.
- ✓ Talk to your family: What does it mean for our family to be a blessing to others? How are we going to do it?
- ✓ Learn and remember: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." Genesis 17:7
- ✓ Pray every day: "Thank you, Lord, that I may be part of your people. Help me to be a blessing to others."

