

The Value of Bible Stories

— Lessons and Reflections from David's Story for Teenagers

Many young Chinese immigrants come to the United States and face numerous challenges and frustrations in learning and daily life due to language barriers and cultural differences. For the Chinese community, rooted deeply in Confucian traditions, understanding Christian values is crucial for integrating into American communities, which are largely shaped by Christian and Western culture. The Christian message of love, human connection, and mutual assistance can help new Chinese immigrants build relationships within communities, feel the warmth of love, and learn to “love their neighbors” and “love others as themselves.” For new immigrant families, adapting quickly to the local language, culture, and values is a key task in making a smooth transition to local life. Understanding the Bible and establishing Christian values can assist Chinese immigrant teenagers in better integrating into American school and community life.

Currently, both in the U.S. and within churches and mission organizations in China, one noticeable trend is that it is increasingly difficult to attract teenagers to Sunday School. This is partly because the peaceful and reverent atmosphere that used to draw youth is diminishing in today's world, impacting the mindset of young people. Religious observance and worship are often dismissed as outdated or obligatory, and many teenagers attend Sunday School reluctantly. The shift in social attitudes toward faith has made it essential for teachers to explore new methods of Christian education that resonate with young people, helping them resist distractions and secular influences. For young people within the Chinese immigrant and global Chinese church communities, an overly didactic approach may fail to connect with them deeply. Understanding their unique characteristics can help in conveying Biblical truths more effectively.

Due to various factors, using storytelling as a teaching method in Christian education and Bible Sunday school has proven effective. A well-told story can have profound influence by embedding ethical lessons within the narrative. Reflecting on each story can reignite teenagers' aspirations for noble ideals, stir greater ambitions, inspire deeper insights, and warn them of potential dangers on their life path. In summary, engaging Bible stories have a lasting impact on the character development of teenagers. When you tell a story to students, it's like you're sowing seeds in a vibrant and nurturing field of life. In due time, some of these seeds will grow and bloom, others will sprout into strong trees, and some will bear abundant fruit, supplying life's harvest for the world.

The storytelling approach goes beyond making dry subjects interesting; it is an insightful and practical teaching method. Listening to a story or seeing an engaging picture are human instincts, and when teaching aligns with these instincts, results improve dramatically. Jesus provides the perfect example, as His fundamental teaching approach was through parables and stories: “He used parables to teach the people.” Jesus did not aim to construct a complex theology of divine nature but instead taught divine truths through simple stories, like asking, “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?” These seemingly straightforward stories speak to the nature of God in ways more profound than any theology book. His example undeniably supports storytelling as the most effective method for religious education. When we delve into the Bible, almost every page reveals a story rich with human experience. Biblical figures are genuine individuals, not mere puppets in a play. As teachers, our greatest responsibility is to uncover the images hidden within words and the stories between the lines, bringing them into the hearts of students, young and old alike.

The story of David's growth, as recorded in the Book of Samuel, offers valuable lessons and reflections for Chinese immigrant teenagers. Young David faced challenges within his family and worked as a shepherd in a dangerous environment. Despite this, he did not complain or retreat; instead, he demonstrated unwavering trust in God, Jehovah. In a setting where he was overlooked and subjected to hardship, David displayed remarkable traits of resilience and courage: obedience, faith, joy, loyalty, forgiveness, gratitude, reverence, patience, self-control, kindness, prayerfulness, and repentance. His story can inspire teenagers to face life's confusions and challenges with optimism and bravery.

In David's family, he was not valued by his father and was viewed by his brothers as an outsider, treated with contempt. David longed to connect with his brothers, but they rejected him. He was often mocked and humiliated, with city gate officials gossiping about him and even drunkards making songs at his expense. David was the only shepherd in his family, a lowly occupation at that time. Shepherds were often excluded from places of worship or public gatherings, leaving David marginalized. Yet, David obediently followed his father's directives. When protecting his father's sheep in the wilderness, he fought off lions and bears, showing incredible bravery by killing them.

Despite the difficulties David faced in his family and the dangers of working as a shepherd, the Bible does not record any instance of him complaining or retreating. Instead, David learned to play the harp while tending his sheep, composing many psalms of praise to God. His psalms, written to worship and glorify Jehovah, are among the classics of spiritual literature. At least 73 psalms are attributed to David, some of which, like Psalms 8, 19, 23, and 29, reflect his experiences as a shepherd. Particularly, Psalm 23 expresses David's deep faith: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters..." This psalm reveals how David found comfort in God as his ultimate source of solace and peace, even in a wilderness full of danger. In such a harsh environment, David learned to rest in his faith, finding joy and peace by the waters and pastures.

In some ways, the challenges of David's family background and the harsh environment shaped his character, fostering his optimism, resilience, and unwavering faith. It illustrates that while people may fail us, God is a steadfast refuge. Rather than being bound by the emotional pain of his family's disregard, David rose above his circumstances by clinging to his faith in Jehovah. His family's indifference and the demands of his environment inspired him to rely on God, developing within him traits of obedience, joy, courage, and optimism.

In the Bible, David's joy in the Lord is clear: he "delights yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4), continually "My eyes are ever on the LORD" (Psalm 25:15), and declares, "LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup" (Psalm 16:5). "I keep my eyes always on the Lord" (Psalm 16:8), "Guide me in your truth and teach me." (Psalm 25:5). He trusts God's love, "I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul." (Psalm 31:7). David's love for God's will and His laws is evident: "I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8). His challenging circumstances directed his heart and mind entirely toward God, making the Lord his constant focus. David's experiences as a shepherd prepared him well for a greater role later in life: shepherding the people of God.

Throughout his youth, David never voiced resentment or bitterness toward his family. Instead of dwelling on the dangers of the wilderness, the hardships of shepherding, or his family's treatment, he focused on his own sins and God's character and power. He prayed, "Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good." (Psalm 25:7). The Bible contains no expression of David's bitterness toward his family.

If a young person focuses solely on themselves, their immediate feelings, and the comforts of this world, then any slight hurt from their family of origin feels like a sharp knife, cutting a wound into their heart and mind. Each new hurt deepens that wound, creating scars that multiply and grow over time until the pain becomes overwhelming. Many then become consumed with anger, bitterness, and even hatred toward their family, and some may struggle to function normally in life. While some eventually find healing, it often takes a long time to erase those deep scars.

Whatever we fix our attention on becomes our "god." Feeling deeply wounded by family suggests that we are too self-centered, engaging in self-worship. This is idolatry, an offense to God. Our family can wound our bodies, but they cannot wound our hearts unless we allow it. Others cannot reach into our hearts unless we open the door for them. Allowing family hurts to wound our hearts is a choice. Responding with anger, bitterness, and hatred is a form of fighting evil with evil, which is offensive to God. Furthermore, if we don't remove anger, bitterness, and

hatred toward our family, we become slaves to these emotions, constantly dwelling on them, making them our masters.

David had two families: his family of origin and God's family. David's story is also our story. No matter what "giant" we face—whether it's family, classmates, teammates, or academic challenges—God calls us to rise above. Do you want your life to be like David's? Although his family mistreated him, David trusted God completely. In difficult times, he learned obedience, joy, and courage. David took on many roles, including shepherd, musician, poet, warrior, leader, prophet, and king. He was fearless on the battlefield, resilient in adversity, and a strong, courageous leader. Yet, he was also humble, self-controlled, willing to admit his mistakes, and repentant. David was kind-hearted, compassionate, and loved truth and justice. Most importantly, he trusted in God, Jehovah, with his whole heart. David was called "a man after God's own heart," and God granted him the honor of becoming king of Israel.

Learning from David's example, diligently studying and following God's word while training our minds to be immersed in His teachings, can gradually drive out negative thoughts like anger, bitterness, and hatred. We should avoid focusing on feelings, as forgiveness is a matter of will and choice, not emotion. Practicing this over time can lead to a change in feelings. Additionally, we can reflect on how God has used the challenges within our families to shape us. Drawing lessons from David's story in the Bible can nourish Chinese immigrant youth with biblical insights, helping them overcome anxiety and confusion, and resolve conflicts between first-generation immigrant parents and 1.5-generation immigrant youth. This can enable them to grow with confidence and composure.

Adolescence is a prime time to introduce Christian values, helping young people understand themselves and develop solid character. Instead of merely preaching, we can make a real impact through biblical storytelling. Understanding these young people's unique experiences is essential for effectively conveying biblical truths through stories, coursework, and various assignments. Moreover, the innovative "English Bible course" strengthen reading skills while helping Chinese immigrant youth become familiar with Christian values and culture. Facing a new environment and numerous challenges, immigrant students can learn from David's example to face life with optimism and courage, pursue their own faith, and boldly chase their dreams.

Teaching Christian values through "English Bible course" that share Bible stories holds real relevance for Chinese immigrant students and all young Chinese around the world. Using language learning as a vehicle to teach Christian principles introduces them to a new culture. Through this approach, youth can seek answers in the Bible and draw lessons from David's story, finding their ultimate source of trust. Jehovah is our fortress, the most reliable foundation! (Unlike relying on people—David and his father, Jesse.) Becoming a person "after God's own heart" is the core of the value found in Bible stories and the starting point for "English Bible course" content.