Stories are a centerpiece of a children’s chapel program. There are many excellent stories that can be used for a chapel gathering. Picture books, folktales, personal stories, and Bible stories can all contribute to a vibrant program. Picture books for young children offer a story they can revisit on their own or with others. Folktales demonstrate to children that we learn from many cultures. Personal stories remind children that everyone has experiences in common and that we learn from events in others’ lives. Bible stories offer a wealth and depth of story that is central to our culture.

**Why tell stories?**

Bible stories were told many times before they were written down. The fact that they have been written down does not mean that they are now in a definitive form. In fact when I tell them, they continue to change. They change because of the listeners.

Some groups need to hear a phrase repeated, and you can see that in their eyes or in their restlessness. Some groups of children require a more energetic telling, while others like a quieter delivery. It is true that you can be responsive to your listeners when you are reading, but it is easier for you and more meaningful to them if the story is told, not recited word for word. Then it exists in the space shared by you and your listeners. It offers you the opportunity to find the phrase that can be repeated by the children, allowing them to become a storyteller too and help you tell the story.

It is the moment of the telling that you can keep active the interface of teller/listener in most meaningful ways. This is not something that will happen immediately, but will accumulate over many sessions. This does not mean that the first times will not be meaningful! They will, for the children sense the immediacy and presence of a story told. As you become comfortable you will notice more ways of adjusting your stories to your listeners.

**What telling a story offers to the chapel experience:**

- Telling a story allows the relationship to be exclusively between you and the children listeners, rather than having a book as intermediary. Even if you know the words in a book, you will turn to it as you are reading, breaking into your relationship with your
young listeners.
• Telling the story allows you to be extremely responsive to the children and provides the opportunity to alter the way you’re telling the story as you go. You will use different words different times. This keeps it fresh and in the moment. Memorizing a story word for word is very time-consuming and tends to make you focus on trying to remember the words rather than on telling the story. Create “story skeletons” for retelling rather than memorizing.
• Children sense the “magic” of a story being told, seeing it as a privilege and giving it attention that they don’t when they know they can pick up the book later and look at it.
• It is hard to deviate from the text of a written story even if you sense that something should be altered. Telling a story is specific to the moment in which it is told.

_Building a Children’s Chapel: One Story at a Time_ – an excellent resource for day school and Sunday church school use – will entertain and teach you how Bill Gordh tells stories. The book includes:

• Advice and tips on how to create a childhood chapel, with the challenges of using whatever space is available
• Techniques for retelling stories for young listeners, including the use of songs and artwork
• Suggestions for including parents in the chapel experience
• Stories organized thematically
• A collection of songs to support the story themes, with lyrics, musical notation, and easy-to-learn refrains.