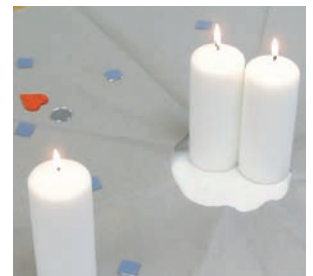




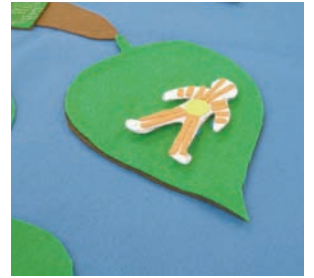
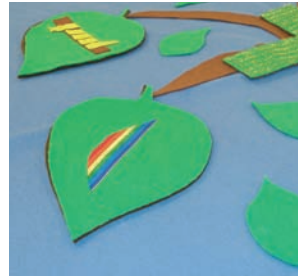
The story of the story



Enemies and friends

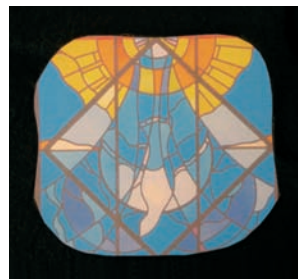


Dark and light



Famine and feast

Death and life



Depths and heights

Hide and seek

The story of the story

The following reflective story stands on its own and is designed to give children a bird's eye view of how the Bible came together, as well as a three-dimensional timeline of Bible history. Ideally, it could be used at the beginning of a new academic year and then perhaps be revisited at the end of the following summer term. The intention is to provide a visual framework and point of reference for all the subsequent sessions and to capture the big picture of how God's story fits together. You may wish to display an enlarged picture of the story cloth so that subsequent story themes can be located in relation to the whole Bible. An enlargement of the image displayed on the inside cover of this book can be downloaded from the website: www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/pdfs/thebigstory.pdf.

Members of the Barnabas children's ministry team often use the story in church training events and Barnabas RE Days in schools. Children's leaders, teachers and the children themselves have found it fascinating and it provokes some creative discussions. It is also used as a tool for the 400th birthday celebrations of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible (the Authorised Version) both at INSET events with primary teachers and in RE Days with children on the theme of 'What's so special about the Bible?' Visit www.barnabasinschools.org.uk for more details.

'The story of the story' is intended to give a visual framework and point of reference for all the sessions in the book, helping children to catch the big picture of how the Big Story all fits together.

You will need:

- A sand-coloured base cloth that rolls out 1m long by 23cm wide and is marked off into eight equal sections with seven thin pieces of wood (blunted kebab sticks, for example), so that when it is rolled up, the whole has the appearance of an ancient scroll.
- A small pottery dish filled with bits of broken wood and some tiny red and yellow beads to give the appearance of a glowing camp fire.
- A red heart-shaped tray holding ten flat, grey stones, each with a key word from one of the Ten Commandments scratched on it.
- A small gold box, large enough to contain the stones.
- Two tablets made from air-drying clay, marked to look as if there is writing on them.
- Some pieces of hand-made paper to represent papyrus.
- A Torah scroll made from two small rolling pin-like pieces of wood with hand-made paper rolled around them, on which are written one or two Hebrew words (search via the internet); paint the ends of the scroll gold and place in a small gold box.
- Eight small scrolls in a flat gold box (the staircase rods from a doll's house accessories pack make useful ends for these).
- One larger scroll, to represent the book of Isaiah.
- One or two pages of the early manuscripts of John's Gospel (Greek New Testament) photocopied on to stiff brown card and stapled together to represent the first codices on vellum (animal hide), and placed in a small silver envelope.
- More rolled-up scrolls of paper to represent the pastoral epistles.
- A mounted photocopy from one of the illustrated Latin manuscripts of the Bible (for example, a page from the Book of Kells), placed in a large silver envelope.
- A complete printed Bible.

Bible books: The stories of Genesis

Action: Roll out one section of the base cloth from your right to your left.

Script: In the beginning was the story.

Action: Place the camp fire in the centre of the first section and trace a circle around it slowly, as you say the next words.

Script: The people of God gathered in circles around their campfires in the desert. They did not need pictures or pages. In the glow of the fire they heard how the gift of light was given and how the darkness came, too. Beside their tents they listened to the story of the flood and were glad when the rainbow appeared. Beneath the stars they were told of Abram's long journey and the promise of the great family.

Bible books: The stories of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

Action: Roll out the base cloth to reveal the second section. Bring out the red heart-shaped tray as you say the following.

Script: After Moses had taken the people of God through the water into freedom, God gave him words to write down. The ten words were carved on stone tablets.

Action: Put each of the ten flat stones down on the second section, saying the commandments as you do so. Put down the special gold box.

Script: They kept this part of their story safe in a special box, which went everywhere with them.

Action: Roll out the base cloth to reveal the third section.

Script: When God's people came into the land they had been promised, they settled in towns and cities.

Action: Place the two clay tablets on the third section, followed by the pieces of hand-made paper.

Script: Here they began to write their stories down, first on clay tablets and then on a kind of paper made from reeds, called papyrus.

Action: Roll out the base cloth to reveal the fourth section. Open the gold box and take out the Torah scroll.

Script: The most important words from God were written on a great scroll. This part of the story is called the Torah. The priest read from it to the people whenever they worshipped God.

Action: Open the Torah scroll to reveal the Hebrew writing.

Bible books: The stories of Joshua, Judges, Ruth; the histories of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles; stories from Job, Proverbs, the Psalms and Song of Songs

Script: But they wanted to remember other stories, too, so they recorded these in the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah. They also wrote out the songs they sang, and some of the poems, that had become part of their story.

Action: Place four of the smaller scrolls around the Torah.

Bible books: The books of the prophets

Action: Unroll the base cloth to reveal the fifth section.

Script: Prophets are people who listen carefully for God's voice, and God speaks to them. They seem to know what God is thinking. The words of some of these prophets were put down on scrolls.

Action: Place down the rest of the scrolls from the flat gold box, including the large one, which is the prophecy of Isaiah.

Script: Now God's people could always read the warnings and the promises that God had given them.

Bible books: Luke 4:18–19; Isaiah 61:1–2

Action: Point to several scrolls deliberately.

Script: In the scrolls of the prophets, it was written that one day someone would come, who would be a king for ever. But he would be a king that no one expected.

Action: Unroll the base cloth to reveal the sixth section.

Script: When Jesus began his work in the synagogue at Nazareth, he read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, where it says...

Action: Pick up the big scroll and unroll it, to read the following above the sixth section of the cloth, but afterwards replace the scroll on the fifth section, where it comes from.

Script: The Lord's Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say, 'This is the year the Lord has chosen.'

Bible books: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

Script: Jesus did and said amazing things, and people did not want to forget his words. In the years after he had died and then had been seen alive again, some of his friends and followers wrote everything down on parchments.

Action: Open the small silver envelope and show the parchment codex of John's Gospel, before placing it on the sixth section.

Script: Now we too can read the Gospels and discover the story for ourselves.

Bible books: Acts and the pastoral letters from Paul, Peter, James, Jude and John to churches and individuals

Action: Unroll the seventh section of the base cloth. Place down the rolled-up letter scrolls.

Script: The story was taken across the sea and over the land. Christians wrote letters to each other and to the new churches.

Script: In each new country, God's people took great care to write the whole story down. The monks in Britain and Ireland made careful copies by hand, decorating each page with colourful pictures and beautiful writing. You can still see their manuscripts today.

Action: Open the large silver envelope, and place down the copy of a page of an illuminated manuscript. Unroll the final section of the base cloth and place down the Bible.

Script: Finally, the story was printed as a book. After many struggles and much hard work, it was produced in different languages. Some Bibles even have pictures and special notes to help people understand what is there. The story went out to the whole world and it is still travelling today. Look...

Action: Pick up the Bible and hold it so that everyone can see it clearly.

Script: It is all here in the Bible. It is a whole library of story books. Let's open the cover and let the stories out!

Action: Open the Bible to reveal its many pages of stories. Holding it first over the camp fire section and then over each of the other sections of the base cloth in turn, flick through the pages of the Bible and say...

Script: Here are the stories from the desert and the ten words from God...

Here are the most important laws and the history of their kings...

Here are the songs the people sang and the poems they wrote...

Here are the warnings and the promises of the prophets...

Here are the Gospels that tell the story of Jesus...

Here are all the letters that the first Christian leaders wrote to help the church to go on sharing the story.

In the beginning was the story.

In the end there is still the story.

Now we can all read the story for ourselves.

And there is more. We, too, can become part of this story, part of God's big story. I wonder what our story will be?

Enemies and friends

You will need

A Bible, 16 wooden people figures and one other distinct wooden figure to represent Jesus, a large circle of blue felt, small silver confetti hearts, a small model sheep, a small multi-coloured piece of cloth, a small crown, a small model donkey, a simple cross glued on to a heart-shaped base

Bible story: Genesis 1:1 – 2:4

Action: Open the Bible and then lay it down at your side.

Script: God has given us the stories in his book to show us what he is like and help us to discover how we are meant to live.

Action: Lay down a large circle of light blue felt and scatter some small silver hearts over it.

Script: When God made the world, he loved it and filled it with love.

Bible story: Genesis 3:1 – 4:16

Action: Place twelve wooden figures in a circle around the centre of the felt.

Script: God made people to be like him. He wanted them to care for the world and to love and care for each other.

Action: Rearrange the twelve figures in three groups of four, but still close to the centre of the felt.

Script: God gave people many gifts to do this caring, and one of the greatest of these was the gift of choosing to be friends: friends with God and friends with other people.

Action: Reposition the figures as individuals around the whole world, randomly. As you place them down, turn them as if they are turning their backs on each other.

Script: But people chose not to be friends with God and the gift was broken. Friends became enemies and God's world began to fill up with hatred alongside the love.

Bible story: Genesis 25:19 – 33:20

Action: Move your right hand across the world as if searching for those who will be friends.

Script: People chose to be enemies, not friends. But God never stopped wanting to be friends with the people he had made, and so he looked for those who would choose friendship, not hatred. God loved to call these people his friends.

Action: In the near quarter of the world on the storyteller's left, reposition two of the figures opposite each other and put a model sheep in between them.

Script: God saw how Jacob and his brother Esau became enemies over what belonged to them; but then God patiently worked in their lives to mend and to use what had been broken.

Bible story: Genesis 37 and 39 – 47

Action: In the middle, on the storyteller's left, reposition two of the figures opposite each other and put the small piece of colourful cloth in between them.

Script: God saw how Joseph and his brothers became enemies over Joseph's position in the family. Then God patiently worked in their lives to mend and to use what had been broken.

Bible story: 1 Samuel 18:1 – 20:42

Action: Lower down on the storyteller's left, reposition three of the figures in a triangle and put a model crown in between them.

Script: Although young David and King Saul's son Jonathan were friends, God saw how Saul and David became enemies. Then God worked in their lives to mend and to use what had been broken.

Bible story: John 3:16–17

Script: God longed that people would choose friendship with God and each other; but again and again they chose to become enemies instead.

Action: Place a new, distinct but similar figure on the felt at the bottom, furthest from the storyteller.

Script: Finally, Jesus came into the world to show us how to become God's friends again. Jesus was God's only Son. He showed God's love to everyone, even those who were treated as enemies and outsiders. Jesus is known as a friend to all.

Bible story: Luke 10:25–37

Action: Low down on the felt, to the storyteller's right, reposition two new figures opposite each other, one lying flat, and put a model donkey in between them.

Script: Once, Jesus told a story of how a hated enemy chose to become a surprising friend.

Bible story: Matthew 5:44–45

Action: In the middle of the felt, on the storyteller's right, reposition three figures in a triangle, touching each one in turn as you speak the following words.

Script: Jesus teaches people how to be friends with those who are different. He says that people should love their enemies into becoming friends. Jesus shows people how friends should forgive enemies. He says, 'Love your enemies and pray for anyone who ill-treats you. Then you will be acting like your Father in heaven.'

Bible story: Matthew 18:21–35

Script: How many times should you forgive someone who does you wrong? 'Not just seven times,' says Jesus, 'but seventy-seven times!'

Bible story: Matthew 26:47–50, 56

Script: But then God saw how people chose to hate Jesus and become his enemies. Even his closest friends turned away from him.

Bible story: John 15:13–15

Action: Place a small cross with a heart-shaped base on the closest part of the felt to the storyteller's right. Gently, lay the cross down on its side.

Script: God watched Jesus lay down his life for his friends and his enemies, to mend and to use what had been broken. 'The greatest way to show love for friends is to die for them... I speak to you as my friends,' says Jesus.

Bible story: 2 Corinthians 5:19–21

Action: Pause, and then stand the cross upright.

Script: But in Jesus, the gift of God's friendship proved stronger than hatred, more powerful than death.

Action: Carefully place four new figures around the cross.

Script: Now, because of Jesus' love, people can show the world how hatred can become love, how enemies can become friends, and how anyone can be called a friend of God.

Bible story: Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; 27:6

Action: Sweep your right hand across the whole world.

Script: Because God's friendship is for all those who put their trust in him.

Script: I wonder what is so special about friendship... and why people choose to become enemies, not friends.

I wonder what is so special about friendship with God... and how friendships can be mended.

I wonder how friendship can be stronger than hatred... and how hatred can be turned to love.

Dark and light

You will need:

A Bible, a large circle of grey felt with a hole at the centre, three large candles, several small craft mirror pieces (with a non-reflective side), six large craft mirror pieces, six wooden hearts, a round piece of shiny reflective material (the same size and shape as the grey felt), a candle snuffer and matches.

Bible story: Genesis 1:1–2

Action: Open up the Bible and then lay it down at your side.

Script: God has given us the stories in his book that show us what he is like.

Action: Place down the three candles and light them.

Script: God is light and doesn't have any darkness in him.

Action: Lay out the circle of grey felt around the candles.

Script: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was empty and with no form of life—but the Spirit of God was there.

Bible story: Genesis 1:3

Action: Place the small pieces of mirror all over the grey felt, reflective side up.

Script: God who is light said, 'I command light to shine!' ... and there was light.

Bible story: John 3:19–20

Action: Turn over some of the mirror pieces and move them away from the flames.

Script: But people turned away from the light.

Bible story: Exodus 2–40

Action: Place a large mirror piece down. Place a wooden heart on it.

Script: There was a person who loved God and reflected the light. His name was Moses. Moses listened to God's word and shone the light to God's people through dark times in the desert.

Bible story: Judges 4–5

Action: Place a large mirror piece down. Place a wooden heart on it.

Script: There was a person who loved God and reflected the light. Her name was Deborah. Deborah listened to God's word and shone the light to God's people through dark times of fighting.

Bible story: 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2

Action: Place a large mirror piece down. Place a wooden heart on it.

Script: There was a person who loved God and reflected the light. His name was Elijah. Elijah listened to God's word and shone the light to God's people through dark times when they ignored him.

Bible story: Isaiah 1–11

Action: Place a large mirror piece down. Place a wooden heart on it.

Script: There was a person who loved God and reflected the light. His name was Isaiah. Isaiah listened to God's word and he shone the light to God's people, showing the future to those who walked in darkness.

Bible story: John 8:12; John 18—21

Action: Remove one of the candles from the middle and place it on the grey felt.

Script: There was a person who was God and was the light. His name was Jesus. Jesus said, 'I am the light for the world! Follow me, and you won't be walking in the dark. You will have the light that gives life.'

Jesus took that light into the deepest darkness...

Action: With a snuffer, extinguish the flame of the candle on the grey felt. Then pause before relighting it with a match lit from one of the central candles still burning.

Script: But God brought his light back to life again. The light of Jesus shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Action: Pause again before returning the 'Jesus candle' back to the centre.

Script: There will be a time when everyone will walk in the light. There will be no darkness, no need for lamps or sun. For God, who is light, will shine everywhere.

I wonder...

What that will be like...

How we will reflect the light then...

Bible story: Acts 9—28

Action: Place a large mirror piece down. Place a wooden heart on it.

Script: There was a person who loved God and reflected the light. His name was Paul. Paul listened to God's word and he shone the light to many people in many countries.

Bible story: Revelation 22:5

Action: Place a large mirror piece down. Place a wooden heart on it.

Script: I wonder...

How we reflect the light...

What things we choose to do that reflect the light...

What parts of who we are reflect the light...

Who we reflect the light to...

Action: Carefully move the three candles to the side and place the shiny fabric over the grey felt. Put all three candles back into the centre.

Famine and feast

You will need:

A Bible, a bright plain circular tablecloth, sand to sprinkle, two serviettes, some matzo wafer and some wooden bird shapes, a piece of blue ribbon, a basket of wooden or toy fruits, dried grasses, a small roll of bread and a small jug, confetti, a plate, a wine cup, wine or juice that looks like wine, some smiling faces, five small wooden or toy rolls of bread and two fish, a paten and chalice (plate and Communion cup), a large bread roll, party poppers and streamers

Bible story: Matthew 4:4; John 6:60; Psalm 119:102–104

Action: Open up the Bible and lay it down at your side.

Script: God has given us the stories in his book to show us what he is like and how much he loves us. But what sort of stories are they?

Action: Spread out a bright plain circular tablecloth. As you tell each part of the story, you will be laying out a place setting around the edge of the cloth. There are five around the edge and one in the centre. Start on the left, on the part of the circle nearest to you, and work round the cloth so that the stories appear clockwise for those listening on the other side.

Script: They are like our daily bread. They are like a feast on a table. Some parts are hard to digest. Some parts are as sweet as honey. But we need every part.

Bible story: Exodus 16

Action: Sprinkle some sand around the first place setting. On it, place an open serviette. On the serviette, place some pieces of wafer and some wooden bird shapes.

Script: Long ago, God led his people out of Egypt. He led them on a long journey across the desert. The desert is an empty place and it's hard to

find enough to eat. But every day God sent his people a sort of bread to eat called manna, and a sort of bird called quails. Day by day God fed his people in the desert.

Bible story: Numbers 13

Action: Lay a piece of blue ribbon between the previous place setting and the next one. Set down an overflowing fruit basket on the other side of the ribbon, in the next place setting.

Script: God wanted his people to live in a land of plenty. When they arrived at the River Jordan, Moses sent Joshua and some other spies into the land to see what it was like. The spies came back with pomegranates, figs and a bunch of grapes so big it took two men to carry it on a pole! There was plenty to eat in the land.

Bible story: 1 Kings 17

Action: Place some dried-out grasses between the second and third place settings. Place a roll of bread and a small jug of oil on a plate in the third setting.

Script: Even in the land of plenty, there were times of famine when there was no rain, so there wasn't enough to eat. During one famine, the prophet Elijah met a woman who was collecting sticks. She told him she was going to make a fire and use the last of her oil and flour to bake a little loaf of bread for herself and her son, and then they would die, as there was no food left. Elijah asked her to use the last of her flour to make a little loaf for him as well. He promised her that God wouldn't let the flour or the oil run out until it rained again. The woman kindly baked him some bread from the last of her flour and God kept the promise Elijah had made: she never ran out of flour or oil.

Bible story: John 2:1–10

Action: For the next place setting, scatter some confetti between a plate and an empty wine cup. Pour wine into the cup.

Script: Many years later, Jesus was at a wedding when his mother told him the wine had run out. The feast would be ruined. But Jesus changed some huge jars of water into wine and the feast could carry on even better than before.

Bible story: Luke 5:30–33; Luke 15:2; John 6:1–13, 22–35

Action: Place smiling faces between the cup and a serviette. Spread out the serviette like a picnic rug. On the serviette, place five rolls and two fish shapes. Tear some bread and scatter it in a trail that links the serviette and the last plate and cup.

Script: Jesus enjoyed many meals with his friends. In fact, he enjoyed so many meals that some people told him off for eating with the wrong people. One time, Jesus was out in the desert with thousands of people who were very hungry. One boy gave his food to Jesus and Jesus turned the five rolls and two fish into enough food for all the thousands of people. Jesus told everyone, ‘I am the bread that gives life! No one who comes to me will ever be hungry.’

Bible story: Matthew 26:26–28

Action: Place a plate and wine glass in the centre of the cloth. Tear a bread roll in two and place it on the plate as you speak. Pour out wine into the cup as you speak.

Script: The last meal Jesus ate with his friends before he died was a feast to remember the time when God led his people out of Egypt. Jesus took the bread and said, ‘Take this and eat it. This is my body, given for you.’ He took the wine and said, ‘Take this and drink it. This is my blood poured out for you.’

Bible story: Matthew 8:11

Action: Spread some party streamers or party poppers over the table, around and between the plates. Sit back and spread out your hands over the table in enjoyment.

Script: Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like a wonderful feast, with food for everyone to share—a feast that goes on and on and on!

Script: I wonder where we see the feast happening today...

I wonder why there is famine as well as feast in this story...

I wonder why Jesus said once that people don’t just need food to eat but every word that comes from God...

Death and life

You will need:

A pale base cloth; a large circle of pale blue felt or net; a brown felt tree shape; green gauze or net cut into a leafy tree shape; seven teardrops made from blue or grey felt; a cross shape to fit over the tree trunk and branches (double-sided brown and green); seven small bright green felt leaf shapes; four larger leaves (double-sided, with an autumnal brown on one side and a fresh green on the other), decorated as follows on the green side:

- Leaf 1: a rainbow
- Leaf 2: a bronze snake
- Leaf 3: a human figure
- Leaf 4: a white human figure filled with teardrops, which folds back to reveal a human shape filled with a sunrise (try stitching a hinge on the figure's hand)

NB: This story takes the colours of green to represent life, mirroring spring-time leaves, and brown to represent death, like dead leaves in the autumn. The tree of life implicitly forms the structure of the story, with the cross superimposed on it.

Please be sensitive to the fact that your listeners may well have had experience of death and bereavement, and the story may provoke strong emotions. The repeated litany 'Death is an ending; death hurts; but God is a God of life' acknowledges the pain of bereavement but points towards a bigger picture.

Bible story: 1 Timothy 6:16

Action: Place the open Bible to the side of the large pale base cloth.

Script: God has given us stories in his book to show us what he is like.
God is a God of life.

Bible story: Genesis 2

Action: Spread out a pale blue circle on top of the base cloth. Place the tree outline on top of the blue, and the green gauze haze over the tree.

Script: When God made the first man, he breathed the breath of life into him and put him in the garden, where the tree of life grew. The man was surrounded by life. Life bubbled up through the earth in streams of water. Life was in every tree, fish, bird and animal. Life was in the woman God made. Their job was to take care of that place and to make more life. There was no death in that place.

Bible story: Genesis 3

Action: Remove the green gauze so that the stark brown trunk is left. Scatter teardrops (raindrops) behind the tree.

Script: But when the man and the woman chose the wrong way, death came to them and to the world.

Bible story: Genesis 6—9

Action: Place the four leaves, brown side up, at the ends of the branches.

Script: Death is an ending; death hurts; but God is a God of life. God did not want his story to have this ending. He did not want his people hurt. He chose to bring life out of death.

Action: Turn over one leaf to reveal the rainbow.

Script: Death came to many people in the great flood. But God saved animals and people to fill the earth with life again. The rainbow was a sign that God promises life.

Bible story: Numbers 21:4–9

Action: Turn over the leaf with the bronze snake behind it.

Script: Death came to God's people in the desert and many died of snakebite. But God told Moses to set a bronze snake on a pole so that whoever looked at it would live. The bronze snake was a sign that God wants life.

Bible story: Ezekiel 37

Action: Turn over the leaf with the person outline on it.

Script: Ezekiel saw beyond the visible world into a valley of dry bones that first came together as skeletons, then grew flesh and muscles and skin, and then changed into people who came to life when a wind blew on them. The living people were a sign that God brings new life.

**Bible story: Luke 7:11–17; John 11:25;
John 10:10; John 11:35**

Action: Turn over the leaf with the teardrop figure.

Script: Jesus said, 'I am the one who raises the dead to life... I came so that everyone would have life, and have it fully.' Jesus hated death. He was angry at the ending and the hurt that death brings. Once, full of compassion, he brought back to life the son of a poor widow, and later, when his friend Lazarus died, he wept.

Bible story: John 11:1–44

Action: Fold out the teardrop figure to reveal the sunrise figure.

Script: Jesus brought Lazarus back from death and made him alive again. Jesus brought new beginnings. Jesus brought healing. Jesus brought life in all its fullness.

**Bible story: Revelation 21; Romans 5;
John 10:10**

Action: Place a brown cross over the tree trunk and branches.

Script: But so that we could have life, Jesus chose death. This is a mystery. Life was buried in death. Death is an ending; death hurts; but God is a God of life.

Action: Turn over the cross to reveal its bright green side.

Script: When Jesus died, death turned upside down. Jesus died but came back to life. Because of Jesus, death is not just an ending but a beginning.

Action: Take away the teardrops from the background. Scatter bright green leaves all over the tree.

Script: Because of Jesus every tear will be wiped from our eyes. Because of Jesus we see that our God is a God of life. Death came into the world through one man, but life came into the world through one man. This is a new life, a life without ending, a life in all its fullness.

Death is an ending; death hurts; but God is a God of life.

Depths and heights

You will need:

A Bible, three circles of cloth (dark blue, blue and light blue), two cardboard cylinders (one smaller than the other), a piece of rope, a model crown or throne, a wavy piece of very dark blue cloth, a model of a large fish, a manger, small circles of light blue cloth, a tealight candle, a circle of dark blue cloth, a cross, white feathers

Bible story: Psalm 139:7–8

Action: Open up the Bible and then lay it down at your side.

Script: God has given us the stories in his book to show us what he is like and how he works in our lives.

Action: Set out a circular base cloth of dark blue. Place a cylinder at the centre and cover it with another circle of lighter blue so that it looks like a hill with a wide flat top. Place a smaller cylinder on top of this and cover it with a circle of pale blue to make a sort of wedding cake effect.

Script: Our world has low places and high places. We sometimes feel low and we sometimes feel high. God has work to do in the depths and in the heights, so the Bible has stories of low places and high places.

Action: Move your hands from the base to the summit as you speak, and then from the summit to the base as you say the words from Psalm 139. Repeat this action every time you say these words.

Script: Where could I go to escape from your Spirit? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Bible story: Jeremiah 38:1–27

Action: On the dark blue base, place a rope for Jeremiah so that everyone can see it clearly.

Script: Sometimes God's people go to a low place. There was once a man called Jeremiah. His enemies threw him down a well, where he started to sink into the mud. But his friends used a rope to rescue him and he was then allowed to speak God's words to the high king.

Bible story: Esther 1:1–10

Script: Where could I go to escape from your Spirit? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Action: Place a throne or crown on the middle tier of the hill, where everyone can see it.

Script: God puts people in high places, too. There was once a young woman called Esther. She was made high queen so that she could save God's people in a time of danger.

Bible story: Jonah 1:1 – 2:10

Script: Where could I go to escape from your Spirit? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Action: Place a very dark blue, wavy shape on the lowest base cloth, to represent the sea, and place a fish in this dark area.

Script: Where could be a lower place than the bottom of the sea? There was once a man called Jonah. He was thrown overboard and sank to the very depths of the sea. But God sent a great fish to save him and bring him back up to dry land.

Bible story: Luke 2:1–7

Script: Where could I go to escape from your Spirit? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Action: *Place a manger on the base cloth. Move your hand back up the mountain to show the transformation Jesus brings.*

Script: Jesus knew all about low places and high places. He came down to earth from highest heaven. He was born in a down-to-earth stable. When he grew up, he lived among down-to-earth people—and he changed them. He turned low places to high places wherever he went.

Bible story: Matthew 5:1–12

Action: *Place several small circles of pale blue on the middle blue cloth so that everyone can see them.*

Script: Once, Jesus went up a hill to teach people about his Father's kingdom. He told them that God blesses those who depend on him, and those who are humble he raises up. God's kingdom turns everything upside down and inside out.

Bible story: Matthew 17:1–8

Action: *Place a tealight candle on the middle tier of the bill. Light it as you say the following words.*

Script: Once, Jesus took three of his friends up a high mountain. There they caught a glimpse of how wonderful Jesus was, when his clothes shone with the light of highest heaven.

Bible story: Acts 2:1–4

Action: *Place a circle of dark blue on the very top tier of the bill and place a cross on it. Movements of the band should illustrate the heights and depths in the words that follow.*

Script: Jesus turned a high place to the lowest place of all when he was lifted up on a cross to die, then was buried deep in a tomb. But then he turned that lowest place to the highest place when he rose up again.

Action: *Gently let white feathers fall over the whole set.*

Script: Jesus' Spirit came down from a high place like a dove to rest on God's people, so that now anyone can have Jesus close to them, whether we are in a low place or a high place.

Script: Where could I go to escape from your Spirit? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

I wonder what low places you know...

I wonder what high places you know...

I wonder where you feel closest to God...

I wonder why God lets us go down to the depths...

I wonder what it feels like in the heights...

I wonder whether you would be prepared to go to a low place or a high place for God...

Hide and seek

You will need:

A Bible, a large circle of black felt, 20 small pieces of black felt (on the reverse side of six of these should be pasted the following images: a star, praying hands, a dream bubble, water and a dove, a stormy sea, a mysterious picture of Jesus—possibly an icon)

Bible story: Genesis 15

Action: Open up the Bible and then lay it down at your side.

Script: God has given us the stories in his book to show us what he is like and how much he loves us.

Action: Lay down the large circle of black felt and the 20 felt pieces around the edge.

Script: Do you still play hide and seek? It must be one of the very first games most of us learn to play. Now you see me... now you don't. Peek-a-boo! It's a game with a purpose. Through it we learn to trust. Although something may no longer be in front of our eyes, it is still there, just out of sight.

Action: As you talk, place the felt pieces on to the large circle.

Script: It can be like this with God. Perhaps the game is a God-given lesson about faith that can help us through life. God is in all places and in all times. God holds everything together.

Action: Finally, all the 'hide and seek' felt pieces are laid down on the large circle.

Script: There's no place or experience where God is not present. Sometimes we are deeply aware of his presence and a moment of glory helps us know it. This inspires us and draws us on to seek God and live by faith from then on.

Action: Search for the star picture piece, turning over one or two other pieces in vain first.

Script: There was a person who was deeply aware of God's presence. His name was Abraham. Abraham lived by faith and obeyed God when he was told to go and find the promised land. He had a vision from God that changed his life. It led him on to seek God's eternal city.

Bible story: Genesis 32—33

Action: Search for the praying hands picture piece, turning over one or two other pieces in vain first.

Script: There was a person who was deeply aware of God's presence. His name was Jacob. Jacob lived by faith and dared to return to his homeland to meet his brother Esau. A strange thing happened by a brook that changed Jacob's life. It led him on to seek God and find it in the face of his own brother.

Bible story: 1 Kings 3:1–15

Action: Search for the dream picture piece, turning over one or two other pieces in vain first.

Script: There was a person who was deeply aware of God's presence. His name was Solomon. Solomon heard God speaking to him in a dream. It changed his life and led him on to seek God through his wisdom and writings.

Bible story: Matthew 3:13–17

Action: Search for the water and dove picture piece, turning over one or two other pieces in vain first.

Script: There was a person who was deeply aware of God's presence. His name was Jesus. When Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan, it led him on to seek God's kingdom at all times and in all places.

Bible story: Mark 4:35–41

Action: Four pieces have been 'found' so far. Search for the storm at sea picture piece, turning over one or two other pieces in vain first.

Script: There were others who were deeply aware of God's presence. They were Jesus' closest friends and, with him, they made new discoveries. Once they were caught in a storm on the lake and then everything was changed. It led them on to seek God in the life of Jesus.

Bible story: Revelation 1:9–20

Action: Search for the mysterious picture of Jesus piece, turning over one or two other pieces in vain first.

Script: There was a person who was deeply aware of God's presence. His name was John. At the end of his life, John caught a glimpse of Jesus. It changed him and helped to prepare him—and us—to seek our true home in heaven.

Action: All the story pieces have now been 'found'.

Script: I wonder if there are times when we have been deeply aware of God's presence. These moments of glory lead us to seek after God, making possible days and years of faith. God is still teaching us through his heavenly 'hide and seek' to trust him in the dark, to walk by faith and not by sight. God still comes close to us through the beauties of the world, the stories of his people, the life of Jesus, and the words and love of the people we meet. God is closer than our very breathing but also always just around the corner, drawing each of us ever onward to where we belong.

I wonder if you have sometimes felt God to be very close...

I wonder if you have sometimes felt God to be far away...

I wonder what God is teaching you through his heavenly game of 'hide and seek'...

I wonder where you are in his story...