

Stick Figure Storying

By **PAM ARLUND**

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The scene was beautiful. The Middle Eastern dad got down on the floor with his six or so children and began to draw stick figures on a piece of paper. He drew a stick figure Jesus asleep in a boat and then stick figure disciples who looked afraid. His next drawing was Jesus speaking to the waves and they grew calm. Dad had learned the story earlier that day from someone else and there he was, immediately bringing the hope of Jesus to his children through his own stick figure drawings.

Although Dad couldn't read or write words, he could read and write stick figures. This method of storytelling means he is now empowered to share "Jesus stories" with his children or anyone else in his community. His personal library of Jesus stories may have started with just the one story, but it grew and grew over time.

This Middle Eastern dad had discovered a method of Bible study that empowered him to interact with the words of the Bible as both a learner and a teacher. This is one of the goals of all believers: to be able to tell others about Jesus.

But yet, how will that happen if people can't read, are unwilling to read, or maybe are just too tired to read?

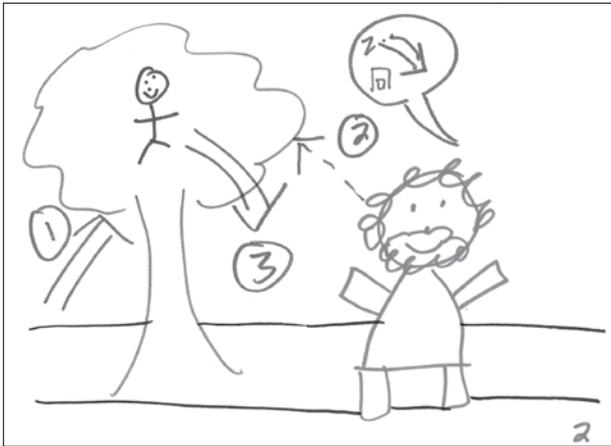
As a missionary in Central Asia, I had worked with a remote people group whose language did not have a writing system. Some of them could read and write in some other language, but many of them could not. People didn't read books in their spare time as it just wasn't part of the rhythm of the culture. This reality was a significant challenge when as believers we are "people of the book." My job, as a missionary and Bible translator, was to help them learn the Bible well enough to pass it on to someone else.

Audio Bibles were too expensive and not widely available. Also, getting recordings of native speakers was difficult, given the extreme persecution in the area. We weren't sure we could keep people's voices disguised enough to keep them from being arrested.

When I told people stories from the Bible, they seemed to lose interest, or lose details of the story that matter. I wanted the stories of the Bible to be loved and told accurately from person to person.

One day, out of frustration, I decided to tell a story from the Bible using stick figures. This was not a grand design at the time or a strategy that I had deeply thought out. It was simply another attempt and what popped into my mind at the time. Perhaps the Holy Spirit was prompting me, but in any event, as I began to draw stick figure Zacchaeus, something began to happen. The whole family was suddenly gathering around and became very interested in the story. When I finished telling it, people were able to point to the stick figures and retell the story accurately. From the littlest child who could talk all the way up to the oldest grandma, every person in the household could tell the story of Zacchaeus!





Quickly, I told all those who were there to get a piece of paper and draw their own stick figure Zacchaeus. The family began to draw together, laugh, enjoy one another, and also to learn the story.

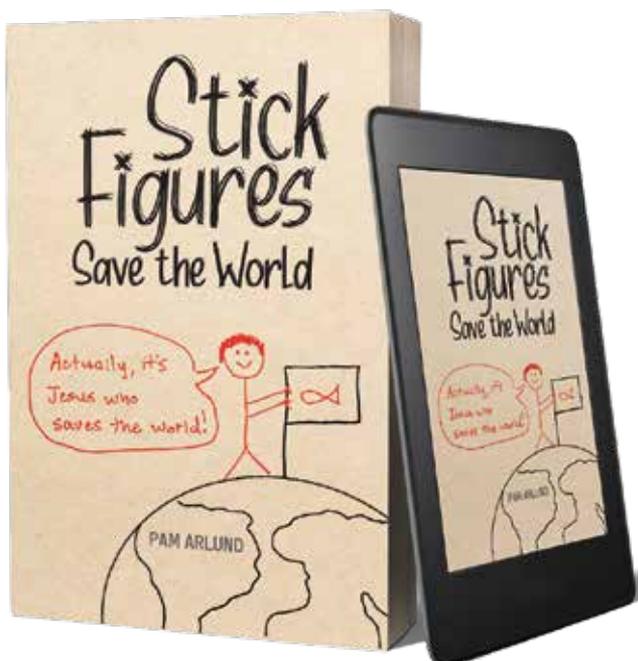
As I began to praise the Lord for what had happened that day, I began drawing stick figures of Bible stories regularly to build my own library of Jesus stories. Soon, I realized that I knew stories from the Bible in a better way than I had ever known them before. It wasn't my training as a Bible translator, nor my PhD that had brought this depth of connection with the stories. It was having to think through each story and how to draw it that had me engage on a whole new

level with the Word of God that I love. Now I, just like the Muslim dad to whom I taught the method, could tell Bible stories from my heart and could "see" my pictures in my head and reproduce them for others. Soon, despite my education that encouraged more complicated and sophisticated methods, I realized that stick figures were not something childish but rather they were simply a good learning and sharing tool that I needed to share with others.

Since that early personal discovery of this method, I have had the pleasure of empowering post-doc students at universities, impoverished people who never went to school, and church people in dozens of countries to share in, enjoy, and learn Jesus stories from the Bible. Stories that they can then immediately share with others with confidence and joy. What is particularly wonderful is how this method levels the ground. All education levels and age levels can participate together, learn and grow, with no one feeling less than or left out.

Since sharing the truth and hope of Jesus with the world is what every believer is called to do, then maybe the sword of the Spirit in this instance is a pen that draws stick figures. 🖋️

LEARN MORE



Dr. Pam Arlund has taken the big, scary complexity of evangelism and storytelling and simplified it in practical and important ways, so every believer can be empowered to share the good news of Jesus. Stick Figures Save the World is practical, inspiring, and a refreshing look at the art of storytelling. We all have good news stories to share, and this book will help you share them effectively. I highly recommend you read this, practice it, and make it part of your lifestyle.

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