**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY**
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**
**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

# NARRATIVES OF THE PROPHETS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A QUALITATIVE AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COPTIC CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM PARENTING APPROACHES

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**ISTANBUL, 2025**

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**by**
**HAGER MOHAMED HUSSEIN RIAD**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in fulfillment of the requirements for Master's degree in Religious Studies**

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**ISTANBUL, 2025**

# ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Full Name: Hager Mohamed Hussein Riad

Signature:

# ÖZ

## PEYGAMBER KISSALARININ ERKEN ÇOCUKLUKTA ANLATIMI: KIPTİ HRİSTİYAN VE MÜSLÜMAN EBEVEYN YAKLAŞIMLARININ NİTEL VE KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BIR ANALİZİ

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Bu tez, ebeveynlerin dini hikâyeleri çocuklarına nasıl anlattıklarını ve yorumladıklarını incelemektedir. Çalışma, özellikle İslam'daki peygamber kıssaları ile Kıpti Hristiyanlıkta yer alan İncil hikâyelerine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, ebeveynlerin bu kutsal anlatıları nasıl anladıklarını, çocuklarına nasıl aktardıklarını ve neden onları ahlaki anlayışı, manevi farkındalığı ve karakter oluşumunu destekleyen etkili araçlar olarak gördüklerini ele almaktadır. Araştırmada, çocuklarıyla düzenli olarak ilahi figürlerin hikâyelerini paylaşan ebeveynlere ait örnek vakalar incelenmiş; bu ebeveynlerin hikâyelerdeki dersleri çocuklarının anlayış düzeyine nasıl uyarladıkları ve nezaket, düşüncelilik, saygı ve manevi farkındalık gibi gözlemlenen olumlu sonuçlar vurgulanmıştır.

Çalışma, Müslüman ve Kıpti Hristiyan ebeveynlerin peygamber hikâyelerini çocuklarına nasıl yorumlayıp aktardıkları, bu anlatıların dini ve ahlaki mesajlarını nasıl ilettikleri, hangi duygusal ve manevi değerleri ön plana çıkardıkları, hikâye anlatımını modern teknolojiyle nasıl bütünleştirdikleri ve neden bu hikâyeleri çocuk yetiştirmenin vazgeçilmez bir unsuru olarak gördükleri gibi temel sorulara odaklanmaktadır. Nitel analiz yöntemleri kullanılarak yapılan araştırma, dini hikâye anlatımıyla ilgili kuramsal yaklaşımları uygulamalı gözlemlerle birleştirmiş; her iki gelenekten seçilen belirli peygamber hikâyeleri teolojik ve ahlaki açıdan incelenmiştir.

Araştırmaya on Müslüman ve on Hristiyan ebeveyn katılmıştır. Katılımcılar, dini hikâye anlatımıyla ilgili deneyimlerini, hikâyeleri nasıl anladıklarını ve bu anlamları çocuklarına nasıl aktardıklarını paylaşmıştır. Bulgular, ebeveynlerin kutsal metinlerle çocukların anlayışı arasında bir köprü kurarak soyut manevi ve ahlaki kavramları günlük yaşamla ilişkilendirdiklerini göstermektedir. Ebeveynler, hikâyelerin anlatımını çocuklarının yaş ve anlama düzeyine göre uyarlayarak dini anlamın içselleştirilmesini sağlamaktadır.

Bu çalışma, dini anlatıların aile içindeki ahlaki düşünme ve manevi gelişim sürecinde nasıl bir çerçeve sunduğunu ortaya koyarak din bilimlerine katkı sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dini Eğitim, Hikâye Anlatımı, İncil Hikâyeleri, Peygamber Kıssaları.

ABSTRACT

NARRATIVES OF THE PROPHETS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A QUALITATIVE AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COPTIC CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM PARENTING APPROACHES

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This thesis examines how parents interpret and tell religious stories to their children, focusing on prophets' stories in Islam and Bible stories within Coptic Christianity. It explores how parents understand these sacred narratives, communicate them to their children, and why they regard them as effective tools for nurturing moral understanding, spiritual awareness, and character formation. Through selected case studies, the research highlights parents who regularly share stories of divine figures, showing how they adapt moral lessons to children's level of comprehension and their observations such as greater kindness, thoughtfulness, respect, and spiritual awareness.

The study addresses key questions about how Muslim and Coptic Christian parents interpret and transmit prophetic stories, how they communicate their religious and moral lessons, what emotional and spiritual values they emphasize, and how storytelling integrates with modern technology. Using qualitative analysis methods, the research combines theoretical perspectives on religious storytelling with practical observations, analyzing specific prophetic stories from both traditions in terms of their theological and moral interpretations.

Twenty parents participated in interviews—ten Muslims and ten Christians—sharing experiences with storytelling practices, their personal understanding of the stories, and

how they convey these meanings to their children. Findings suggest that parents act as interpreters between sacred texts and children's comprehension, using storytelling to connect abstract spiritual and moral ideas with everyday experiences. By engaging with religious narratives, children encounter positive role models who embody honesty, gratitude, forgiveness, courage, mercy, and altruism. Parents adjust tone, detail, and focus to match children's understanding, shaping how religious meaning is received and internalized.

This research contributes to religious studies by illuminating how parents transmit prophetic stories as frameworks for moral reflection and spiritual formation within contemporary Muslim and Christian family life.

**Keywords**: Bible Stories, Prophets' Stories, Religious Education, Storytelling.

# DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with deep love and gratitude to my beloved family, my beloved husband who selflessly stood by me throughout this journey. His patience, understanding, and guidance helped me navigate the challenges I faced, and I am forever indebted to him.

To my beloved children, Salih and Hana, I dedicate this work to you with all my love. I deeply apologize for the moments when my research kept me away from you, yet please know that you have always been my greatest priority and constant source of strength. My greatest hope is that this accomplishment makes you proud and inspires you to follow your own dreams with passion, determination, and courage.

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Her profound knowledge and rich academic experience have been a great source of learning for me. She devoted significant time and effort to guide me through every stage of the research process, holding several meetings to provide detailed instructions, constructive feedback, and suggestions for revision and improvement. She was always patient and attentive, carefully reviewing every part of my work — from the literature review to the interviews I conducted — and ensuring that I stayed on the right path.

I am especially grateful for her support in helping me identify suitable interviewees and guiding me in preparing the right questions. Through her, I gained deep insights into qualitative research and learned to use several academic tools and techniques that I was not previously familiar with. She also provided me with a variety of valuable resources, including different versions of children's Bible stories and other Christian books, which helped me enrich my understanding and broaden my perspective on the topic.

It has been a privilege to work under the supervision of such an inspiring lecturer, who not only guided me academically but also motivated me personally. Her constant encouragement, readiness to meet whenever needed, and belief in my abilities have kept me focused and determined, even during challenging moments. I often felt as though I was working with an elder sister who genuinely cared about my progress and success.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

Stories have always been central to human development, shaping how individuals perceive the world, others, and themselves. From the earliest lullabies to complex moral tales, narratives guide children's understanding of human behavior, social relationships, and moral reasoning. The importance of storytelling is widely recognized across disciplines such as psychology, education, and anthropology, emphasizing its role in fostering imagination, empathy, language, and cognitive growth. Jerome Bruner viewed narrative as a fundamental mode of thought through which people construct meaning and organize experience.[1] Likewise, Kieran Egan described stories as powerful frameworks that make complex ideas accessible and memorable.[2] Similarly, Olivia Saracho and Bernard Spodek noted that storytelling supports children's emotional and ethical development, helping them grasp abstract concepts through concrete and relatable contexts.[3]

Within religious traditions, storytelling assumes a sacred and interpretive function. Narratives from scripture not only transmit beliefs but also provide moral and spiritual guidance as understood within faith communities. In Islam, the stories of the prophets hold a central place in child upbringing, presenting models of faith, compassion, justice, and perseverance as understood within the Islamic tradition. Drawn from the Qur'an and Sunnah, these narratives are interpreted as living lessons rather than historical accounts, offering moral guidance within the framework of Islamic teaching.[4] Parents and educators frequently use such stories to teach values such as

[1] Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 43.
[2] Kieran Egan, *Teaching as Story Telling: An Alternative Approach to Teaching and Curriculum in the Elementary School* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 1-5.
[3] Olivia N. Saracho and Bernard Spodek, *Contemporary Perspectives on Socialization and Social Development in Early Childhood Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008), 1-10.
[4] Husni Rahim and Maila Dinia Husni Rahiem, "*The Use of Stories as Moral Education for Young Children,*" International Journal of Social Science and Humanity 2, no. 6 (2012): 454-458.

divine obedience, patience, and empathy in adversity.[5] Through the lives of prophets such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, children encounter spiritual ideals that contribute to forming moral identity and a sense of purpose.[6]

In Christianity, biblical stories are vital to children's moral and spiritual education. Stories from both the Old and New Testaments are used to teach themes of divine love, humility, forgiveness, and justice within Christian education. Parents and teachers often narrate stories such as Noah's Ark, David and Goliath, or the parables of Jesus to communicate Christian values.[7] These stories function as frameworks through which children understand the divine nature and the concept of salvation.[8] Through engaging with these sacred texts, children learn more about moral decision-making and concepts of faith and godly characters. Religious narratives also serve as living testimonies that continue to guide ethical and spiritual reflection within the Christian worldview.[9]

While Jesus Christ remains central to Christian belief, the prophetic tradition extends to numerous Old Testament figures—Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Elijah—whose roles as divine messengers hold theological importance.[10] Their narratives express themes of divine faithfulness, covenant, and repentance, providing essential moral lessons relevant to Christian education today.[11] These prophetic stories, often shared with children in family and educational contexts, are used to illustrate obedience to divine will and the moral consequences of human choice.[12]

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[5] Mohammad Zuhal Fathur Rohman, Mohammad Chotib, and Abdul Muhith "*Islamic Education Teachers' Efforts In Instilling Islamic Values Through Prophet And Companion Stories In The Classroom*," Islamic Management: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam (2025).

[6] N. Nasirudin and M. Musthafa, "*Friendly Education: Prophet Muhammad's Interactions with Children*," Journal of Integrated Elementary Education 5, no. 1 (2025): 169-182

[7] Sigal Achituv and Ruth Danino Lichtenstein, "*Which of the Bible stories do you best remember? The significance of selected Bible stories for early childhood education students*," British Journal of Religious Education (2023).

[8] Kerrin Huth, "*Exploring the Use of Story as a Pedagogically Beneficial Support for Teaching Christian Studies in the Early Years of Primary School*" (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2022).

[9] Andrea Porcarelli, "*Educational Functions of Biblical Narratives: Insights from an Empirical Research,"* Religions 16, no. 4 (2025): 445.

[10] Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

[11] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 15-20.

[12] Randall E. Otto, "The Prophets and Their Perspective," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 63, no. 2 (2001): 219-240.

In both Islam and Christianity, storytelling serves as a bridge between generations, ensuring that sacred teachings remain meaningful within changing social contexts. Parents act as interpreters who translate sacred texts into stories children can understand, relating divine lessons to everyday experiences. This interpretive process involves simplifying complex theological ideas while retaining moral and spiritual depth, allowing children to internalize faith-based values at an early age.

Religious storytelling also benefits from insights in neuroscience and developmental psychology. Research by Paul Zak[13] and Raymond Mar[14] demonstrates that engaging stories activate multiple brain regions, enhance empathy, and improve moral reasoning. Zak's studies showed that emotionally engaging narratives stimulate oxytocin release, a neurochemical linked to trust and social bonding. This biological response fosters connection between storyteller and listener, suggesting that stories are neurologically suited to transmit moral and emotional understanding. Zak explains that narratives prompting emotional engagement motivate altruistic behavior by allowing listeners to identify with the characters' actions and moral choices. He states "narratives that cause us to pay attention and also involve us emotionally are the stories that move us to action." He also says "it seems that once we are attentive and emotionally engaged, our brains go into mimic mode and mirror the behaviors that the characters in the story are doing, or might do. As social creatures we are biased toward engaging with others, and effective stories motivate us to help others."[15] These findings affirm that storytelling functions as a uniquely human means of fostering moral sensitivity and ethical awareness.

In early childhood education, narrative learning supports the development of moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and language skills. Vivian Paley[16] and Ageliki Nicolopoulou found that stories help children understand cause and effect, navigate ethical dilemmas, and manage emotional responses.[17] Storytelling thus becomes a

[13] Zak, P. J. (2015). Why inspiring stories make us react: The neuroscience of narrative. *Cerebrum, 2015*, 2.
[14] Mar, R. A. (2011). The neural bases of social cognition and story comprehension. *Annual Review of Psychology, 62*, 103–134.
[15] Zak, The Neuroscience of Narrative."
[16] Paley, V. G. (1990). *The boy who would be a helicopter: The uses of storytelling in the classroom*. Harvard University Press
[17] Nicolopoulou, A. (2017). The power of story and narrative in early childhood development. *Early Education and Development, 28*(5), 593–602.

natural pedagogical medium for moral and spiritual formation, especially when the content is drawn from religious traditions.

Stories that feature morally significant figures—prophets, sages, or heroes—are used to illustrate examples of virtue and moral decision-making through engaging and relatable scenarios. Gabriel S. Reynolds emphasize that shared prophetic narratives across the Abrahamic traditions convey moral reasoning through concrete, dramatic encounters, allowing listeners to engage emotionally and intellectually with moral dilemmas.[18] For example, the story of King Solomon (Prophet Sulaiman), appearing in both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, exemplifies this. In *Kings* 3:16–28,[19] Solomon's wise judgment between two mothers demonstrates compassion and justice. Such stories, retold within families and faith settings, serve as moral case studies that encourage children to reflect on ethical behavior. Children's attraction to heroic figures, including prophetic and saintly models, has been widely discussed in developmental and moral psychology. Robert Coles observes, stories of moral exemplars provide children with "vivid portraits of virtue," enabling them to imagine and evaluate right and wrong through narrative experience rather than abstract instruction.[20] When parents or educators recount stories that embody qualities such as fairness, compassion, and humility, they translate moral principles into relatable human actions. This process helps children internalize moral reasoning by identifying with the motivations and struggles of the characters portrayed.[21] Anna Maynard argues that stories are not mere entertainment but the primary way cultures communicate and internalize social and moral norms.[22] This view aligns with the role of religious storytelling across faiths—as a means of shaping belief, identity, and conduct through narrative engagement.

[18] Gabriel S. Reynolds, The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 305–307.
[19] https://rb.gy/w1d05f
[20] Robert Coles, *The Moral Intelligence of Children: How to Raise a Moral Child* (New York: Random House, 1997), 45–46.
[21] Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," in *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues*, edited by Thomas Lickona (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 31–53.
[22] Maynard, K. (2021). *American mythology: How storytelling shapes modern cultural perceptions* (Master's thesis, College of Liberal Arts).

Effective storytelling depends on developmental appropriateness and interpretive adaptation. Research indicates that dramatization, visual aids, and dialogue enhance children's comprehension and emotional involvement. [23] Narratives become transformative when they correspond to the child's cognitive and emotional capacities, inviting active participation rather than passive listening. Bruner emphasizes that narratives are culturally transmitted frameworks that help individuals organize experience and make sense of human events.[24] Through family storytelling, parents act as mediators of this cultural and religious transmission, helping children connect sacred meaning with daily life.

Bruno Bettelheim emphasized that stories help children process emotions, develop moral reasoning, and understand social dynamics.[25] He explained that by identifying with a story's protagonist, children vicariously experience struggle and triumph, which deepens their empathy and resilience. Regular storytelling within homes and religious institutions reinforces these outcomes by combining moral content with emotional engagement. As caregivers interpret and retell these stories, they sustain a process through which faith and morality are transmitted, adapted, and renewed across generations.

In contemporary contexts, children are exposed to diverse influences and media. Amid this environment, parents and educators increasingly recognize the enduring value of sacred stories that convey virtues such as honesty, compassion, courage, and gratitude. Religious storytelling continues to serve as an important medium for communicating complex spiritual and ethical ideas in forms children can grasp and retain. Empirical and theoretical studies in both religious and moral education affirm that storytelling promotes ethical reflection and internalization of values among children.[26] Research indicates that moral and sacred stories can shape behavior,[27] enhance empathy,[28] and

[23] Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 56.
[24] Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry, 18*(1), 1–21
[25] Bettelheim, B. (1976). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. Knopf.
[26] Mahir S. Al-Hawamleh, "Storytelling as Promoting Moral Consciousness: Religious Education Teachers' Perspectives," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 18, no. 12 (2019): 102–17, https://www.ijlter.org/index.php/ijlter/article/view/1697
[27] Mingyue Liang et al., "The Influence of Different Types of Moral Stories on Honest Behaviour in Children," *Behavioral Sciences* 15, no. 2 (2025): 178, https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/15/2/178.
[28] Sakerani Mangkurat University, "The Use of Storytelling Method in Early Childhood Religious and Moral Value Development," *Proceeding of the International Conference on Multidisciplinary Studies* (2022): 45–52, https://proceeding.sabajayapublisher.com/index.php/multidisciplinary/article/view/20

provide frameworks through which children learn to interpret moral experiences and social realities.[29]

The use of stories rooted in faith traditions provides a distinctive narrative framework for moral and spiritual education. As Stanley Hauerwas and other scholars of narrative theology have argued, religious stories are not merely illustrative but are fundamentally identity-forming, shaping a community's collective understanding of concepts such as justice, mercy, and compassion.[30] Stephen Barton similarly notes that biblical stories serve as primary vehicles for teaching virtue and moral responsibility within Christian ethics.[31]

The educational and psychological relevance of these stories is also supported by developmental research. Rebekah Richert and Erin Smith demonstrate that religious narratives operate as cognitive tools that help children process and internalize abstract spiritual and moral principles, especially when these stories are mediated through parental or instructional interpretation.[32] Jerome Berryman's approach to *Godly Play* further emphasizes that the structured use of storytelling allows children to engage imaginatively with sacred narratives while developing personal meaning and ethical awareness. [33] Thus, the pedagogical function of religious storytelling is both theological and psychological, combining the transmission of belief with the cultivation of character.

Empirical evidence supports this integrative role. A 2018 longitudinal study conducted by Harvard University revealed that children who regularly participate in faith-based family activities—such as communal prayer, scriptural reading, or spiritual storytelling—demonstrate higher levels of emotional well-being, happiness, and social

[29] Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 84–86.
[30] Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 45-48.
[31] Stephen C. Barton, "Virtue in the Bible: Learning from the Stories," in *Virtue and the Moral Life: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. William Werpehowski and Kathryn Getek Soltis (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 15.
[32] Richert, Rebekah A., and Erin I. Smith. "The Role of Religious Stories in the Development of Religious Cognition and Identity." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 11, no. 3 (August 2019): 304–13.
[33] Jerome W. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children* (Denver, CO: Morehouse Education Resources, 2009), 55-60.

trust than peers without such experiences.[34] These findings indicate that spiritual practices, including storytelling traditions, can strengthen children's emotional resilience and contribute to the formation of socially responsible behavior within a supportive moral community.

From a comparative perspective, stories of divinely inspired figures serve as foundational elements in the moral and spiritual formation of children across religious contexts. Robert B. Wright observes that these narratives portray virtues such as patience, compassion, integrity, and resilience, reinforcing ethical conduct through concrete and memorable examples.[35] Scholars in moral theology and education argue that the depiction of moral exemplars through narrative is more effective than abstract instruction. Vigen Guroian explains that "mere instruction in morality is not sufficient to nurture the virtues; instead, a compelling vision of the goodness of goodness itself must be presented in a way that stirs the imagination."[36]

Although specific traditions vary in their portrayals of prophetic and saintly figures, recurring themes emerge—justice, social responsibility, and the triumph of moral conviction over adversity. Structured engagement with these narratives, whether through family discussions, religious instruction, or institutional programs, allows children to internalize moral lessons and apply them within their own experiences. As children listen and reflect on these stories, they develop both a moral imagination and an empathetic awareness that link belief to ethical practice.[37] This process of interpretive engagement demonstrates how storytelling within religious contexts functions not only as moral education but also as a form of spiritual formation.

Given the established significance of storytelling, particularly within religious traditions, this study moves from theoretical foundations to lived practice. It gathers

[34] "Religious Upbringing Linked to Better Health and Well-Being During Early Adulthood," Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, September 13, 2018, https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/religious-upbringing-adult-health/; "Harvard Study: Religious Upbringing Better for Kids' Health, Well-Being," Charisma Magazine, June 12, 2019, https://tinyurl.com/3whbu4mr

[35] Robert B. Wright, *The Psalms of Solomon: A New Translation and Introduction*, ed. Rodney A. Werline, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 58.

[36] Guroian, V. (1998). *Tending the heart of virtue: How classic stories awaken a child's moral imagination*. Oxford University Press

[37] Bettelheim, B. (1976). The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales. Knopf.

firsthand insights from parents and religious educators regarding their use of such narratives in daily life. Through qualitative interviews, the research documents how these participants understand and employ religious stories as religious tools, and their observations concerning the perceived influence of these stories on children's moral and spiritual development.

This thesis is structured into five main chapters. The first is this introduction. The second is the methodology used in this thesis. The third provides a review of the relevant literature on biblical and prophetic stories as models of moral and spiritual formation. The fourth examines the appearance and use of these narratives within the Qur'an, Hadith, and Bible, alongside their representation in modern media and educational materials. The fifth chapter analyzes data collected from interviews to draw evidence-based conclusions about the interpretive practices of parents and educators in different faith settings.

All the Christian participants in this study are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Therefore, a brief overview of this community is provided to clarify its historical and theological background and its relation to other Christian denominations.

The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria is the largest Christian community in Egypt and one of the oldest traditions of Christianity. The term *Copt* derives from the Greek *Aigyptios* ("Egyptian") and came over time to refer specifically to Egypt's Christian population.[38] Coptic Christianity belongs to the Oriental Orthodox family of churches, distinct from both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. Its theology emphasizes *miaphysitism*—the belief that in the person of Christ, divine and human natures are united in a single, inseparable nature without confusion.[39]

[38] Meinardus, Otto F. A. *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/coptic_1.shtml?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[39] Wakin, Edward. *A Short History of the Copts and of Their Church*. Cairo: Christian Study Centre, 1963 & Griggs, C. Wilfred. *Early Egyptian Christianity: From Its Origins to 451 C.E.* Leiden: Brill, 1990

Christianity as a whole developed into several theological and ecclesial traditions. The first is Catholicism, which centers on the authority of the Pope in Rome and recognizes both Scripture and Apostolic Tradition as sources of authority. Prophets in Catholic thought are often interpreted as figures within salvation history who point toward Christ, rather than as messengers (*rusul*) in the Islamic sense. The second major branch is Eastern Orthodoxy, which stresses the continuity of the early Church and the authority of the Ecumenical Councils; prophets are regarded as holy men of Israel, venerated as saints, but not primarily seen as "messengers." The third is Coptic Orthodox Christianity, which maintains its own distinct theological and cultural heritage.[40]

In this study's fieldwork, Coptic participants frequently referred to biblical and Islamic prophets alike using the Arabic term *rusul*. This linguistic and conceptual overlap highlights how Coptic identity is shaped by Egypt's broader religious environment, where Muslims and Christians share intertwined cultural and moral vocabularies. Recognizing this intersection is essential to understanding why Coptic perspectives on prophecy and religious storytelling often differ from those of other Christian denominations.

Different Christian traditions also hold varying views on biblical prophets. In many Catholic and Eastern Orthodox contexts, prophets are remembered primarily as figures of moral authority, historical leaders, kings, or precursors to Christ, often associated with kingship or national leadership (Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Prophet"[41]). In contrast, the Coptic participants in my study frequently described them as *messengers* (*rusul*) —a designation closer to the Qurʾānic understanding than to typical Christian discourse. This terminological choice underscores the unique cultural and religious position of Egyptian Copts, who live in close interaction with Muslim majority society, demonstrating how local religious language and cultural interrelations shape theological categories. Recognizing this difference was essential for my analysis, as it clarified why Coptic perspectives on prophecy and religious storytelling diverge from those of other Christian denominations.

[40] Ware, Timothy. *The Orthodox Church*. London: Penguin, 1993.
[41] https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/prophet

# CHAPTER II

# RESEARCH PURPOSE & METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examines how parents interpret and tell religious stories to their children, focusing specifically on prophets' stories in Islam and Bible stories within Coptic Christianity through a methodological framework designed to capture the nuanced perspectives of parents and educators. The research employs a qualitative, comparative case study design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 20 parents from both faith traditions (10 Muslims & 10 Christians). The subsequent sections detail the participant selection criteria, data collection procedures, and thematic analysis approach, followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations undertaken to ensure the rigor and validity of the findings.

This study uses a qualitative research design, which means it focuses on understanding people's experiences, beliefs, and perspectives in depth, rather than using numbers or statistics. The research has two main features: Comparative Case Study: The study carefully examines and compares two specific groups: Muslim families and Coptic Christian families. Each group is treated as a separate "case" to explore how they use religious stories in parenting. Interpretive Approach: The goal is to interpret the meanings that parents give to storytelling. The researcher collects detailed stories and opinions from participants to understand the "why" and "how" behind their actions, not just the "what." In short, the design is built on comparing two real-world groups and interpreting the deeper meaning of their experiences with religious storytelling.

This research is structured into five chapters, preceded by a preface and an abstract. The first is an introduction. The second is this methodology and design chapter. The third provides a review of the relevant literature on biblical and prophetic stories as models of moral and spiritual formation. The fourth examines the appearance and use of these narratives within the Qur'an, Hadith, and Bible, alongside their representation in modern media and educational materials, together with a comparative discussion

that brings these strands together, showing both convergences and divergences in how Islam and Coptic Christianity present prophetic stories and transmit their teachings to the next generation. The fifth chapter analyzes data collected from interviews to draw evidence-based conclusions about the interpretive practices of parents and educators in different faith settings.

This study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically employing an interpretivist approach to explore the nuanced experiences and perspectives of parents, tutors, religious specialists, and storytellers regarding the impact of religious narratives on children. A qualitative methodology was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the complex interplay between religious storytelling practices and child development, allowing for the exploration of subjective meanings and interpretations.

Furthermore, this research is inherently interdisciplinary, transcending the boundaries of a single academic field. It delves into the psychological, behavioral, emotional, and developmental impacts of religious stories on children, examining their multifaceted influence. Concurrently, it investigates the practical application of these narratives as pedagogical tools across various educational and familial settings. The research is primarily based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews, which facilitated a rich understanding of participants' views and experiences, aligning with the exploratory nature of the study.

The study involved a purposive sample of 20 participants, comprising 10 Muslims and 10 Coptic Christians with direct experience in religious storytelling for children. This included parents, tutors, religious studies specialists, behavior change specialists with religious background, pastors, and storytellers. The selection criteria focused on individuals who actively engaged in narrating religious stories to children and could provide detailed insights into the perceived impact of these stories. The sample was intentionally diverse in terms of religious affiliation (Muslim and Coptic Christian) to facilitate a comparative analysis of approaches and outcomes. While the majority of interviewees were Arabs from Egypt, around 6 Muslim participants were English speakers from India, Turkey, Afghanistan, USA, KSA, and Bangladesh, adding a minor cross-cultural dimension to the data. The diverse geographical locations of the

participants, spanning various countries, necessitated the use of online interview platforms.

The Christian population in Egypt is overwhelmingly Coptic Orthodox; thus, the research is effectively limited to Coptic Christians. Consequently, the data presented in this thesis are derived mainly from Coptic Christians rather than from Christians of other denominations.

Data was primarily collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the 20 selected participants. The interview questions were carefully designed to elicit detailed information regarding their experiences, perceptions, and observations on the impact of religious stories on children. Prior to commencing data collection, the interview questions were submitted to and approved by the relevant ethical committee of Ibn Haldun University, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines and safeguarding the rights and well-being of the participants. This approval process was a crucial step in validating the research's ethical integrity, and the Committee's approval is attached.

Due to the geographical dispersion of the participants, all interviews were conducted online using Zoom, WhatsApp calls, and Teams. This approach allowed for the inclusion of a diverse range of participants from different countries, overcoming logistical challenges. Each interview was audio-recorded using a recording device, with the explicit consent of the interviewees. Participants were informed at the outset that the interviews would be recorded and were given the option to withdraw at any point if they felt uncomfortable, reinforcing the ethical commitment to voluntary participation and participant autonomy.

Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed. Given that the majority of interviewees were Arabic speakers and the limitations of AI transcription tools for Arabic at the time, a significant portion of the transcription process was performed manually. This meticulous manual transcription ensured accuracy and fidelity to the original spoken words. Subsequently, all transcribed interviews were translated into English to facilitate comprehensive analysis within the broader academic context of the thesis. This dual process of transcription and translation was critical in preparing the raw data for subsequent qualitative analysis.

The transcribed and translated interview data were systematically analyzed manually. The analytical process followed a thematic analysis approach, which involved several iterative steps to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. Initially, the researcher engaged in an intensive reading of all interview transcripts to gain a holistic understanding of the data and to identify recurring ideas and concepts. This initial immersion was crucial for developing a preliminary sense of the key topics discussed by the participants.

Following this, the data was subjected to a rigorous coding process. The first stage involved open coding, where initial themes were extracted directly from the participants' responses. These themes were then grouped into broader categories based on their conceptual similarities. Subsequently, a coding scheme was developed, and specific codes were assigned to segments of the text that represented these categories and themes. This systematic coding allowed for the organization and retrieval of relevant data segments for further in-depth analysis. Each identified theme was then explored in detail, supported by direct quotes from the interviewees to illustrate and substantiate the findings. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' own words, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

To enrich the analytical depth and provide a broader context for the findings, the analysis also incorporated insights and opinions from relevant scholars and authors on the same topics. This integration of academic literature with empirical data allowed for a more comprehensive discussion of the themes and contributed to the theoretical grounding of the study. The manual approach used in this study allowed the researcher to engage more deeply and directly with the data, ensuring that the interpretation remained close to the participants' own words. Throughout the analysis, strict measures were taken to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees. Their real names were replaced with pseudonyms, and any identifying information was carefully redacted to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Throughout the research process, paramount importance was placed on ethical considerations to ensure the protection and well-being of all participants. As previously mentioned, the interview questions and research protocol were rigorously

reviewed and approved by the institutional ethical committee prior to any data collection. This approval signified adherence to established ethical guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw.

All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the procedures for data collection and storage. Explicit consent was obtained from each interviewee before the commencement of the interviews, and they were made aware that their conversations would be recorded. Crucially, participants were repeatedly reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or the need for explanation. This commitment to voluntary participation was a cornerstone of the ethical framework.

To safeguard the privacy and anonymity of the interviewees, all identifying information was meticulously protected during transcription, analysis, and reporting. Real names were replaced with pseudonyms, and direct quotes were presented in a manner that prevented individual identification. While some Christian participants expressed clearly their engagement as a 'missionary job' and even referred the researcher to groups or invited visits to their church, and some Muslim participants expressed reservations about reading the Bible, these interactions were handled with respect and gratitude, maintaining professional boundaries while acknowledging their perspectives. The researcher consistently emphasized the educational purpose of the study, ensuring that all interactions remained within the scope of academic inquiry. The inclusion of interviewees' shared photos of narration tools was done with their explicit consent, understanding that these were general examples rather than personally identifiable images.

Upon completion of the individual thematic analyses for both Muslim and Christian interviewees, a dedicated comparative analysis was undertaken. This involved systematically examining the similarities and differences in their approaches to religious storytelling, the perceived impacts on children, and the challenges and successes encountered. The comparison specifically focused on the distinct narratives used – prophetic stories for Muslim participants and Bible stories for Christian participants – and how these specific narrative traditions shaped their practices and

observations. This comparative lens allowed for the identification of universal themes in religious storytelling as well as culturally and religiously specific nuances.

Findings suggest that storytelling, particularly prophetic narratives significantly enhance children's ability to process abstract concepts in accessible and emotionally resonant ways. These stories provide children with role models whose lives demonstrate values, such as honesty, gratitude, forgiveness, courage, mercy, and altruism. Parents report that when children hear about the trials and triumphs mentioned in these narratives, they begin to internalize and imitate them.

This thesis contributes to the field of religious studies by examining the effectiveness of prophetic and Bible storytelling in shaping children's morals, character and supporting their behavioral and emotional development. It addresses the impact of this tradition in child-rearing practices and offers practical recommendations for integrating these stories into children's everyday lives.

# CHAPTER III

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious storytelling has long functioned as a medium through which faith communities transmit moral teachings, spiritual understanding, and collective identity. Narratives of prophets and sacred figures hold a significant place in both Islamic and Christian traditions, where they are regarded as means of conveying moral reasoning and shaping character.[42] Within these traditions, sacred stories are interpreted not merely as accounts of past events but as narrative frameworks that communicate ethical concepts such as justice, compassion, perseverance, and faith.[43] Scholars of religious education note that prophetic and biblical narratives continue to be used pedagogically because they render complex theological ideas accessible through concrete and memorable human experiences.[44]

Research within developmental psychology and education likewise supports the formative power of storytelling—particularly when embedded in religious contexts. Studies demonstrate that narrative engagement enhances children's moral reflection, empathy, and emotional understanding. [45] Cognitive and neuropsychological research further indicates that listening to and reflecting on stories activates neural systems associated with language, social cognition, and moral evaluation, strengthening both comprehension and empathy. [46] Within this framework, stories of prophets and biblical figures serve a dual purpose: they transmit spiritual tradition while simultaneously fostering children's cognitive, emotional, and moral development in ways consistent

[42] Husni Rahim and Maila Dinia Husni Rahiem, "*The Use of Stories as Moral Education for Young Children,*" International Journal of Social Science and Humanity 2, no. 6 (2012): 454-458.
[43] Vigen Guroian, *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5–7.
[44] Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 63–67.
[45] Kidd, D. C., & Castano, E. (2013). *Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind*. Science, 342(6156), 377-380.
[46] Hasson, U., Egidi, G., Marelli, M., & Willems, R. M. (2018). *Grounding meaning in experience: A broad perspective on embodied language*. Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 90, 174-187.

with their cultural and religious environment. Scholars in both Islamic [47] and Christian[48] traditions have written about the theological and pedagogical importance of these sacred stories.

However, a significant gap exists between this theoretical appreciation and evidence from real-life practice. While many books and articles discuss why religious stories should be told to children, there is a shortage of qualitative research that explores how parents and educators actually use these stories and what outcomes they observe.

In other words, there is ample theory about the potential impact of religious narratives, but there is a lack sufficient in-depth, firsthand accounts from the people who tell these stories frequently. There are very few studies that simply ask parents and teachers: "What changes have you seen in your children's behavior after sharing these stories with them?"

This thesis addresses this gap. It moves from theory to practice by conducting a qualitative, comparative study with Muslim and Coptic Christian parents and educators. Through detailed interviews, this research collects and analyzes their personal experiences, reflections, and direct observations of how prophetic and biblical stories influence their children's moral reasoning, emotional responses, and everyday behavior. By focusing on these lived experiences, this study provides a missing, on-the-ground perspective on the role of religious storytelling in shaping child development.

This review establishes the theoretical foundation for the study by surveying scholarship on the power of narrative in child development, with a specific focus on religious storytelling.

[47] Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003)
[48] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990)

### 3.1. Importance of Storytelling and Religious Narratives

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of human communication, preceding the development of writing systems and serving as a primary means through which societies preserved memory, transmitted norms, and established continuity across generations. From ancient oral traditions to modern media, stories have shaped how individuals and communities construct their understanding of the world. Scholars in anthropology emphasize that storytelling functions as a cultural repository, carrying myths, rituals, and shared values that strengthen collective identity. As Walter J. Ong notes, oral cultures rely on narrative forms not only to communicate but also to preserve and transmit essential cultural knowledge.[49] Jerome Bruner similarly underscores that storytelling is central to human cognition, allowing individuals to organize experience into coherent plots that are both culturally meaningful and personally significant.[50]

Anthropological studies highlight how storytelling conveys social hierarchies, moral codes, and cosmological worldviews across cultures.[51] Within psychology, stories are regarded as instruments of meaning-making that connect abstract concepts to lived experiences. According to developmental psychology, children learn not merely through logical explanation but through narrative forms that simplify complexity and situate ideas within familiar plots and characters. Bruner argues that narrative "deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course."[52] In this sense, narrative operates simultaneously as a cognitive and affective tool, facilitating comprehension, memory, and emotional resonance.

Across civilizations, storytelling has been employed as an educational strategy to instruct, entertain, and socialize the young. In pedagogical contexts, stories function as scaffolding devices that bridge the gap between unfamiliar concepts and learners'

[49] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), 32–36.
[50] Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 56.
[51] Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 23–27.
[52] Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 5.

prior knowledge.[53] They promote engagement, imagination, and empathy by inviting the listener into a participatory relationship with the text or oral performance. Kieran Egan emphasizes that stories are indispensable in education because they "give meaning and emotional force to knowledge."[54] Whether conveyed through folktales, epics, or legends, stories cultivate moral reasoning, social cooperation, and cultural literacy, making them a universal pedagogical instrument.

In the framework of Piagetian developmental theory, stories align with stages of cognitive growth, supporting the transition from concrete operations to more abstract reasoning. Jean Piaget showed how narrative sequences assist children in organizing experiences into coherent structures, a fundamental step in logical thought.[55] Lev Vygotsky, by contrast, emphasized the social dimension of storytelling, viewing it as a "cultural tool" that mediates learning within the *zone of proximal development*.[56] Through dialogic storytelling, children not only absorb information but also co-construct meaning in interaction with adults and peers.

At young age, children learn to engage with stories in ways that reflect how they might later approach their own lives.[57] Zipes emphasizes that the period between six and ten is highlighted as crucial for giving children a "sense of story and an ability to play with story as they may later play with their lives: in a joyful and responsible way".[58] While earlier exposure can also be beneficial, the middle childhood years are a pivotal time for more structured engagement with narrative. Jack Zipes even confirms that creative storytelling is a powerful tool for fostering community building and contributing to positive life changes. He says that storytelling in schools helps children see how everyday things can be special, fostering collaboration and encouraging self-reflection. Storytellers act like the "big 'bad' wolf," stirring up curiosity and thought to unite people around shared concerns for their children's future; "the storyteller is in many

[53] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8–12.
[54] Kieran Egan, *Teaching as Storytelling: An Alternative Approach to Teaching and Curriculum in the Elementary School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23.
[55] Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 74.
[56] Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 86.
[57] Catherine E. Snow, *Literacy and Language: Relationships during the Preschool Years,* Harvard Educational Review 53, no. 2 (1983): 165-189.
[58] Jack Zipes, *Creative Storytelling: Building Community, Changing Lives* (New York: Routledge, 1995), https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781136661556_A23861011/preview-9781136661556_A23861011.pdf

respects like the big “bad” wolf, a rabble-rouser whose stories are meant to incite, not to destroy, to provoke thought and curiosity; to point a way toward creating a network within a community that brings people together around the concerns they may have for the future of their children."

Penelope Leach[59] states that engagement with fantasy and storytelling enables children to construct diverse representations of self and reality, facilitating cognitive and social development. This imaginative exploration allows them to process experiences, develop creativity, and understand social norms, ultimately leading to shared narratives of reality. She states "Through fantasy and the stories that are fantasy-with-words, children (like all human beings everywhere and in every time) construct kaleidoscopic[60] versions of themselves and of reality, shaking them together in their growing brains to produce myriads of different patterns and versions until like historians, they arrive at a story that others will share as true. Until they have done so, much of our information and explanation passes unnoticed: 'This one is green'; 'There aren't really any monsters'; 'He didn't mean to hurt you'; 'You're cold; you need your coat'; 'It's nice to say "please":)" She also emphasizes that around the age of seven, children experience significant developmental changes that are universally recognized. At this stage, they become more aware of the broader society beyond their family and show a strong desire to learn about its knowledge, skills, history, concerns, and aspirations. This period marks a new level of maturity and a drive for learning, as children strive to integrate into their social groups by adopting prevailing values and behaviors. She says whether the focus is on children’s feelings, understandings or thoughts, their judgments, beliefs or reasoning, the beginning of middle childhood promises a new maturity and a new desire to learn that is recognized in every culture. All over the world, it is at about seven years of age that children become increasingly aware of a wider society surrounding the family. They want to acquire its knowledge and skills; they need to learn its history; they strive to understand its concerns and aspirations. And because children are, above all, social animals, they do all that learning within a context of social value systems and come to behave as others in their social group behave.

[59] Leach, P. (1995). *Children First: What Society Must Do--and Is Not Doing--for Children Today* (Paperback ed.). Vintage

[60] Kaleidoscopic means rapidly changing from Changing form, pattern, color, etc., in a manner suggesting a kaleidoscope, http://dictionary.com/browse/kaleidoscopic

Beyond developmental theories, narrative psychology underscores the role of storytelling in constructing selfhood and moral identity. Bruner describes human beings as "homo narrans" — storytelling organisms who interpret life events through narrative frameworks.[61] Stories thus act as cognitive schemas that shape memory, guide moral judgment, and enable individuals to situate themselves within a larger cultural and historical narrative.

- **Transition to Religious Storytelling**

Religious narratives often combine moral instruction with spiritual symbolism, aiming to cultivate ethical behavior, identity formation, and existential meaning.[62] The religious and pedagogical power of these stories lies in their ability to connect the ordinary with the transcendent, offering children models of virtue, resilience, and moral decision-making.

In both Christian and Islamic contexts, scholars note that religious stories differ from any other tales by emphasizing divine agency, prophetic exemplarity, and eternal moral lessons. Biblical parables and Qur'anic narratives, for example, do not merely entertain; they are designed to guide, warn, and inspire across generations.[63] Comparative studies further reveal that while other stories are often culture-bound, religious narratives claim universality, presenting lessons intended to transcend historical and cultural boundaries. Seyyed Hossein Nasr observes that Qur'anic stories, for instance, function as archetypes for moral and spiritual development,[64] while Kenneth J. E. Wright emphasizes the role of biblical narratives in shaping children's ethical imagination.[65]

[61] Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 15.
[62] Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 128.
[63] John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 46–49.
[64] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 103.
[65] Kenneth J. E. Wright, Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research and Applications (London: Cassell, 2013), 67.

Narrative is a foundational method for religious instruction and moral formation in both Christianity and Islam. Within these traditions, sacred texts themselves employ storytelling as a primary mode of guidance. In Islam, the Qur'an explicitly frames its accounts of past prophets as pedagogical instruments. The verse, "Indeed in their stories there is a lesson for those of understanding" (Qur'an 12:111), positions these narratives not simply as historical records, but as tools for moral and spiritual instruction. [66] Classical Islamic exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, have consistently interpreted these stories as serving to strengthen faith, model ethical conduct, and cultivate virtues like patience. Contemporary scholarship affirms that Qur'anic narratives are designed to engage believers cognitively, morally, and emotionally, establishing them as a cornerstone of religious upbringing.

The Christian tradition similarly employs narrative as a central mode of religious instruction. The Bible's structure is largely narrative, organized around accounts of covenant, prophecy, and salvation history.[67] Within this, the Gospels frequently utilize parables—concise, illustrative stories—as the primary vehicle for conveying the moral and theological teachings of Jesus in an accessible format.[68]

Historical Christian theologians have long emphasized the pedagogical function of these texts. Augustine, in *De Doctrina Christiana*, argued that scriptural narratives guide belief and behavior by inviting reflection and emulation.[69] Later thinkers like Thomas Aquinas further elaborated on the exemplary nature of biblical stories, positing that the lives of apostles and saints provide concrete models of virtue for adherents.[70] This approach continues in modern analysis; scholars such as Gabriel Moran observe that storytelling provides a necessary framework for children to comprehend and internalize abstract theological concepts.[71]

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[66] The Qur'an 12:111 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* [Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1989], 585).
[67] For analysis of the narrative structure of the Bible, see N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), particularly chapter 5, which discusses the "story-formed" nature of Christian worldview and theology.
[68] Dodd, C. H. *The Parables of the Kingdom.* Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1978.
[69] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine (De Doctrina Christiana)*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Book II, Chapter 6.
[70] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), I-II, Q. 102, Art. 2.
[71] Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 45-48.

Comparative analysis indicates that within Islamic and Christian contexts, religious narratives are distinguished from secular stories by their asserted divine origin and claim to universal moral authority. William A. Graham posits this meaning, "Scripture is not simply a text that is read, but a 'voice' that is heard... It is a vehicle of divine authority and presence, and as such, it commands a response that is fundamentally different from the response to other kinds of literature." [72] Rather than merely conveying cultural history, Qur'anic and biblical stories are fundamentally oriented toward shaping religious identity, inculcating a specific ethical framework, and defining the believer's relationship with the divine. Consequently, religious storytelling operates as an essential pedagogical practice, situated at the confluence of communal memory, moral instruction, and spiritual formation.

### 3.2. Religious Storytelling and Children's Development

Within both Islamic and Christian traditions, storytelling is presented in religious literature not as a form of entertainment but as a pedagogical tool intended to influence a child's cognitive development and emotional formation. Scholarly studies in both faith contexts emphasize that sacred narratives are regarded as central to engaging the child's intellectual and affective capacities within a religious upbringing.[73]

In Islamic educational sources, the Qur'anic verse, "Indeed, in their stories there is a lesson for people of understanding" (Qur'an 12:111), is frequently cited as a textual basis for the use of prophetic narratives. Classical and modern scholars argue that such stories function to engage children's reasoning processes while also shaping their emotional and spiritual orientation. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, in his writings on spiritual education, highlights the formative role of storytelling in cultivating moral character from early childhood. He suggests that children should be introduced to the stories of prophets and the righteous in order to foster admiration and moral learning. According to this approach, the pedagogical function of religious stories lies in their ability to illustrate cause-and-effect patterns—such as the rewarding of virtue or the

[72] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 68.
[73] Dr. Ekram Beshir and Dr. Mohamed Rida Beshir, *Parenting Skills: Based on The Qur'an and Sunnah* (Beltsville, MD: amana publications, 2004), 33, 58, https://dokumen.pub/parenting-skills-based-on-the-quran-and-sunnah-1590080297-2004019500.html

consequences of wrongdoing—while simultaneously inviting emotional identification with the experiences of the prophets. [74]

Contemporary Muslim educators build on this foundation. Dr. Suwayd, a Syrian educator, in his book The Prophetic Method for Educating the Child, dedicates a section to "Storytelling and its Educational and Psychological Impact." He explicitly argues that religious stories are one of the most effective means to contribute to the development of what is termed an “Islamic personality,” by presenting abstract theological concepts such as divine oneness, divide trust, and moral character in forms accessible to children. Here, the pedagogical emphasis lies in making complex religious ideas comprehensible and emotionally resonant through narrative models. He uses the story of Prophet Yūsuf as his prime example, detailing how its narrative makes the abstract concept of patience in the face of betrayal and hardship emotionally resonant and psychologically comprehensible for a child, thereby providing a powerful model for navigating their own complex emotions.[75]

- **The Christian Perspective: Forming Faith and Feeling**

In Christian religious education, a similar emphasis is placed on biblical storytelling as a means of shaping children’s faith, intellect, and emotions. The parables of Jesus are often presented as paradigmatic examples of this narrative pedagogy. In classic works on Christian education, authors highlight the role of stories in capturing children’s imagination and rendering theological ideas more accessible.[76] Stonehouse describes how children engage cognitively with biblical characters’ moral dilemmas while also experiencing emotional investment in the outcomes, thereby allowing them to explore virtues such as courage and loyalty within a formative context. She writes, "The story is the gateway to the child's heart... It is through the story that we can best convey the great truths of the Gospel."[77] Stonehouse argues that when children hear

[74] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, trans. Fazli Ulvan (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2011), 3:85. Alternatively, for an online source, see *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. Kenneth Honerkamp, Book 20, "The Book on the Etiquette of Earning a Livelihood," Ghazali Children's Project, https://www.ghazali.org/rrs-ovr/
[75] Dr. Muhammad Nur Suwayd, *Manhaj al-Tarbiyyah al-Nabawiyyah lil-Tifl (The Prophetic Method for Educating the Child)*, 11th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Multaqa, 2009), 233-238.
[76] Catherine M. Stonehouse, *Patterns in Moral Development* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), 45.
[77] Ibid, 45.

stories of biblical figures, they do not just learn facts; they are drawn into the narrative, cognitively processing the moral dilemmas and emotionally investing in the outcomes. This engagement allows them to "try on" virtues like courage, as with David, and loyalty, as with Ruth, in a safe and formative context. Cognitively, scholars also argue that biblical narratives provide the essential "language" and framework for a child to construct a coherent understanding of God, faith, and the world. Jerome Berryman, the founder of the Godly Play[78] method, posits that these sacred stories, parables, and liturgical lessons give children the necessary "vocabulary" to name and explore their religious experiences and existential wonder. [79] This process is not merely informational but deeply formational, as the narrative structure allows a child's mind to grasp complex theological abstractions—such as grace, covenant, and redemption—by embedding them within the concrete, relatable struggles and triumphs of characters like David, Moses, or the Prodigal Son.

Jerome Berryman founded The Godly Play method as an approach aiming to utilize storytelling, wonder, and reflective play to foster spiritual development in children. The method is grounded in the belief that children have an innate capacity for religious experience and that their spiritual development requires a specialized "language" composed of sacred narrative, parable, and liturgical action.[80] In practice, a storyteller presents a biblical narrative or parable using simple, three-dimensional materials in a deliberate, ritualized manner. Following the presentation, the children are invited into a period of "wondering," where open-ended questions—such as "I wonder what you liked best?" or "I wonder where you are in this story?"—are posed. This phase is designed not to test for correct answers but to encourage personal reflection, cognitive engagement with the narrative's symbols, and the formation of personal meaning.[81] The impact of The Godly Play on children is observed across cognitive and affective domains. Cognitively, the method provides a tangible framework for processing abstract theological concepts. By manipulating physical materials that represent

[78] Godly Play: Making meaning through story, wonder, and play, https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/get-started, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEuRHWPS-Qw

[79] Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 15.

[80] Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991)

[81] Jerome W. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: The Sunday Morning Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

elements of a story—such as a desert box for Exodus narratives or wooden figures for parables—children actively construct and internalize the narrative, making complex ideas more accessible.[82] Affectively, the method aims to create a safe and open environment where children can connect the stories to their own emotional lives. The wondering questions specifically facilitate this by allowing children to project their own feelings, fears, and joys onto the narrative, thereby helping them develop emotional literacy within a spiritual context. The ultimate objective of Godly Play is not merely the transmission of biblical knowledge but the facilitation of an encounter where children can use the language of the Christian tradition to make meaning of their world and their relationship with the divine.[83]

Sofia Cavalletti, in her work with young children, observed that engagement with core biblical stories, such as the Parable of the Good Shepherd, elicits a visible response of deep joy and peace, which she interprets as the child's soul finding its "corresponding term" or ultimate home in the divine love revealed through the narrative.[84] This emotional resonance is pedagogically intentional; the stories are understood to shape the child's affections and moral imagination, teaching them not only what to believe but also *how to feel* and react their relationship with divine and people. By presenting models of courage, compassion, repentance, and forgiveness, the stories provide a safe imaginative space for children to navigate their own complex emotions, fostering empathy and building a moral and spiritual identity that is both intellectually grounded and emotionally engaged.

The religious literature from both Islamic and Christian traditions presents a consistent theme: sacred storytelling is an indispensable practice for the holistic development of a child. It is valued for its dual capacity to construct a cognitive framework of faith and morality while simultaneously engaging the emotions, fostering empathy, and shaping a religious identity that is both intellectually grounded and emotionally resonant. Despite the generally positive view of religious storytelling, some scholars raise critical concerns. Supporters argue that narrative immersion fosters deep

[82] Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children*, trans. Patricia M. Coulter and Julie M. Coulter (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992).
[83] Berryman, *Godly Play*, 28
[84] Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child*.

engagement, cultivating both cognitive flexibility and emotional resilience.[85] Critics, however, suggest that exposure to highly moralized or dogmatic stories at an early age may restrict critical thinking, leading to oversimplified worldviews or uncritical acceptance of authority.[86] Others caution that stories portraying divine punishment or eschatological themes may provoke anxiety rather than constructive moral reflection.[87]

Nevertheless, the prevailing consensus in religious, educational and psychological literature affirms that when presented thoughtfully, religious storytelling provides an integrative medium where cognition and emotion converge, shaping both intellectual development and emotional well-being in children.

- **The Pedagogical Power of Sacred Narrative in Moral and Faith Education**

The use of sacred narrative as a pedagogical instrument is widely discussed in both Islamic and Christian educational literature, moving beyond the concept of general storytelling to a structured approach for conveying doctrine, ethical principles, and spiritual ideas. Scholars and educators in both traditions have systematically articulated how these stories function as curated educational instruments, offering children concrete examples of ethical behavior, resilience, and compassion.[88] These narratives are integral not only to religious instruction but also to the moral and emotional development of young learners. Scholars emphasize that religious storytelling helps children internalize complex moral concepts by engaging their emotions and imagination.[89] Stonehouse offers relevant insight saying "Biblical stories play an important role in the elementary child's search for answers. Coles found that children relate the experiences of biblical characters to the events of their own lives. As children think about these stories, they see themselves in the characters and see God working and relating to those biblical people. Certain stories grab children, inspire

[85] Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 28.
[86] James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 143–145.
[87] Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 64–66.
[88] Bettelheim, B. (1976). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. Knopf.
[89] Stonehouse, C., & May, S. (2010). *Listening to children on the spiritual journey: Guidance for those who teach and nurture*. Baker Books.

their imagination, and draw them to reflect on life, meaning, and God."[90] A significant number of studies have supported the pedagogical effectiveness of storytelling in religious education. Harris & Koenig assert that testimonies (or narratives) provide children with frameworks for understanding abstract concepts such as justice, mercy, and perseverance. They argue that children's trust in testimony extends beyond empirical data, allowing them to develop concepts about things they cannot directly experience, such as the brain's function or the existence of God, and this reliance on testimony is a fundamental aspect of getting knowledge about both secular and spiritual realms.[91] Similarly, research by Berryman emphasizes the significance of biblical storytelling in nurturing children's moral reasoning and spiritual imagination. [92] He illustrates this through an encounter between a child and a priest, highlighting the depth of understanding achieved through shared parable work: "There was a lot packed into that brief theological encounter between a child and his priest. Most of it was nonverbal and depended on having worked with parables together in the same way with mutual respect many times."[93] Berryman underscores the importance of engaging deeply with each parable, "It really is better to take as much time as is needed to enter the world of each parable and wonder about it, like he had learned to do in the church school, following the method of Godly Play."[94] He further advocates for a thoughtful exploration of theological history to better support children's spiritual development.

In Christian educational literature, the parables of Jesus are analyzed as a distinct pedagogical genre that invites reflection and reorientation of thought. Klyne Snodgrass, in his comprehensive study *Stories with Intent*, describes the parables as devices intended to "reorient perception and invite a new way of seeing God and life."[95] He further notes that they function rhetorically as "weapons of warfare against

[90] Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 135.
[91] Paul L. Harris and Melissa A. Koenig, "Trust in Testimony: How Children Learn About Science and Religion," *Child Development* 77, no. 3 (May/June 2006): 505-524, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00886.x
[92] Jerome W. Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: An Imaginative Method for Presenting Scripture Stories to Children*, vol. 2 (Denver: Morehouse Education Resources, 2009), 14.
[93] Ibid
[94] Ibid, Godly Play: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godly_Play, https://rb.gy/ko75mi
[95] Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 23.

the powers of evil and ingrained patterns of thought,"[96] language that underscores their perceived transformative and disruptive educational role.

Building on this interpretation, Catherine M. Stonehouse examines how biblical stories are selected and adapted in Christian education to facilitate children's moral and spiritual development. She observes that narratives such as the Parable of the Good Samaritan are presented to "raise questions about who our neighbor is and what it means to love," thereby using storytelling to engage children in ethical inquiry and reflection.[97]

Within Islamic pedagogy, the stories of the prophets are regarded as a foundational component of religious instruction. Ibn Kathīr, in the introduction to his *Stories of the Prophets*, outlines this purpose, stating: "We have related these stories in the manner ordained by God... so that the reader may discern the wisdom behind God's actions and the perfect planning in His creation, thereby strengthening his faith and increasing his certainty."[98] This statement illustrates how classical Muslim scholars viewed prophetic narratives as a means of reinforcing theological principles—particularly those related to divine wisdom, justice, and omnipotence—through engagement with historical exemplars.

Contemporary scholars have continued to interpret these stories within structured educational frameworks. Dr. ʿAbd al-Karīm Zaydān, in his writings on Islamic education, categorizes the objectives of prophetic narratives into pedagogical domains: establishing the principles of faith, clarifying the foundations of religious law, and providing practical models for ethical conduct.[99] He says that the story of Mūsā and Pharaoh is often cited in Islamic curricula to illustrate theological concepts of divine justice and moral steadfastness in the face of oppression. This use of narrative demonstrates how complex theological and legal ideas can be rendered more accessible through illustrative storytelling that supports learners' comprehension and

[96] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 27.
[97] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 118.
[98] Imād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Dārussalam, 1999), xxiii.
[99] 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *The Individual and the State in Islamic Law* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1999), 145.

ethical reflection. Similarly, the story of Joseph illustrates patience, integrity, and forgiveness, providing a narrative structure through which children can explore the value of trust, ethical decision-making, and emotional resilience. Through these stories, young learners are exposed to moral virtues in action, enabling a deeper emotional connection with religious pedagogical values.

Hay & Nye, in their book: The spirit of the child,[100] state that what distinguishes religious narratives as educational tools is their ability to evoke empathy and imagination. As children listen to or engage with these stories, they do more than passively receive information—they actively identify with the characters, internalizing values through emotional and cognitive reflection. Hay & Nye explore children's innate spiritual awareness, introducing the concept of "relational consciousness (their innate capacity to connect deeply with others). They emphasize that children's spirituality is relational and interactive; they don't passively absorb stories but "respond to them in ways that integrate their own experiences". They stress that "meaning-making in children arises from emotional resonance, not abstract dogma." In addition to fostering individual growth, religious storytelling reinforces a collective spiritual and cultural identity.[101] Through shared narratives, children understand their role within a wider faith community, nurturing a sense of belonging and continuity (Wright, 2000). These stories are thus not merely instructional but formative, shaping character and ethical outlook from an early age.

### 3.3. Religious Storytelling in the Digital Era

In contemporary digital culture, children are increasingly exposed to high-speed, screen-based media environments that often privilege entertainment, instant gratification, and visual stimulation over ethical reflection and spiritual formation. Scholars across Christian and Islamic educational thought have examined how sacred narratives from the Bible and the Qur'an can retain their formative and pedagogical significance within this shifting context. At the same time, empirical and pedagogical research has raised concerns that the proliferation of digital media—particularly short-form videos, interactive games, and algorithmically curated content—may weaken

[100] Hay, D., & Nye, R. (2006). *The spirit of the child*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
[101] Ibid

children's capacity for sustained attention, contemplation, and moral reflection. These developments have prompted renewed interest in how religious storytelling can serve as a counterbalance, fostering cognitive, emotional, and spiritual depth in an age characterized by constant digital engagement.

A recurrent theme in the literature concerns the tension between traditional, community-based storytelling and the passive forms of consumption often associated with digital media. In the Christian context, theologian and educator John Westerhoff, in his work Will Our Children Have Faith? emphasized the formative power of an "intentional, faith community" in a child's spiritual and moral development. Writing during the early stages of the digital transition, he argued that while information could be transmitted electronically, faith formation depends on relational and communal contexts in which stories are lived, shared, and embodied. [102] For Westerhoff, the threat of digital culture lies in its potential to reduce religion to "just another subject to be learned,"[103] stripping the narrative of its power to form a holistic worldview within a living community. His work reflects broader concerns among Christian educators about maintaining the depth of spiritual formation in an increasingly mediated culture.

Parallel concerns appear in contemporary Islamic educational thought. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, in his writings on The Concept of Education, argues that Islamic education must cultivate ethical discipline and intellectual coherence to safeguard learners from confusion and moral disorientation. Within this framework, prophetic narratives serve as formative tools for instilling moral discernment and spiritual stability, helping children interpret external influences through a unified, value-based lens. He explicitly writes that Islamic education aims to produce an **"**integrated, balanced, and disciplined soul**"** and warns against "the confusion and loss of ethical discipline" that arise when information is received without proper ethical and spiritual guidance. He also emphasizes that Qur'anic narratives and prophetic examples are central pedagogical means for forming right behavior and moral

[102] John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3rd ed. (Toronto: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 3.
[103] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 56.

discernment and for cultivating intellectual and spiritual coherence in an age of competing influences.[104]

Recent studies also document adaptive approaches that employ digital media as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional storytelling. The work of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship has been pivotal in documenting this shift. Christian educator Tracy Radosevic explores the practice of "Digital Storytelling" within religious education, describing it as most effective when it "incorporates metaphors or offers complementary sounds and imagery to a story."[105] This method seeks to use technology as a pedagogical bridge—connecting contemporary learners to the cultural and theological world of sacred texts—while preserving the interpretive and affective depth of the original narratives. This perspective is reinforced by media producer Tim Coombs, who explains that effective digital storytelling uses "visual metaphors" that act as a "bridge from our world to the biblical world and culture."[106] This represents a strategic adaptation where technology becomes a new vessel for religious stories, aiming to make them accessible to a digitally-native generation without diluting their theological content.

Overall, the literature on religious storytelling in the digital era highlights two main directions. The first emphasizes protecting the communal and formative value of religious traditions, which may be weakened by the fast and potential superficiality of digital media. The second focuses on using digital tools in creative ways to make sacred stories more engaging and accessible for modern learners. Together, these approaches show how educators and scholars are balancing the preservation of religious traditions with the opportunities offered by new technology in sharing Biblical and Qur'anic narratives. On protecting communal and formative values, Yasni Hellen Lae, the author of Digital Transformation and Challenges in Christian Religious

[104] Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education.* Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1999.
[105] Tracy Radosevic, quoted in "*Digital Storytelling: Use Multimedia in Worship to Enhance, Not Replace*," Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/digital-storytelling-use-multimedia-in-worship-to-enhance-not-replace/.
[106] Tim Coombs, quoted in " *Digital Storytelling: Use Multimedia in Worship to Enhance, Not Replace*," Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/digital-storytelling-use-multimedia-in-worship-to-enhance-not-replace/.

Education: A Critical Perspective, [107] says “in faith-based education systems, especially those rooted in communal and relational values, the shift to digital modes demands critical reflection. Theological educators are increasingly concerned with how technological affordances shape the transmission of sacred knowledge and the embodiment of Christian values in digital spaces.” On adapting and integrating digital tools, he says “digital tools and platforms have enhanced access to theological resources, enabled flexible and interactive learning environments, and facilitated the building of online faith communities. These developments have the potential to democratize Christian education, particularly by reaching marginalized or geographically isolated learners.” He adds “the creative use of digital media can engage younger generations, especially digital natives, in ways that traditional pedagogies often fail to do.”[108]

Ryan Panzer, in his article *Creativity as Faith Formation: The Importance of Telling Stories in a Digital Age*, says "the act of passively consuming content—whether it's watching hours of YouTube videos or losing track of time on TikTok—can dull our imaginative capacities. It’s easy to fall into the habit of mindlessly watching rather than actively creating."[109] As Livingstone and Smith observe, "problematic internet use is characterized by a cognitive preoccupation with the internet, an inability to control its use, going online to relieve emotional distress, and continued use despite negative consequences."[110] These concerns are particularly salient in religious studies, where the cultivation of sustained reflection, empathy, and ethical discernment are integral to spiritual development. Ryan Panzer emphasizes "the church ought to engage in this critical tension of the digital age, with leaders who empower and embolden the creation and distribution of stories. After all, creativity and faith formation are deeply interrelated, especially when we define creativity as a process of articulating experiences and telling stories." This idea is also articulated by Pettersen

[107] Yasni Hellen Lae, *“Digital Transformation and Challenges in Christian Religious Education: A Critical Perspective,” Journal Didaskalia* 8, no. 1 (April 2025): 1–10, https://jurnal.sttii-surabaya.ac.id/index.php/didaskalia/article/view/480/413
[108] Ibid
[109] Panzer, R. (n.d.). *Creativity as Faith Formation: The Importance of Telling Stories in a Digital Age*. Church Anew, https://churchanew.org/blog/posts/ryan-panzer-creativity-as-faith-formation
[110] Livingstone, S., & Smith, P. K. (2014). *Annual Research Review: Harms Experienced by Child Users of Online and Mobile Technologies: The Nature, Prevalence and Management of Sexual and Aggressive Risks in the Digital Age*. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 55(6), 635–654. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12197

(2019), he says "lived experiences are personal, intimate and unique and can be layered with other experiences, along with relatable research. Inquiring into lived experiences is my preferred practice for engaging in pedagogical relationships. It can also be an entry into a spiritual pedagogy, especially when the lived experiences inquired into offer the opportunity to deeply wonder and to notice thoughts and feelings; this is a connection with the inner life."[111]

As an alternative to the immediacy and ephemerality of digital stimuli, narrative-based methodologies—such as oral storytelling—offer significant developmental advantages. Storytelling has been shown to enhance attentional control and listening skills by inviting children into structured, coherent narratives that require interpretive engagement and cognitive processing. Furthermore, whereas exposure to fast-paced screen content has been linked to sleep disturbances, the use of storytelling in bedtime routines has been associated with improvements in sleep hygiene and emotional regulation. Dr. Leora Mogilner, associate professor of pediatrics at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, emphasizes that "establishing a bedtime routine that includes reading books and telling stories is a wonderful way to promote parent-child bonding while helping develop children's literacy, language, and social-emotional skills."

From a methodological perspective, this contrast between digital media consumption and traditional narrative practices invites renewed attention to storytelling as a form of religious pedagogy. Religious storytelling, in particular, provides a rich avenue for cognitive, emotional, and ethical development, as it conveys enduring moral frameworks through engaging, contextually situated narratives. Studies emphasize that sacred stories function as moral containers—they carry values across generations in forms that are both memorable and transformative for young minds. In *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories*, William J. Bennett compiles a rich anthology of tales from diverse traditions, including the Bible, Aesop's Fables, and Native American folklore. These stories are curated to instill virtues such as honesty, courage, and compassion in young readers. Bennett emphasizes that these narratives are not merely for entertainment but are instrumental in moral education, stating that

[111] Pettersen, A., (2015). *Angels: A bridge to a spiritual pedagogy?* International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 20(1), 4–17

they help children understand what virtue is and how to live it. These narratives invite active interpretation and internalization of values, fostering a sense of identity, empathy, and moral reasoning in young audiences. Coles emphasizes this point, that children respond to moral stories not because they are told to, but because they identify with the characters and grasp the weight of moral decisions.[112]

Thus, when investigating the impact of religious narratives on the behavior and development of children, it becomes essential to account for the broader media ecology within which these stories are situated. Storytelling should be considered not only as a medium of instruction but as a formative practice capable of counterbalancing the fragmented and often superficial moral landscape presented by contemporary digital media.[113] Religious stories rooted in various faith traditions present time-honored virtues in a format that captivates children's imaginations. These stories serve as intellectual and emotional anchors, helping young audiences understand complex moral concepts. For instance, the story of Joseph (Yusuf) as told in both the Bible and Qur'an illustrates the values of patience, forgiveness, and resilience in adversity. Similarly, the story of David and Goliath—commonly shared across Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions—demonstrates the triumph of courage, faith, and moral conviction over brute strength.[114]

Religious narratives also introduce children to the consequences of ethical decisions. The story of Jonah (Yunus), found in both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, communicates themes of repentance, responsibility, and divine mercy.[115] The Exodus narrative, where Moses leads the Israelites across the Red Sea, illustrates perseverance and trust amid uncertainty.[116] Such stories reinforce ethical frameworks that enable children to navigate personal and social challenges with moral clarity and emotional resilience.[117]

[112] Coles, R. (1989). *The moral life of children*. Atlantic Monthly Press.
[113] Alter, R. (2011). *The art of biblical narrative*. Basic Books.
[114] Nasr, S. H. (2003). *The heart of Islam: Enduring values for humanity*. HarperOne
[115] Esposito, J. L., Fasching, D. J., & Lewis, T. (2006). World Religions Today. Oxford University Press
[116] Esposito, J. L. (2011). What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam. Oxford University Press, p. 100.
[117] Brueggemann, W. (2010). *An introduction to the Old Testament: The canon and Christian imagination*. Westminster John Knox Press.

### 3.4. Religious Narratives in Interactive Play

The integration of religious narratives into interactive play represents a pedagogical approach within both Christian and Islamic education, moving beyond passive storytelling to active, embodied engagement.

In Christian education, the *Godly Play* method developed by Jerome Berryman offers a systematic framework for using interactive play in the teaching of biblical narratives. Berryman conceptualizes *Godly Play* as a means of providing children with a symbolic "language" for expressing their spiritual understanding, composed of sacred story, parable, and liturgical action, which they explore through tactile interaction.[118] In a *Godly Play* session, a storyteller presents a biblical account using simple, three-dimensional materials—such as a desert box for the Exodus narratives or wooden figures for parables. Following the presentation, children are invited to engage in guided reflection, described as "wondering," and then to work independently with the materials. Berryman argues that play constitutes a natural mode of learning and engagement, enabling children to internalize the structure and meaning of the narratives through self-directed exploration.[119]

This pedagogical model is further developed in the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* program, co-founded by Sofia Cavalletti. Cavalletti documents how young learners respond to tactile materials that concretize biblical accounts—such as miniature representations of Jerusalem or figures depicting the Good Shepherd and his sheep. She characterizes this engagement not as mere recreation but as purposeful "work" that supports children's capacity for reflection and comprehension. For instance, when presented with a model of the Cenacle (the Upper Room of the Last Supper), children manipulate its objects as part of an activity that facilitates understanding of the narrative's symbolic and theological dimensions.[120] Through this process, material

[118] Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 15
[119] Jerome W. Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: An Imaginative Method for Presenting Scripture Stories to Children*, vol. 1 (Denver: Morehouse Education Resources, 2002), 17.
[120] Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), 109.

interaction functions as a medium for cognitive and affective engagement with religious content.

Many educators and religious organizations have applied the Godly Play methodology across various educational and worship settings, adapting it for classroom use, Sunday schools, and faith-based early learning environments. A significant number of online platforms, such as the Godly Play Foundation[121] and Etsy Education[122], display a wide range of materials designed to support this method. These resources illustrate how biblical stories are presented through tactile, interactive engagement. For instance, the *Creation Story* set[123] uses simple felt underlays, light and dark panels, and wooden symbols to help children explore the sequence of creation days. Another application by Sunday school the researcher found is like this:




**Figure 3.1. Creation Story Through Play**

[121] https://store.godlyplayfoundation.org/
[122] https://shorturl.at/8s4HQ
[123] https://www.etsy.com/market/creation_story




**Figure 3.2. Days of Creation Craft**



**Figure 3.3. Noah's Ark**

The *Noah's Ark*[124] *and the Flood* materials include a handcrafted ark, pairs of animals, and figures of Noah and his family, allowing children to re-enact the story's events and reflect on themes of covenant and renewal.

[124] PLAYMOBIL Take Along Noah's Ark Zoo Toy Set - Walmart.com



**Figure 3.4. The Good Shepherd**

The *Good Shepherd and the Lost Sheep* set employs small wooden figures of the shepherd and flock, inviting children to explore ideas of care, belonging, and trust, such as this:




**Figure 3.5. The Exodus Story**

Similarly, *The Exodus Story* utilizes a desert box, wooden figures of Moses and Pharaoh, and symbols of the Red Sea to make the story's moral and spiritual dimensions tangible. Other examples include *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*, *The*

*Great Family (Abraham and Sarah)*, and *The Mystery of Easter*, each accompanied by distinct symbolic materials and visual cues.

The practical application of the Godly Play methodology demonstrates how theoretical principles of narrative-based and play-centered religious education are translated into concrete classroom and church settings. Developed within Christian pedagogy but adaptable across faith contexts, the approach emphasizes learning through active participation, tactile engagement, and reflective dialogue.[125] Educators and storytellers employ carefully designed materials and story sets to help children encounter biblical narratives in a sensory and exploratory manner.[126] Rather than memorizing or merely listening to religious stories, learners are invited to handle objects, construct scenes, and engage in "wondering" questions that encourage reflection and personal interpretation.[127] This process transforms storytelling into a participatory act in which children integrate symbolic play with moral and spiritual reasoning, linking cognitive exploration with affective learning.[128] The following examples illustrate how Godly Play resources—ranging from structured story kits to open-ended sensory boxes—are used to support this form of interactive and experiential learning.[129]

The use of such construction-based materials in religious education represents an experiential learning approach that aligns with constructivist and Montessori pedagogical principles.[130] For example, LEGO-based models of the Kaʿbah are increasingly used in Islamic educational contexts to help children visualize and understand the spatial and ritual dimensions of the ḥajj by physically assembling representations of the sacred site.

[125] Jerome W. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play,* 5–8.
[126] Jerome W. Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 2: 14 Enrichment Presentations for Fall* (Denver, CO: Living the Good News, 2003), 1–3.
[127] John M. Hull, "Godly Play and the Language of Religious Education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 27, no. 1 (2005): 33–43.
[128] Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 84–87
[129] Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, 46–52
[130] Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 169–75



**Figure 3.6. Lego-Based Model of Kaʿbah**

This tactile process supports cognitive development through sequencing, spatial reasoning, and sensory engagement, enabling learners to connect symbolic practices with concrete activity.[131] Similarly, Christian-themed educational toys, such as *Playmobil's Noah's Ark* or *LEGO's Last Supper*, provide opportunities for children to reconstruct biblical narratives and engage with their moral and thematic content in a hands-on manner.[132]



**Figure 3.7. Lego-Based Model of Last Supper**

[131] Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 90–98.
[132] Karen-Marie Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 112–15.

Rather than emphasizing doctrinal learning, such play environments facilitate story comprehension, cooperative interaction, and problem-solving.[133] The physical act of constructing these scenes allows children to externalize and organize their understanding of narrative structure while fostering creativity and reflective thinking. Moreover, parables such as the Good Samaritan have been adapted into illustrated children's books, digital story apps, and interactive play kits, illustrating how multi-modal media can communicate ethical and social principles such as empathy, cooperation, and inclusion.[134]




**Figure 3.8. Bible Felt Book**

Across these examples, educational design leverages the child's natural engagement with storytelling and construction play to make abstract moral ideas more cognitively and emotionally accessible without privileging any particular theological interpretation.

[133] Jerome W. Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play*, 45–49.
[134]

These adaptations align with experiential learning theories, such as those proposed by Dewey[135] and Kolb[136], which emphasize learning through experience and reflection. O. Fred Donaldson underscores the idea that play is not merely a leisure activity but a fundamental process through which children engage in experiential learning and reflection; he says "children learn as they play. More importantly, in play, children learn how to learn."[137] Thus, by engaging multiple senses and encouraging emotional participation, digital religious storytelling can transform passive consumption into active learning. Such approaches maintain the educational and spiritual value of religious traditions while ensuring their accessibility and relevance in an increasingly digital culture.

### 3.5. Visual and Interactive Media in Religious Education

The increasing integration of digital media into children's lives has prompted religious educators across traditions to explore how visual and auditory technologies can support religious pedagogy. A growing body of literature, including both scholarly analysis and practitioner accounts, examines how videos and songs can function as structured tools for presenting sacred narratives in accessible and developmentally appropriate ways. Rather than viewing media use as a concession to entertainment culture, many religious education theorists regard it as a pragmatic adaptation to contemporary learning environments, where attention and comprehension are often mediated through multisensory experience. Mary E. Hess argues that digital media, when intentionally designed, can deepen religious understanding by creating spaces where learners interact with scripture through visual and auditory.[138]When designed intentionally, such media serve to translate scriptural narratives into formats that enhance attention, memory, and affective engagement, allowing abstract moral and theological ideas to be explored through visual and auditory storytelling.[139]

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[135] Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience And Education*. Macmillan.
[136] Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience As the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice Hall.
[137] Donaldson, O. F. (n.d.). *Children Learn as They Play.* Retrieved from Quotesanity
[138] Mary E. Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 42–45.
[139] Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 187–90.

Within contemporary Christian education, animated video series are widely recognized as effective tools for conveying biblical stories to children. The *VeggieTales* series, created by Phil Vischer and Mike Nawrocki in the 1990s, exemplifies how animation and music are employed to communicate biblical themes into appropriate narratives within a child-friendly cultural idiom. In his account of the project, Phil Vischer explains that the project aimed to communicate "God's stories and values" to children through humor and animation that matched their cultural environment.[140] Episodes such as those based on *David and Goliath*[141] or *Daniel in the Lions' Den*[142] use familiar narrative structures to present ethical dilemmas, with accompanying songs that summarize key lessons through rhythm and rhyme.

Music-based pedagogy complements these visual strategies, employing music directly as a vehicle for narrative retention and comprehension. In an article titled "Using Songs and Music to Teach Kids About the Bible,"[143] published on the family-focused Christian blog *True Groundnuts*, the author outlines a clear rationale for this method. The article posits that music serves as a powerful mnemonic device, asserting that "Music is a wonderful tool for teaching children about the Bible because it captures their attention and makes learning feel like play. Songs about faith can help children remember Bible verses and lessons much more easily, as the melody and rhythm give each word extra power. For children, singing turns Bible study into a lively, memorable experience that goes beyond traditional reading or listening. Here's how you can add tunes to your everyday life."[144] This pedagogical principle is applied extensively in modern digital ministries. The YouTube channel "Lighthouse Kids Family" serves as a prime example, producing animated music videos that set stories of prophets like Noah[145] and David[146] to original, catchy songs, using simple lyrics and a cheerful melody to help children remember the sequence of the story and its core lesson of obedience to God, directly applying the recommended strategy of using music as a mnemonic and engagement tool.

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[140] Phil Vischer, *Me, Myself, & Bob: A True Story About Dreams, God, and Talking Vegetables* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 114.
[141] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psRBFh7mfFk
[142] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDEbFXv6y04
[143] "Using Songs and Music to Teach Kids About the Bible," *True Groundnuts* (blog), https://www.truegroundnuts.com/using-songs-and-music-to-teach-kids-about-the-bible/.
[144] Ibid
[145] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pT0tvgEY6Hk
[146] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z2YqZ46-YI

Parallel developments are evident in Islamic education, where animated storytelling and nasheeds[147] (rhymed or sung devotional pieces) are used to introduce children to Qurʾānic narratives and prophetic biographies. In their paper, Effectiveness of Nasheed-Based Teaching of Islamic Education,[148] Al-Mufraji frames nasheed not merely as devotional music but as an instructional strategy — arguing it strengthens memory, motivation, and attention and should be selected intentionally to meet pedagogical aims. It directly links nasheed use to creating engaging, value-oriented learning environments. This approach is applied several modern digital ministries. Several YouTube channels, such as Quran Stories,[149] are providing media alternatives that align with Islamic ethical frameworks. Their stated objectives focus on creating positive representational spaces and making moral and theological ideas intelligible through character-driven animation and short musical refrains. In addition, a wide repertoire of children's nasheeds—produced by artists such as Zain Bhikha[150] and educational studios like *One 4 Kids*[151]—continues to function as a core pedagogical medium. In an interview, Zain Bhikha[152] describes how repetitive lyrics and simple melodies are designed to enhance recall and emotional connection, allowing children to engage with key moral messages through participatory listening.

Across both traditions, the literature identifies the pedagogical effectiveness of videos and songs in enhancing attention, comprehension, and emotional engagement. By adapting sacred narratives into animated and musical forms, educators align religious instruction with contemporary media literacy, providing children with multisensory entry points into moral and scriptural reflection. These strategies illustrate how visual and auditory storytelling can function as integrative educational tools—supporting memory, interpretation, and cultural belonging—within diverse faith-based learning contexts.

[147] Nasheed: It is an Islamic musical composition, focusing on religious, spiritual, or moral messages, https://dbpedia.org/page/Nasheed
[148] Al-Mufraji, Khadijah A., and Maimoona D. al-Zadjali. 2021. *Effectiveness of Nasheed-Based Teaching of Islamic Education Subject to Fifth-Grade Female Students and Its Impact on Their Achievement and Retention of Learning*. Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies (JEPS) 15, no. 2: 235-55. https://doi.org/10.53543/jeps.vol15iss2pp235-255
[149] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZu173pTldI
[150] https://zainbhikha.com/
[151] https://www.youtube.com/@One4kids-Zaky
[152] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Or-d-OQ8pZ0

# CHAPTER IV

# PROPHETIC AND BIBLICAL NARRATIVES — MORAL AND RELIGIOUS LESSONS FOR CHILDREN

Religious narratives in Islam and Christianity, deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual fabric of societies worldwide, have long served as powerful vehicles for transmitting moral values, shaping character, and fostering a sense of identity. For children, these stories often represent their earliest encounters with complex ethical dilemmas, heroic virtues, and the profound mysteries of faith. This chapter explores selected narratives of prophetic figures drawn from both the Qur'an and the Bible. It examines how these stories are conveyed in the Quran, Hadith, and Bible, alongside scholarly interpretations. The objective is to uncover the religious value embedded in these narratives as transmitted by Muslim scholars and Christian researchers—how these stories communicate ideas such as honesty, courage, forgiveness, responsibility, and empathy—and to consider how these values can be introduced and reinforced in early childhood through storytelling. Each narrative will be mentioned in terms of its core message and the potential it holds to guide children in the development of character, behavioral, and religious awareness.

This chapter examines certain prophetic figures shared by both Islamic and Christian traditions—Adam and Eve, Noah, David and Solomon, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses—maintaining a clear focus on extracting lessons and morals that scholars and educators have identified as beneficial for children's behavioral and religious development within each faith. Particular attention is given to how these stories are introduced to children, not only in terms of the values they communicate but also through the methods, tools, and practices used to transmit them effectively. The analysis explores how these stories are conveyed in their respective sacred texts (the Quran, Hadith, and Bible), alongside a rich tapestry of scholarly interpretations, to highlight how religious educators and scholars view these narratives as shaping children's behavioral and spiritual development. The chapter is structured as follows:

each Bible and prophetic figure's narrative is analyzed separately, with subsections devoted to the story's central message, the moral and behavioral lessons emphasized by scholars, and the influence of these lessons on children's development when conveyed through storytelling. The chapter concludes with a comparative discussion that brings these strands together, showing both convergences and divergences in how Islam and Christianity present prophetic stories and transmit their teachings to the next generation.

### 4.1. Adam and Eve: A Comparative Religious Perspective

The story of Adam and Eve is one of the foundational narratives shared by both Islam and Christianity. It introduces children not only to the beginnings of humankind but also to themes of temptation, disobedience, forgiveness, and moral responsibility. For centuries, scholars, theologians, and educators in both traditions have reflected on the religious and pedagogical value of this story. They have explored how its morals and lessons can be adapted to guide the development of children's character, identity, and worldview.

The Islamic Perspective: The story of Adam and Eve, as conveyed in Islamic tradition; i.e. Quran and Hadith, centers on the creation of humanity, the temptation by Iblis (Satan), and the subsequent repentance and forgiveness of Adam and Eve. Muslim scholars emphasize that this narrative illustrates the human capacity for error, the importance of seeking forgiveness, and the mercy of Allah. According to Al-Tabari (cited in Wheeler)[153], the story underscores the divine infinite mercy, as Adam's repentance is accepted, establishing a model for human accountability and divine forgiveness.[154] The Quranic account (Quran 2:30–39) highlights Adam's role as the first prophet and vicegerent on earth, tasked with upholding divine guidance.

Muslim scholars identify several key moral and behavioral lessons in the story of Adam and Eve that are relevant for children. The narrative teaches responsibility for one's actions, as Wadud notes Adam and Eve's acknowledgment of their mistake after

[153] Wheeler, B. M. (2002). *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*. Continuum, p. 45.
[154] Ibid

eating from the forbidden tree (Quran 7:23) demonstrates the importance of owning up to errors rather than deflecting blame.[155] This encourages children to take responsibility for their actions, fostering accountability from a young age.

The story emphasizes repentance and forgiveness. Rumi (cited in Chittick) interprets Adam's plea for forgiveness as a universal model for seeking divine mercy,[156] teaching children that mistakes are opportunities for growth when followed by sincere remorse. This aligns with Islamic teachings on Allah's mercy, which is accessible to all who seek it earnestly (Quran 7:56)[157].

The narrative conveys humility. Al-Ghazali (cited in Moosa) highlights that Adam's fall from paradise illustrates the dangers of pride and disobedience,[158] encouraging children to cultivate humility and obedience to divine guidance. These lessons are reinforced in Hadith, where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasizes humility as a core virtue.[159]

Narratives like Adam and Eve's resonate with young audiences because they present relatable human experiences—making mistakes and seeking redemption—in a divine context. By hearing about Adam's repentance, children learn that errors do not define them but can lead to spiritual growth if addressed with sincerity.[160] Storytelling also fosters empathy, as children connect with Adam and Eve's vulnerability and their reliance on divine mercy.

Several classical Muslim scholars interpreted the story of Adam and Eve as a narrative of human dignity, divine trust, and moral testing. For children, the story functions as a lesson in obedience and responsibility. Ibn Kathir, in his *Stories of the Prophets*, emphasizes that Adam's creation from clay and his elevation above the angels

[155] Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press, p. 78.
[156] Chittick, W. C. (1983). *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. SUNY Press, p. 112.
[157] https://quran.com/al-araf/56
[158] Moosa, E. (2005). *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*. University of North Carolina Press, p. 134.
[159] Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 164, https://sunnah.com/muslim:164a
[160] Siddiqui, M. (2017). *The Good Muslim: Reflections on Classical Islamic Law and Theology*. Cambridge University Press, p. 89.

demonstrates humanity's honored position before God.[161] For young learners, this instills a sense of dignity and purpose. At the same time, the command not to approach the forbidden tree highlights the importance of obedience. Children are taught that divine rules, even if simple, must be respected because they serve as boundaries for human welfare.

Al-Tabari underscores the theme of temptation in his *Tafsir*. He explains that Satan's whispering to Adam and Eve symbolizes the ongoing struggle between human vulnerability and the constant need for vigilance.[162] For children, this interpretation fosters awareness that temptations are natural, but resisting them requires strength and moral guidance.

Al-Qurtubi adds a legal and ethical dimension, noting that Adam's repentance set the model for seeking forgiveness after mistakes.[163] This insight translates into the moral lesson that children, too, can err, but they should always turn back with humility and repentance. In educational settings, such lessons help prevent children from internalizing guilt, instead teaching them that errors are part of growth.

Al-Ghazali, in *Ihyaʾ ʿUlum al-Din*, treats the story as an allegory for the inner struggles of the soul.[164] For him, the forbidden tree symbolizes the pull of worldly desires, while Adam's fall demonstrates the consequences of giving in to them. He notes that when teaching children, stories like Adam's should be framed in ways that help them understand their inner impulses and the importance of self-control.

Ibn Taymiyyah likewise highlights the theological balance of justice and mercy in God's treatment of Adam.[165] He argues that children can learn that while wrongdoing has consequences, God's mercy provides opportunities for reform. Thus, the story fosters both accountability and hope, which are central to moral education.

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[161] Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003)
[162] al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qurʾān (Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān)*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1987.
[163] al-Qurṭubī, *The Compendium of Qurʾānic Rulings (al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān)*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm al-Atfayish. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1964.
[164] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn)*. Vol. 4. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1996
[165] Ibn Taymiyya, *Collected Fatwas (Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā)*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Qāsim. Riyadh: King Fahd Complex, 1995.

Contemporary Muslim Perspectives have built on these classical insights, often emphasizing the relevance of the Adam and Eve story for educational psychology. Abul A'la Mawdudi, in *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, stresses that the narrative highlights the consequences of disobedience and the importance of learning from mistakes.[166] For children, this reinforces the lesson that freedom must always be coupled with responsibility.

Ghatas interprets the story through the lens of Islamic pedagogy, noting its function in cultivating moral resilience.[167] He suggests that when children hear how Adam acknowledged his error and sought forgiveness, they learn that moral growth comes from humility and self-correction rather than denial.

Nadawy, in his work on the educational impact of prophets' stories, explains that Adam's story provides a model for teaching children about family life, cooperation, and responsibility.[168] The family setting of Adam, Eve, and their children introduces values of kinship, parental care, and social responsibility, which shape children's identity and sense of belonging.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr interprets the story within the broader framework of Islamic spirituality. He argues that children learn from Adam and Eve that human life is a journey of returning to God after straying.[169] This spiritual reading helps children connect the story to their personal sense of growth and purpose.

The Christian Perspective: According to Early Christian Reflections, the story of Adam and Eve also holds a central place in Christian pedagogy. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, interprets the fall as the moment when humanity first experienced disobedience and pride.[170] For Christian educators, this introduces children to the concept of original sin and the need for divine grace. Augustine's writings emphasize

[166] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an (Tafhīm al-Qurʾān)*, trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansari. Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1988.
[167] Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ghatas, *Islamic Education and Its Schools (al-Tarbiya al-Islāmiyya wa-Madārisuhā)*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2001.
[168] Muḥammad Nadawy, *Stories of the Prophets and Their Impact on Education (Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ wa-Atharuhā fī al-Tarbiyya)*. Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2008.
[169] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).
[170] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

that even from an early age, children must learn that wrongdoing has consequences, but God's love provides redemption.

In *The City of God*, Augustine links Adam's fall to the broader human need for order and divine authority.[171] Children can thus learn from the story that obedience to God is essential for harmony in both family and society.

Other Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom, highlighted the pedagogical role of Eve's temptation as a way of teaching vigilance and the dangers of deception. For children, this creates awareness that trust must be wisely placed and that discernment is necessary in daily life.

Modern Christian theologians have explored the Adam and Eve story with a focus on moral psychology and education. Thomas Oden emphasizes the themes of free will and moral accountability.[172] Children are encouraged to see that choices matter and that responsibility accompanies freedom.

Walter Brueggemann views the Genesis narrative as a formative text that speaks to the human condition.[173] For children, it conveys lessons about vulnerability, desire, and forgiveness. Similarly, Brevard Childs interprets the story as central to shaping Israel's theological memory and, by extension, Christian identity.[174] These insights show that children who learn the story are also introduced to their community's foundational memory.

Contemporary educators emphasize how the narrative can teach empathy, forgiveness, and resilience. Stephen Jones, in *Teaching the Bible Creatively to Children*, argues that stories like Adam and Eve help children understand human imperfection and the

[171] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).
[172] Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989).
[173] Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).
[174] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

value of reconciliation.[175] This interpretation ensures that the story is not only about punishment but also about learning to rebuild trust.

- **Comparative Analysis**

When comparing Islamic and Christian perspectives, several points of convergence and divergence emerge. Both traditions view the story as foundational for teaching obedience, responsibility, and the moral consequences of human actions. In Islam, the emphasis falls on Adam's repentance as a model for children to learn humility and self-correction. In Christianity, particularly in Augustinian thought, the emphasis is on the fall as the origin of sin, highlighting the need for divine grace.

For children, the Islamic approach presents a hopeful model: mistakes are part of life, but forgiveness is always available if one sincerely repents. This helps children understand that they should not lose hope when they do something wrong, because forgiveness is always possible. It teaches them humility, self-correction, and resilience—qualities that help them develop a balanced and hopeful outlook on life. By learning that they can improve after mistakes, children build confidence, responsibility, and compassion for others.

In Christianity, the narrative emphasizes the seriousness of sin because it separates humanity from God, and the redemptive work of Christ as the ultimate resolution. This perspective helps children develop a sense of moral vigilance and an awareness of right and wrong. They learn that life involves challenges and temptations, but that God's grace offers strength and healing. For children, this becomes a way to grow spiritually by learning to rely on God, to seek forgiveness, and to appreciate values like obedience, faith, and redemption.

Both perspectives encourage moral vigilance but frame the outcome differently—Islam stresses repentance and resilience, while Christianity stresses redemption and salvation.

[175] Stephen Jones, *Teaching the Bible Creatively to Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

- **Practical Tools for Teaching**

In examining the use of sensory tools and toys for narrating the story of Adam and Eve, a clear difference emerges between Islamic and Christian traditions. Within Islamic contexts, the researcher did not find toys that directly depict the figures of Adam and Eve, the Garden of Paradise, the tree, or the serpent, which are commonly represented in Christian educational materials such as felt boards or figurine sets. This absence is largely due to religious sensitivities, as many Muslim toy makers avoid producing detailed human or prophetic figures out of respect for religious guidelines. Instead, Islamic resources often rely on symbolic representations or abstract tools. For example, rather than figurines, there are puzzles and interactive digital activities available on educational platforms such as *Wordwall*,[176] which present the story of Adam in a question-and-answer format designed to engage children cognitively and morally. In addition, the story of Adam and Eve is frequently shared through audiovisual media; YouTube hosts a number of child-friendly storytelling videos that illustrate the events in creative ways.[177] These emphasize not only the moral lessons of obedience and repentance but also inspire children with hope, portraying Paradise as a beautiful reward to long for. A popular toy used is the puzzle of Jannah. The playset lets children build a simple version of the Garden of Eden.[178] Such approaches encourage children to strive for good deeds and to understand that mistakes, when followed by sincere repentance, need not result in despair. These tools are hands-on way to make the Qur'anic story less abstract and more engaging for children, helping them connect moral lessons to something they can touch, build, and imagine.

In Christian contexts, throughout the study, the researcher found that children often encounter the story in Sunday school through Bible storybooks, puppet shows, and dramatized plays.[179] A common Christian toy is the "Creation and Fall Felt Board Set.[180]" This is a felt board with soft fabric figures of Adam, Eve, animals, the tree, and even the serpent. Teachers or parents let children place the felt characters on the board while narrating the story. Children learn that moving Adam and Eve towards or

[176] https://wordwall.net/resource/6351256/prophet-adam-a
[177] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdqiEQkUTzI
[178] https://crescentmoonstore.com/products/jannah-dreams-puzzle
[179] https://ourcountryroad.blogspot.com/2010/09/adam-and-eve-story-telling-box.html
[180] https://tinyurl.com/bddubkfa

away from the tree is symbolic of making good or bad choices in life. It introduces them to moral decision-making in a very tactile and playful way. [181] Hymns and songs about creation and the fall reinforce the moral themes in accessible ways.[182] Games and activities, such as puzzle sets about Eden, are used to engage children's imagination. Some educators employ interactive lessons that encourage children to reflect on making good choices, thereby connecting the narrative to their everyday lives.

Both traditions thus employ pedagogical tools that combine storytelling, creativity, and play. These methods ensure that the deep moral lessons of the Adam and Eve narrative are communicated in ways that resonate with children's cognitive and emotional development.

### 4.2. Noah's Story in Islamic and Christian Traditions

According to the Islamic Perspective, the story of Noah (Nūḥ) holds a central place in the Qurʾān and Islamic pedagogy, serving as a lesson in patience, perseverance, faith, and obedience. Classical Muslim scholars often highlighted Noah's steadfastness in the face of rejection. Al-Ṭabarī explained that Noah's unyielding call to his people, despite centuries of rejection, embodies for children the value of persistence in truth and moral courage.[183] Similarly, Ibn Kathīr emphasized Noah's role as a model of sincerity and trust in God, portraying him as an exemplar of patience and hope.[184] Such interpretations present children with an image of resilience, showing them that moral conviction must be maintained even in difficult circumstances.

Educationally, the story also highlights obedience to God and respect for parental guidance. Al-Ghazālī stressed that stories such as Noah's encourage children to understand that actions have consequences: those who followed Noah were saved, while those who rejected him faced destruction. [185] For young audiences, this

[181] https://www.amazon.com/Creation-Stories-Storyboard-Sunday-Childrens/dp/B0B81L6WZL
[182] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAMmC3NZJPA
[183] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1987).
[184] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, ed. Sāmī b. Muḥammad al-Salāma (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 2003).
[185] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1996).

reinforces accountability and responsibility. Contemporary Muslim scholars also connect the story with identity formation. Nadawy explains that the story of Noah teaches Muslim children that being in the "minority of truth" should not discourage them, as true success lies in moral integrity and faith. This lesson equips children with resilience against peer pressure and builds their confidence in maintaining religious values.[186]

Modern educationalists stress the developmental impact of the Noah story on children's worldview. Ghatas argued that the narrative instills both hope and fear: hope, in the sense that divine help comes to the righteous; fear, in understanding the dangers of arrogance and wrongdoing.[187] By teaching children that God rewards obedience and punishes corruption, Muslim parents and educators frame moral responsibility as a lifelong commitment. This balance shapes children into disciplined, ethically conscious individuals, nurturing both their sense of belonging to the faith and their broader social responsibility.

According to the Christian Perspective, the story of Noah has long been central to children's moral and spiritual formation. Church Fathers such as Augustine interpreted the ark as a symbol of salvation and the Church, teaching that just as Noah's family was saved by entering the ark, so too believers find safety in God's covenant.[188] This allegorical interpretation made the story a key tool for shaping Christian children's understanding of divine grace and the necessity of faith. John Chrysostom also emphasized Noah's obedience as an example for families, suggesting that children learn from his trust in God's commands despite ridicule from society.[189]

Medieval theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, reinforced this view by describing Noah's righteousness as a model of virtue, demonstrating to children that faith must be lived out in action and not merely belief.[190] In modern pedagogy, Christian

[186] Muḥammad Nadawy, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ wa-Atharuhā fī al-Tarbiyya* (Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2008).
[187] Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ghatas, *al-Tarbiya al-Islāmiyya wa-Madārisuhā* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2001).
[188] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1998).
[189] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Old Testament*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).
[190] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).

educators use the Noah story to teach values of trust, obedience, and perseverance. Huth highlights that Bible stories like Noah's can inspire children to face challenges with faith and to value moral integrity above popularity.[191] For many Sunday schools, the rainbow covenant remains an especially appealing symbol: it assures children that God promises protection and care, providing them with a sense of comfort and stability in their faith journey.

Furthermore, contemporary Christian psychologists note that the Noah story helps children balance fear and hope. Oser and Scarlett observe that children often interpret the flood as frightening but simultaneously learn about divine care and new beginnings. This dual message encourages spiritual growth by teaching children that failure or mistakes do not end their story; rather, with God's guidance, new life and opportunities always emerge. Thus, the narrative nurtures resilience and moral vigilance while reinforcing the redemptive message central to Christianity.[192]

- **Comparative Analysis**

Both Islamic and Christian traditions agree that the story of Noah provides powerful lessons in obedience, resilience, and accountability. In both contexts, Noah represents a steadfast believer who maintains moral integrity against social opposition, offering children a role model of faith and courage. Both traditions also highlight divine justice: the obedient are saved while the disobedient are punished, teaching children moral responsibility. The differences lie primarily in theological framing. In Islam, the story emphasizes repentance, patience, and the consequences of rejecting divine truth.[193] For Muslim children, this narrative nurtures humility and moral strength, stressing resilience and hope. In Christianity, however, the flood is often interpreted as a prefiguration of Christ's salvation, with the ark symbolizing refuge in God's

[191] Kerrin Huth, *Exploring the Use of Story as a Pedagogically Beneficial Support for Teaching Christian Studies in the Early Years of Primary School* (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2022).
[192] Fritz Oser and W. George Scarlett, *Religious Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).
[193] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, ed. Sāmī b. Muḥammad al-Salāma (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 2003), Muḥammad Nadawy, *Stories of the Prophets and Their Impact on Education (Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ wa-Atharuhā fī al-Tarbiyya)*. Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2008.

covenant.[194]. For Christian children, the story points beyond moral conduct to spiritual redemption, with the rainbow serving as a tangible reminder of divine grace. Thus, while both traditions use Noah to encourage discipline, courage, and faith, Islam emphasizes resilience and repentance, whereas Christianity emphasizes salvation and divine promise.

- **Practical Tools and Sensory Methods**

The story of Noah is introduced to children in both traditions through practical, sensory, and creative methods that make the lessons accessible and memorable. In Muslim settings, parents and storytellers often avoid figurative depictions of prophets due to religious sensitivities. Instead, they rely on symbolic tools, depicting also the story. On of the sensory tools the researcher found for the ark of Noah is this:




**Figure 4.1. Noah's Ark Sensory Tool**[195]

According to the description of this sensory tool maker, “it is always fun learning the wonders of animals boarding a giant ark and a huge flood that covered the world. But

[194] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1998). Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).
[195] https://shorturl.at/DnU5s

we also looked at the story of Noah's patience with his community, his determination to complete the task set for him despite the mockery of his people for building the ark and also the sadness he must've felt when his loved ones didn't board the ark with him. A lesson in resilience, determination, patience and trust." This shows also that modern storytellers believe that sensory tools for teaching young audience are more effective in introducing abstract concepts. Storytelling videos on YouTube[196] have also become popular, using animations to portray the ark, animals, and the flood in imaginative but respectful ways, helping children visualize the greatness of divine creation and justice while inspiring hope in divine mercy. These methods nurture curiosity and connect abstract moral lessons with relatable sensory experiences.

In Christianity, by contrast, Noah's Ark toys are widely produced and come in varied forms—from wooden figurines to branded building sets—covering every part of the Noah story, from the ark's construction to the flood's end. Through tactile engagement, imaginative play, and narrative reenactment, they bring scriptural lessons to life. Children don't just hear the story; they experience it—learning about obedience, faith, trust, and the promise of safety through interactive play. For example, the Noah's Ark Play Set (of 17 Pieces)[197] features pieces for Noah, the ark, animals, and often includes a storybook, through which children can recreate the entire tale—from loading animals to disembarking.

[196] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgYVH9IYF3c&t=7s
[197] https://www.amazon.com/BibleToys-Playset-Floating-Christian-Children/dp/B001EZ23MI

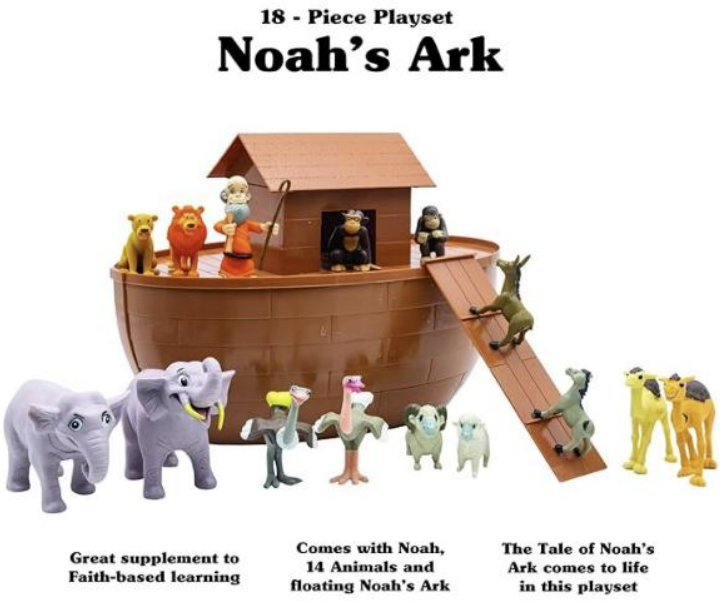



**Figure 4.2. Noah's Ark Play Set**

In Sunday schools, felt boards and wooden figurine sets allow children to act out the story, fostering tactile and visual engagement. Songs such as "Rise and Shine (Arky, Arky)"[198] reinforce the story in a joyful, memorable way, emphasizing obedience and celebration of God's promises. Together, these sensory approaches ensure that children not only hear the story but also engage with it physically, emotionally, and socially. Muslim approaches often focus on symbolic and narrative reinforcement, teaching resilience and obedience through stories and puzzles, while Christian approaches employ figurative toys and music to highlight salvation, grace, and joy. In both traditions, however, the practical methods strengthen memory, shape identity, and allow moral lessons to become deeply rooted in the child's developmental journey.

### 4.3. David and Solomon: Islamic and Christian Perspectives

The Islamic Perspective: The story of David (Dāwūd) and Solomon (Sulaymān) occupies an important place within the Islamic tradition, as both prophets are presented in the Qur'an as righteous leaders blessed with wisdom, justice, and closeness to God. Classical Muslim scholars devoted extensive attention to their narratives, exploring

[198] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56QWeYtHW0k

not only theological lessons but also the moral and educational values that can be drawn for the upbringing of children. These lessons—ranging from justice, fairness, humility, and gratitude to God, to the dangers of pride—were highlighted in tafsīr literature and later in ethical writings. Contemporary Muslim scholars, in turn, have re-emphasized these stories in light of modern educational theories and child development, showing their relevance in shaping children's moral character and identity.

Ibn Kathīr, in his Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm "the Qur'anic Exegesis", provides detailed commentary on the Qur'anic accounts of David and Solomon. He emphasizes that David was not only a king but also a prophet chosen by God, whose justice and fairness were exemplary. [199] He interprets Qur'an 38:17–26, which recounts David's trial with two disputants, as a profound lesson in the importance of listening carefully, avoiding haste in judgment, and exercising fairness. Such lessons, when transmitted to children, nurture an early appreciation for justice and fairness in interpersonal relations. Similarly, Ibn Kathīr interprets Solomon's request for wisdom (Qur'an 38:35) as a model of humility and recognition of human limitations, illustrating for children that greatness lies in seeking knowledge and wisdom from God rather than in relying solely on one's own abilities.[200]

Al-Ṭabarī, one of the earliest and most influential Qur'anic commentators, highlights the divine gifts granted to David and Solomon, such as the ability to render just judgments, command over nature, and deep understanding.[201] For him, these elements reinforce the message that God equips His chosen servants with special capacities to serve their people with justice and wisdom. For children, these stories introduce the idea that true success and authority are grounded in responsibility and service, not in dominance or arrogance.

Al-Qurṭubī's Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān "the legal rulings derived from the Qur'an" adds another dimension, focusing on the ethical and spiritual virtues exemplified by David and Solomon. He notes, for example, David's devotion in worship, his

[199] Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003).
[200] Ibid
[201] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1987).

melodious recitation of the Psalms, and his humility despite being a king.[202] These aspects provide children with a model of piety that harmonizes worldly success with spiritual devotion, teaching them that leadership should never overshadow one's responsibility to God.

Al-Ghazālī, in his ethical and pedagogical works such as Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn "The Revival of the Religious Sciences", interprets these prophetic stories in a more didactic manner. He views the wisdom of Solomon and the justice of David as central lessons for character formation, suggesting that children should be raised with stories that model such virtues. For al-Ghazālī, children's moral development depends not only on abstract principles but on concrete exemplars; hence, the prophets' lives are essential educational resources.[203]

Ibn Taymiyyah also reflects on David and Solomon, stressing their role as exemplars of leadership grounded in submission to God. He argues that introducing such stories to children instills a vision of authority as a trust and a responsibility, rather than a privilege. By learning about how Solomon judged fairly between disputants (Qur'an 21:78–79), children internalize the idea that fairness is a divine obligation.[204]

Contemporary Muslim scholars continue this line of thought, adapting it to modern educational contexts. For instance, Ghatas emphasizes that teaching children the story of David and Solomon helps cultivate in them a sense of responsibility and justice, both within family life and in wider society.[205] Nadawy notes that these narratives encourage children to balance ambition with humility, learning that God's blessings require gratitude and ethical conduct.[206] Abul A'la Mawdudi, in his Tafhīm al-Qur'ān "The Meaning of the Qur'an", underscores the theme of divine wisdom, highlighting Solomon's prayer for a discerning heart as a guiding principle for children's moral

[202] al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm al-Atfayish (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1964).
[203] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1996).
[204] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Qāsim (Riyadh: King Fahd Complex, 1995).
[205] Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ghatas, *al-Tarbiya al-Islāmiyya wa-Madārisuhā* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2001).
[206] Muḥammad Nadawy, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ wa-Atharuhā fī al-Tarbiyya* (Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2008).

education.[207] Seyyed Hossein Nasr similarly interprets these prophets as models of sacred kingship, whose lives can inspire children to value harmony between spiritual devotion and worldly responsibility.[208]

Taken together, these interpretations reveal that in the Islamic tradition, the story of David and Solomon functions not merely as history, but as a pedagogical tool for shaping children's character. By learning about David's humility and devotion, children discover that success is rooted in faith and service to God. By hearing about Solomon's wisdom and fairness, they are encouraged to value justice, careful judgment, and responsibility. These lessons extend beyond abstract moral ideals, influencing children's everyday behavior—how they share with peers, resolve disputes, and respect authority. In this way, the story contributes to building not only moral awareness but also a sense of identity rooted in faith, justice, and responsibility.

The Christian Perspective on the Story of David and Solomon: Within the Christian tradition, the story of David and Solomon also occupies a central place in biblical teaching and has long been used as a moral and pedagogical resource for children. David, remembered as the shepherd boy chosen by God to be king, and Solomon, revered for his wisdom and his prayerful request for discernment, are frequently presented to children as figures who embody trust in God, courage, humility, and the pursuit of wisdom. From the writings of the Church Fathers through to contemporary Christian educators, their narratives have been viewed not only as historical events but as rich moral allegories designed to shape children's values, imagination, and character.

The early Church Fathers interpreted David and Solomon in ways that highlighted their moral and spiritual dimensions. Augustine, in his *Confessions*[209] and *City of God*[210], refers to David's deep reliance on God, seeing in him a model of faith and repentance. For Augustine, children could learn from David's honesty before God and his readiness to admit wrongdoing. This stress on repentance and humility was seen as

[207] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1988).
[208] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).
[209] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[210] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

vital for shaping children's conscience and their understanding of sin and grace. Similarly, Solomon's request for wisdom was interpreted as a lesson in prioritizing spiritual gifts over material gain, a principle which, when taught to children, encourages them to seek God's guidance in their decisions rather than being driven by worldly desires.[211]

John Chrysostom, another influential Church Father, urged parents to raise children on the stories of biblical heroes such as David and Solomon. In his homilies, he noted that David's courage in facing Goliath offered an enduring lesson in bravery and trust in divine support, which could inspire children to overcome fear in their own lives.[212] Solomon's wisdom, on the other hand, became a recurring theme in Christian pedagogy as a symbol of discernment and moral clarity, qualities that children should aspire to develop.

Medieval Christian theologians continued this interpretive tradition. Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, reflects on Solomon's wisdom as the highest gift God can bestow, surpassing wealth or power.[213] This interpretation shaped the way educators taught children about values: the pursuit of wisdom and virtue was to be placed above ambition or material success. Aquinas also regarded David's psalms as an instrument for spiritual education, introducing children to prayer and devotion as part of their formation.

In modern times, Christian scholars and educators have emphasized the child-centered moral lessons of these stories. Scholars such as Walter Brueggemann stress the complexity of David's character, noting that his humanity—his strengths as well as his failures—provides children with a nuanced view of moral growth. For Brueggemann, children should see in David not a flawless hero but a human being whose reliance on God enables him to rise above weakness. Such an interpretation fosters resilience in children and prevents them from idealizing perfection.[214]

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[211] Ibid
[212] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Old Testament*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000)
[213] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).
[214] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990).

Protestant traditions have placed particular emphasis on David's courage and Solomon's wisdom in Sunday school education. Teaching materials for children often use David's confrontation with Goliath as a symbol of faith conquering fear and adversity, an image that resonates strongly with children's own struggles with insecurity and challenges.[215] Solomon's wisdom, particularly his famous judgment between the two women claiming the same child (1 Kings 3:16–28), is often taught as a vivid story of fairness and discernment, helping children understand justice in tangible and age-appropriate terms.

Taken together, the Christian interpretive tradition emphasizes that David and Solomon are not distant historical figures but living models of faith, courage, humility, and discernment. Their stories provide children with vivid examples of how to relate to God and others. While David inspires children to confront challenges with trust in God and to repent sincerely when they fail, Solomon teaches them to value wisdom, prayer, and justice above self-interest. In this way, Christian pedagogy integrates their stories into the broader moral and spiritual formation of children, shaping their conscience, character, and vision of a faithful life.

- **Comparative Analysis of Islamic and Christian Perspectives**

The story of David and Solomon offers a particularly fertile ground for comparison between the Islamic and Christian traditions, especially in relation to how these figures are presented to children and the lessons derived from their lives. Both faiths regard David and Solomon as divinely chosen leaders whose lives embody significant moral and spiritual lessons. Yet, while there is considerable overlap in the virtues emphasized—such as courage, wisdom, justice, humility, and devotion to God—each tradition frames these narratives differently, reflecting broader theological priorities and pedagogical aims.

From the Islamic perspective, David (Dāwūd) and Solomon (Sulaymān) are revered not only as kings but as prophets entrusted with divine revelation and extraordinary gifts. Muslim scholars, classical and modern alike, have consistently highlighted that

[215] Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

these figures serve as exemplars of submission to God's will. For instance, David's gift of the Psalms (*Zabūr*) is interpreted as a tool for teaching children the beauty of worship and praise, while Solomon's wisdom, including his ability to communicate with animals and judge fairly, is presented as evidence of God's guidance and justice.[216] In this framework, children are taught that moral excellence flows from divine obedience, and that even kings are servants of God. The pedagogical emphasis is on cultivating humility, justice, and spiritual consciousness in young minds.[217]

Christian tradition, while similarly affirming the divine calling of David and Solomon, tends to highlight the humanity of these figures more directly. David is remembered as a shepherd boy, musician, warrior, and king, but also as someone who sinned, repented, and relied on God's mercy.[218]. For children, this becomes an important moral resource: they are encouraged to see that even when they fail, repentance and grace are always possible. Solomon's request for wisdom, in Christian teaching, is often framed as a lesson in spiritual priorities—seeking God's wisdom before wealth, fame, or power. [219] While Islamic tradition also values wisdom, Christian pedagogy emphasizes the relational aspect of Solomon's prayer, teaching children to approach God personally in their own decision-making.

In terms of similarities, both traditions agree on several key lessons. First, David represents courage rooted in faith, whether in the Islamic portrayal of his reliance on God's strength or in the Christian image of his triumph over Goliath. Second, Solomon embodies wisdom and justice as central virtues, with both traditions stressing that children should aspire to fairness and discernment in their relationships. Third, both faiths view these figures as role models for prayer, devotion, and reliance on God, lessons which are considered foundational for shaping children's moral character and spiritual worldview.

The differences, however, are equally telling. Islamic tradition strongly emphasizes the prophetic authority of David and Solomon, portraying them as models of obedience

[216] Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003).
[217] Muḥammad Nadawy, *Stories of the Prophets and Their Impact on Education (Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ wa-Atharuhā fī al-Tarbiyya)*. Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2008.
[218] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1998).
[219] Stephen Jones, *Teaching the Bible Creatively to Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

whose extraordinary gifts derive directly from divine bestowal.[220] Children are thus encouraged to recognize that wisdom and courage are not self-made but granted through faithfulness to God. By contrast, Christian tradition emphasizes the accessibility of David and Solomon as flawed but faithful figures, whose humanity makes them relatable role models for children struggling with moral growth.[221] This difference reflects broader theological orientations: Islam underscores divine guidance and prophetic authority, while Christianity highlights human weakness redeemed through divine grace.

Another difference lies in the pedagogical framing of Solomon's wisdom. Islamic sources often use Solomon's ability to judge fairly and communicate with animals as a means to teach children about justice, compassion, and stewardship of creation.[222] Christian pedagogy, on the other hand, emphasizes Solomon's prayer for wisdom as a model of humility and dependence on God in decision-making, inviting children to see their daily choices as opportunities for prayerful reflection.[223]

Despite these distinctions, both traditions share the conviction that David and Solomon are not simply figures of the past but timeless role models whose stories can shape children's moral imagination and ethical behavior. Whether framed as prophets or as kings, their narratives are consistently employed to instill values of courage, justice, humility, wisdom, and devotion. In this way, the Islamic and Christian traditions demonstrate a common pedagogical strategy: embedding moral and spiritual lessons within narrative forms that captivate children's imaginations and guide their ethical development.

- **Practical Tools and Methods**

The lessons of David and Solomon, though drawn from sacred scripture and classical interpretation, are rarely transmitted to children in abstract theological terms. Instead,

[220] al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qurʾān (Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān)*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1987.
[221] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Old Testament*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000)
[222] Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003).
[223] Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

educators, parents, and religious institutions in both Islamic and Christian traditions use a range of practical tools—stories, songs, plays, games, and modern interactive materials—to make these moral lessons tangible and memorable. These tools not only capture children's attention but also reinforce the values of courage, wisdom, humility, and faith that the narratives are meant to instill.

In the Islamic tradition, storytelling itself remains the primary medium for transmitting the stories of David and Solomon. Qur'anic passages, together with classical commentary, are adapted into simplified narratives for children's storybooks and oral lessons. Writers often emphasize David's psalms (*Zabūr*) as examples of beautiful prayer and worship, presenting him as a model of devotion and courage (Ibn Kathir, trans. 2003). Similarly, Solomon's wisdom—whether in judging fairly between disputing parties or showing compassion toward animals—is retold in a way that children can understand and apply in daily life (al-Tabari, trans, 1987). To make these stories interactive, teachers sometimes introduce it through audiovisual media; YouTube hosts a number of child-friendly storytelling videos that illustrate the events of the battle of Dawod.[224] Songs and chants are also used in Muslim educational settings to instill these values.[225] David's reputation as a psalmist and singer inspires children's nasheed (religious songs) that emphasize praising God and finding strength in worship. In some settings, percussion instruments are added to help children remember verses of praise or short moral maxims related to David and Solomon.[226] In modern contexts, Islamic publishing houses have created picture books, coloring books, and even interactive apps that present these prophets' lives in simple language accompanied by illustrations, such as the "Prophet Dawud (Mini Board Book),"[227] illustrated in child-level materials, emphasizing his spiritual virtues through simplified language. These tools encourage children to engage with the figures not as distant historical characters but as living role models.

Christian pedagogy has developed a similarly rich set of methods. Sunday schools, Christian schools, and families often rely on storybooks and illustrated Bibles tailored

[224] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lkfl9ygP_I&t=5s
[225] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJLAZNo4gwA
[226] Muḥammad Nadawy, *Stories of the Prophets and Their Impact on Education (Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ wa-Atharuhā fī al-Tarbiyya)*. Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2008.
[227] https://www.instagram.com/p/DN_X4PLEmag/?img_index=5

for children. David's battle with Goliath, for example, is one of the most popular biblical stories in children's curricula, often dramatized in plays, puppet shows, or cartoons to highlight the lesson that faith in God can overcome fear.[228]




**Figure 4.3. David and Goliath Play Dough Kit**[229]

It is provided in form of educational toys like this sets which allow children to create the scenes of Prophet Dawud fighting Jalut (Goliath).

[228] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990)
[229] https://www.etsy.com/listing/1690941038/david-and-goliath-play-dough-kit-david

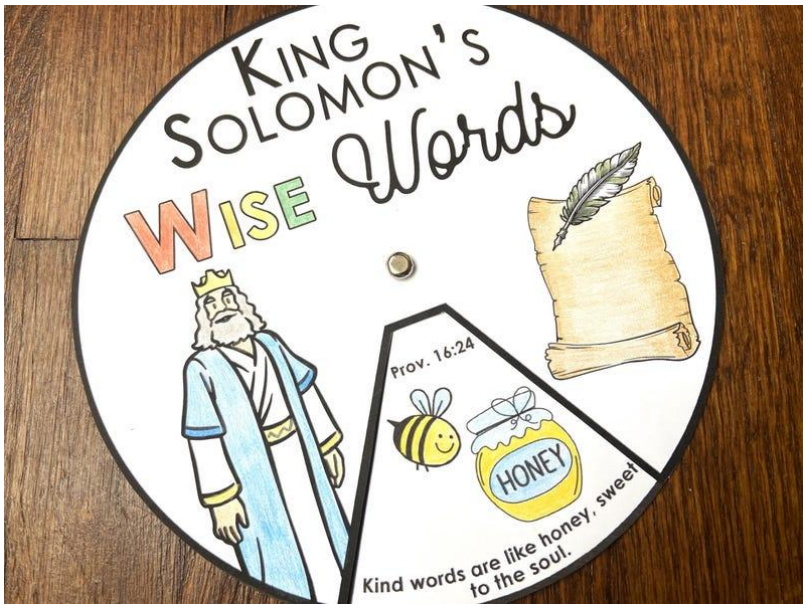



**Figure 4.4. King Solomon Wisdom Coloring Wheel**

King Solomon Wisdom Coloring Wheel is also a used Bible activity, "an engaging memory game and coloring activity about King Solomon's wise words"

Songs and music also play a central role in Christian contexts. Hymns and children's songs about David as the shepherd boy or about Solomon's wisdom make the lessons more memorable. For example, songs emphasize David's trust in God's protection[230] or Solomon's request for wisdom,[231] with catchy melodies ensuring that children remember the moral long after the lesson ends.[232]

Despite differences in theological framing, the practical tools used by both traditions share similar goals: to translate abstract moral lessons into concrete experiences that children can understand, enjoy, and remember. Storytelling, music, drama, visual aids, and digital media all serve to make David and Solomon not only historical or scriptural figures but also living guides for children's spiritual and moral growth. By using age-appropriate methods, educators in both faiths ensure that the timeless lessons of courage, wisdom, humility, and devotion are passed on to future generations in ways that are engaging, meaningful, and enduring.

[230] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTHrYamlftU
[231] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ms3BYHIHgI
[232] Stephen Jones, *Teaching the Bible Creatively to Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

### 4.4. Abraham: Islamic and Christian Perspectives

In Islamic pedagogy, the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) has long been central to shaping children's understanding of faith, sacrifice, and obedience. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr emphasized Ibrahim's rejection of idolatry and his willingness to sacrifice his son as demonstrations of absolute submission to God.[233] These narratives, when adapted for children, are presented not as abstract theological debates but as moral lessons about courage, truthfulness, and reliance upon divine guidance. Contemporary Muslim educators build on this tradition, framing Ibrahim as a model for moral development and resilience in the face of adversity. Islamic children's curricula often highlight Ibrahim's trials as a way to instill perseverance and moral clarity in young learners, encouraging them to prioritize faith and ethical integrity in everyday decisions.[234]

The story of Abraham (Ibrahim) in Islamic tradition, as found in the Quran (e.g., Quran 21:51–71, 37:83–113)[235], emphasizes his role as the father of monotheism, his unwavering faith, and his willingness to sacrifice for Allah. Nasr describe Abraham as a model of submission to Allah's will, particularly in his readiness to sacrifice his son and his survival of the fire (Quran 21:69).[236] The narrative underscores the triumph of faith over adversity.

Scholars highlight several lessons from Abraham's story. For example, monotheism is a central issue in the story. Esposito notes that Abraham's rejection of idolatry and his dedication to one God teach children the importance of spiritual clarity and devotion.[237] This encourages young learners to prioritize faith in their lives. Another key virtue is courage. As Wadud explains, Abraham's defiance of his community's polytheism and his endurance in the fire demonstrate courage in standing up for

[233] al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qurʾān (Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān)*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1987.
[234] Harmaini, H., Putri Miftahul Jannah, Salmiyati, & Kartini Radjabulan Tahir. "*Trust and Character Development (Life Lessons from Prophet Ibrahim AS).*" International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology 3, no. 1 (2022): 58–73. https://doi.org/10.18196/ijiep.v3i1.13810
[235] https://quran.com/al-anbya/51-71
[236] Nasr, S. H. (2015). *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*. HarperOne, p. 234.
[237] Esposito, J. L. (2011). *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*. Oxford University Press, p. 67.

truth.[238] This lesson helps children develop the confidence to uphold their beliefs in challenging situations. Another virtue is sacrifice and trust. Al-Ghazali (cited in Moos)[239] interprets Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of ultimate trust in Allah's wisdom. For children, this translates into lessons about selflessness and trusting authority figures, such as parents or teachers.

Abraham's story is particularly effective for children due to its dramatic elements, such as the fire miracle and the sacrifice narrative. Sahlah Academy notes that these stories captivate young audiences, making abstract values like courage accessible through relatable scenarios.[240] Storytelling methods, such as narrated animations or group discussions, allow children to explore Abraham's choices, fostering empathy for his struggles and admiration for his faith.[241] For example, a storytelling session might ask children to imagine standing up for a belief, reinforcing courage and integrity.

Nasr argues that teaching Abraham's story in early childhood helps children develop a sense of purpose and identity rooted in faith.[242] By engaging with this narrative, children learn to navigate moral dilemmas with trust in divine guidance, shaping their ethical decision-making.

The ritual of ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā "Festival of Sacrifice in Islam", which commemorates Ibrahim's readiness to sacrifice his son, provides children with a concrete annual practice through which lessons of selflessness, obedience, and compassion are reinforced.[243] Stories told during this occasion are crafted in simple, vivid language to encourage empathy and reflection. In this way, the Islamic framing of Ibrahim not only cultivates children's trust in God but also develops their sense of moral responsibility and communal belonging.

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[238] Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press

[239] Moosa, E. (2005). *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*. University of North Carolina Press.

[240] Sahlah.net. (2024, July 17). Islamic Prophets Stories for Kids: Timeless Lessons and Moral Teachings. Retrieved from https://www.sahlah.net/blog/islamic-prophets-stories-for-kids-timeless-lessons-and-moral-teachings

[241] https://www.sahlah.net/blog/11-best-quran-stories-for-kids-5-most-inspiring-stories

[242] Nasr, S. H. (2015). *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*. HarperOne

[243] El-Sayed el-Aswad, *Muslim Worldviews and Everyday Lives* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira / Rowman & Littlefield, July 2012)

Within Christianity, the figure of Abraham is equally formative in children's education. His call to leave his homeland (Genesis 12) and his covenantal relationship with God are central to teaching about faith and obedience. Christian educators emphasize Abraham's trust in God's promises as a framework for developing resilience and hope in children.[244] In Sunday school materials, Abraham is often portrayed as a model of hospitality, patience, and reliance upon divine providence.[245] The binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) is typically narrated in simplified terms to focus on God's faithfulness rather than the violence of the sacrifice, highlighting that trust in God ultimately leads to blessing.[246]

Modern Christian pedagogical approaches encourage interactive retelling of Abraham's journey to make the lessons accessible to children. Children's ministries often integrate Abraham's story into discussions of covenant and promise, emphasizing the continuity between Abraham's faith and the Christian child's personal relationship with God. Thus, Abraham is presented as both a historical patriarch and a model of living faith.[247]

- **Comparative Analysis**

Both Islamic and Christian traditions converge on Abraham as a paragon of faith, obedience, and moral steadfastness. Each tradition uses the story to nurture in children the virtues of trust, perseverance, and ethical integrity. Yet, there are distinct emphases. Islamic pedagogy frequently highlights Ibrahim's rejection of idolatry, his moral courage in challenging his community, and his submission to divine will as a model for children's identity formation and resistance to moral compromise.[248] Christian pedagogy, meanwhile, often underscores the covenantal aspect of

[244] Brueggemann, W. (2010). *An introduction to the Old Testament: The canon and Christian imagination*. Westminster John Knox Press.
[245] K. Elise Leal, *Reforming Manners, Redeeming Souls: Sunday Schools, Childhood, and the Formation of Early Nineteenth-Century American Religious Culture* (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2018), https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/bitstreams/0fa2fae6-7bf0-4471-8f01-2440c533fed8/download
[246] E. E. Östring, *Co-creationist Theology of Human Work* (PhD diss., Avondale University, 2014), https://research.avondale.edu.au/bitstreams/bd9f50e3-4b11-4b6d-8dad-e731f068aa4b/download
[247] Ministry Spark Team (Mikal Keefer), "God's Covenant with Abraham (Elementary Lesson)," *Ministry Spark*, April 19 2021, https://ministryspark.com/gods-covenant-abraham-elementary-lesson/
[248] Harmaini, H., Putri Miftahul Jannah, Salmiyati, & Kartini Radjabulan Tahir. "*Trust and Character Development (Life Lessons from Prophet Ibrahim AS).*" International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology 3, no. 1 (2022): 58–73. https://doi.org/10.18196/ijiep.v3i1.13810

Abraham's story, using it to introduce children to the themes of divine promise, hospitality, and spiritual inheritance.[249] While both traditions see Abraham as a teacher of faith, Islam frames his story in terms of submission and obedience, whereas Christianity emphasizes faith as trust in God's promises.

- **Practical Pedagogical Tools**

Both traditions employ sensory and interactive methods to communicate Abraham's story to children. In Islamic contexts, illustrated storybooks, oral storytelling during ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā, and family discussions around the rituals of sacrifice are used to reinforce moral lessons.[250] These practices help children internalize values such as compassion, gratitude, and communal solidarity. In Christian contexts, pedagogical tools include dramatizations of Abraham's journey, songs about God's promises, and hands-on activities such as tent-building crafts that symbolize Abraham's nomadic life.[251] These methods not only convey the story but also make its moral lessons tangible and memorable.

### 4.5. Joseph: Islamic and Christian Perspectives

The story of Joseph, as presented in the Bible (Genesis 37–50)[252], narrates his journey from betrayal by his brothers to his rise as a leader in Egypt, emphasizing forgiveness and divine providence. Christian scholars, such as Wiersbe interpret Joseph's story as a demonstration of God's sovereignty, where human failings are transformed into opportunities for redemption and leadership.[253]

Christian scholars identify several lessons in Joseph's story. First, forgiveness is a central theme. Kidner notes that Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers (Genesis 45:1–15) models forgiveness despite betrayal, teaching children to let go of grudges

[249] Ministry Spark Team (Mikal Keefer), "God's Covenant with Abraham (Elementary Lesson)," *Ministry Spark*, April 19 2021, https://ministryspark.com/gods-covenant-abraham-elementary-lesson/
[250] El-Sayed el-Aswad, *Muslim Worldviews and Everyday Lives* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira / Rowman & Littlefield, July 2012)
[251] Ministry Spark Team (Mikal Keefer), "God's Covenant with Abraham (Elementary Lesson)," *Ministry Spark*, April 19 2021, https://ministryspark.com/gods-covenant-abraham-elementary-lesson/
[252] https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2037-50&version=NKJV
[253] Wiersbe, W. W. (2007). *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*. David C. Cook, p. 345.

and seek reconciliation.[254] Second, resilience is emphasized. According to Ross, Joseph's perseverance through slavery, imprisonment, and false accusations illustrates the importance of enduring hardships with faith.[255] This encourages children to remain steadfast in adversity. Third, responsibility is a key value. Wenham highlights Joseph's stewardship in Egypt, where he managed resources wisely, as a model of responsibility. For children, this translates into lessons about accountability in their tasks, such as schoolwork or chores.[256]

Joseph's story is ideal for children due to its narrative arc of triumph over adversity. Alexander suggests, the dramatic elements—betrayal, imprisonment, and eventual success—engage young audiences, making moral lessons memorable. Storytelling methods, such as puppet shows or illustrated books, help children connect with Joseph's experiences, fostering empathy for his struggles.[257] Anna Joy Snuggs recommends using Joseph's story to teach children about forgiveness in family settings. By discussing how Joseph forgave his brothers, children learn to resolve conflicts peacefully, reinforcing interpersonal skills. Storytelling also allows teachers to highlight Joseph's resilience, encouraging children to face challenges with hope.[258]

### 4.6. Moses: Islamic and Christian Perspectives

The story of Moses (Musa) in Islamic tradition, as found in the Quran (e.g., Quran 20:9–98, 28:3–43)[259], focuses on his miraculous survival, leadership of the Israelites, and confrontation with Pharaoh. Muslim scholars, such as Siddiqui, emphasize Moses' role as a prophet of perseverance, justice, and divine guidance, highlighting Allah's support through miracles like the parting of the Red Sea.[260]

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[254] Kidner, D. (1967). *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. InterVarsity Press, p. 178.
[255] Ross, A. P. (1988). *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*. Baker Academic, p. 201.
[256] Wenham, G. J. (1987). *Genesis 1–15: Word Biblical Commentary*. Word Books
[257] Alexander, T. D. (2003). *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*. Baker Academic, p. 156.
[258] Anna Joy Snuggs, "*What Joseph's Story Teaches Parents About Forgiveness,"* Rooted Ministry, October 29, 2024, https://rootedministry.com/what-josephs-story-teaches-parents-about-forgiveness/
[259] https://quran.com/taha/9
[260] Siddiqui, M. (2017). *The Good Muslim: Reflections on Classical Islamic Law and Theology*. Cambridge University Press

Scholars identify several lessons in Moses' story. For example, perseverance is central. Nasr notes Moses' persistence against Pharaoh's tyranny illustrates the importance of standing firm in the face of oppression.[261] This teaches children to remain determined in pursuing what is right. Another key value is justice. Wadud highlights that Moses' mission to free the Israelites models a commitment to fairness and standing against injustice.[262] For children, this translates into lessons about treating others equitably. Trust in divine guidance is also emphasized. Al-Tabari (cited in Wheeler)[263] interprets Moses' reliance on Allah's miracles as a lesson in trusting divine wisdom, even in uncertain times. This encourages children to develop faith and resilience.

Moses' story is rich with vivid imagery, such as the burning bush and the Red Sea's parting, making it ideal for storytelling. Sahlah Academy notes that these elements captivate children, allowing teachers to introduce complex values like justice in an accessible way. For example, a storytelling session might involve children acting out Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, fostering empathy for the oppressed.[264]

Siddiqui argues that Moses' story helps children develop a sense of moral responsibility by illustrating the consequences of standing up for justice.[265] Through storytelling, children can explore how Moses' faith guided his actions, encouraging them to trust in positive outcomes when facing challenges.

To conclude, early and recent academic research prove that prophets' narratives offer a rich tapestry of moral and behavioral lessons that are particularly effective for children when conveyed through storytelling. Scholars from both Islamic and Christian traditions emphasize that these stories teach universal values—honesty, courage, forgiveness, responsibility, and empathy—that are essential for character development. For example, Siddiqui and Pinnock[266] highlight storytelling's ability to engage children emotionally, making abstract values tangible and memorable.

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[261] Nasr, S. H. (2015). *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*. HarperOne
[262] Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press
[263] Moosa, E. (2005). *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*. University of North Carolina Press
[264] Asmaa Rabea, *"Islamic Prophets Stories for Kids: Timeless Lessons and Moral Teachings*," Sahlah Academy, July 17 2024, https://sahlahacademy.net/islamic-prophets-stories-for-kids/
[265] Siddiqui, M. (2017). *The Good Muslim: Reflections on Classical Islamic Law and Theology*. Cambridge University Press
[266] ibid

Storytelling fosters cognitive and emotional growth by allowing children to connect with prophetic figures' struggles and triumphs. Zipes argues, narratives provide a safe space for children to explore ethical dilemmas, encouraging critical thinking and empathy.[267] In Islamic tradition, stories like Abraham's and Moses' emphasize submission to divine will, while in Christian tradition, narratives like Joseph's and David's highlight forgiveness and humility. These values align with early childhood development goals, such as building self-esteem, social skills, and moral awareness.[268]

Moreover, storytelling is a culturally responsive method that respects religious diversity while conveying universal ethics. By presenting these stories in age-appropriate formats—such as illustrated books, animations, or interactive discussions—educators can reinforce values that prepare children for responsible citizenship and spiritual growth.

[267] Zipes, Jack. (2004). *Speaking Out: Storytelling and Creative Drama for Children*. Routledge, p. 32.
[268] Sahlah Academy, https://sahlahacademy.net/islamic-prophets-stories-for-kids/

# CHAPTER V

# ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS

This chapter presents a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with Muslims and Coptic Christians; mainly parents, and some of them are working as religious educators and storytellers. The interview tackled how parents understand Quran and Bible stories, how they interpret them to their children, and what is the impact they see in terms of behavioral development and character formation. The central aim of the analysis is to explore how religious narratives—particularly those rooted in the Quran and Bible—are perceived and used by Muslim and Coptic Christian caregivers and mentors as tools to nurture moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and personal growth in children.

Drawing from a wide range of participant experiences, the chapter identifies consistent themes in the use of Quranic and Biblical stories within Muslim and Coptic Christian households and educational contexts.

This Chapter is divided into Three Sections: Section one is a comprehensive analysis of interviews with Muslims. Section Two is comprehensive analysis of interviews with Coptic Christians. Section Three is a comparative analysis of the views and storytelling approaches employed by Muslims and Coptic Christians. Each section is analyzed based on the main themes, divided into categories, and each category is coded, including the internalization of moral values, the modeling of emotional responses, the development of personal and spiritual identity, and the cultivation of empathy, courage, and self-discipline, etc... Across the interviews, Muslim and Coptic Christian participants described Quranic and Bible stories not merely as religious instruction, but as deeply formative narratives that guided their children's choices, influenced their emotional responses, and inspired them to emulate positive moral role models.

All of the Christian participants I interviewed in this study were Egyptians, and since the Christian population in Egypt is overwhelmingly Coptic Orthodox, the research is effectively limited to Coptic Christians. Consequently, the data presented in this thesis are derived mainly from Coptic Christians rather than from Christians of other denominations.

During the interviews, one striking observation was that the Coptic Christians consistently used the term *rusul* (messengers) when speaking about the Islamic prophets. This linguistic and theological nuance is not typically found among other Christian traditions, where prophets are more often regarded as kings, leaders, or prominent religious figures, but not as messengers in the Qurʾānic sense. Being attentive to this distinction allowed me to analyze the data with greater clarity, as it highlighted the specific theological framework of the Coptic community and shed light on concepts that would have remained ambiguous had I treated "Christianity" in general terms.

The qualitative data that were collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed manually using thematic analysis. I carefully read and re-read the full transcripts of the interviews to ensure familiarity with the content. From this iterative process, I coded relevant segments of the data and grouped them into categories. Through constant comparison and refinement, these categories were then developed into broader themes that reflect the main patterns and meanings emerging from participants' responses. Each theme is supported by direct quotes from participants, scholarly literature, and interpretive commentary. The manual approach used in this study allowed the researcher to engage more deeply and directly with the data, ensuring that the interpretation remained close to the participants' own words. The chapter aims to present not only what participants said, but how their narratives reflect broader patterns in religious pedagogy and developmental psychology.

The findings presented in this chapter offer insight into the role of Quranic and Biblical storytelling as a lived practice within Muslim and Christian homes. By highlighting the ways in which caregivers link sacred narratives with everyday life, the chapter contributes to our understanding of how religious tradition is transmitted

intergenerationally—not only through formal teaching, but through meaningful, relational storytelling that invites reflection, emulation, and dialogue.

### 5.1. Analysis of Muslim Parents' Understanding and Interpretation of Prophets' Stories

Muslim parents consistently described prophetic stories as important tool to their children's moral and spiritual upbringing. They viewed these narratives as tools that nurture faith, guide behavior, and instill empathy and respect. Parents emphasized that certain stories of prophets such as Yunus, Yusuf, and Musa provide children with tangible models of virtue—illustrating patience, honesty, forgiveness, and gratitude through example rather than punishment or command.

Storytelling was regarded as a daily practice woven into family routines, allowing parents to shape their children's emotional awareness and connect moral lessons to real-life situations. Participants explained that by narrating prophetic stories, they helped children manage emotions, reflect on consequences, and develop a stronger sense of responsibility. These narratives also served as a way to protect children from negative social and media influences, grounding them in moral clarity and spiritual identity.

Parents frequently adapted the tone, content, and lesson of each story to match their children's age and comprehension level. Through these adjustments, storytelling became both educational and relational—creating moments of connection through which values were naturally absorbed. Across interviews, parents described this process as an interpretive act, mediating between the sacred text and the child's everyday experience. Participants understood prophetic stories as ongoing moral frameworks that, in their view, continue to shape thought, emotion, and behavior across generations.

Drawing on the extensive real-world quotations and statements of the participants, the analysis provides actual non-hypothetical on the way prophetic stories function as a moral compass, emotional guide, cognitive stimulant, and identity-shaping practice. Rather than using punitive discipline, parents intentionally wove narrative into daily

life, creating routines and rituals through which children internalized empathy, resilience, and social responsibility. Supported by insights from scholars such as Jerome Bruner[269], Daniel Goleman[270], Dan P. McAdams[271], and Maria Tatar[272], the chapter demonstrates how stories become internal moral architectures that guide children in making ethical decisions—even without external supervision. The following chart reviews the main themes discussed with the participants, for easy review.




**Figure 5.1. Analysis of Interviews with Muslims**

### 5.1.1. Prophetic Narratives as Restorative Character Development Tool

Across the interviews, many parents expressed a strong belief in the value of stories to influence their children's thinking and conduct. They explained that these narratives were not viewed simply as didactic tools or entertaining fables, but as dynamic agents of change, capable of cultivating moral reasoning, fostering empathetic responses, and guiding ethical decision-making processes. Parents frequently attributed this to the narratives' unique ability to connect children with high values, positive behaviors, and improved character. Several participants also described changes they had noticed in their children's actions and habits, which they correlated them with the consistent exposure of their children to prophetic or moral stories. Several parents noted that they

[269] An American psychologist who made significant contributions to human cognitive psychology and cognitive learning theory in educational psychology. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jerome-Bruner
[270] Psychologist and author of Emotional Intelligence, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Goleman
[271] Researchers in the field of narrative psychology and child development, and co-author of *Parental Co-Construction of 5- to 13-Year-Olds' Global Self-Esteem Through Reminiscing About Past Events*
[272] An American academic whose expertise lies in children's literature, https://german.fas.harvard.edu/people/maria-tatar

used to tell religious stories to their children when they were very young and did not observe immediate behavioral changes. However, as one parent explained, when their second child was born, they noticed that the older sibling naturally began retelling the same stories to the younger one, repeating the moral lessons in a simple and affectionate, childlike way. Other parents similarly emphasized that children may not always act on the moral values conveyed in the stories right away, yet storytelling still plants what they described as "a seed of goodness" in the child's mind. This moral seed, they believed, represents a real rather than fictional form of heroism—one that remains embedded in memory and conscience. Over time, as the child grows, these internalized lessons are recalled and gradually shape long-term attitudes and values.

Participants also explained that these stories helped children understand the importance of admitting mistakes, making amends, and taking action to correct them. Parents noted that such lessons were often modeled through stories of prophetic figures who made errors, asked for divine forgiveness, and exerted efforts to make things right after wrongdoing. For example, Amira, a mother, professional behavior modification specialist and educational practitioner, underscored the imperative of teaching children a constructive approach to error: "When we mess up, we don't label ourselves as bad and that there's no hope for us. When we mess up, we sincerely apologize and do beautiful acts to fix the mistake." Amira's philosophy highlights a foundational tenet: the perpetual openness to self-correction and moving forward. This perspective reframes mistakes not as terminal failures but as opportunities for growth, self-correction, and seeking resolution. This approach stands in stark contrast to punitive or shaming methodologies that can lead to debilitating self-blame or a diminished self-concept.

Amira recounted a poignant case of an 11-year-old who tragically attempted suicide, attributing his despair to feeling inherently "bad" due to the harsh parental responses to his minor infractions. She said: "Once, a parent brought her 11-year-old child to me as he tries several times to end his life. When I talked and discussed with him, he said he saw himself as bad and couldn't live because of bad things he had done. These 'bad things' were very normal mistakes any child his age might make, but the parent's method of magnifying the mistake and dramatizing it was wrong and made the child get an impression of himself as a bad person, and he started proving he was bad through

his actions and behaviors until he reached the point of hating himself for things he had done in his life, all while he was no more than 11 years old." Amira said that she started her session with him by narrating the story of Prophet Adam from the sense that he made a grave a mistake but directly followed it by seeking forgiveness, and that's how he got a new start. While this poignant anecdote primarily illustrates the profound dangers of negative labeling and its impact on self-perception, it implicitly highlights the critical importance of teaching children about the appropriate methods for addressing mistakes, as well as the long-term impact of narratives on character. Amira says: "Instead of labeling them as bad, parents need to learn the moral lessons of these stories and interpret them to their children. The narrative of Prophet Adam (AS) who immediately confessed his error and sincerely sought resolution serves as a powerful counter-narrative to the destructive trajectory of self-condemnation and potential dishonesty." Amira added: "The point here is that Prophet Adam (AS) was a human being like us, which makes his example easier to relate to. He was not fictional or imaginary, nor was he created from something different from humankind. His story provides a real and relatable model of human behavior from which people can learn positive examples."

Amira added that narratives are intentionally employed to educate children about the inherent complexities of human nature, encompassing humanity's profound capacity for both virtue and vice, and the universal exigency for guidance and boundless compassion. She shared her nuanced approach to teaching about human fallibility and self-perception: "Sometimes I share the same religious stories with parents to educate them in parallel with their children. We faced situations with parents labeling their children for their wrongdoing, instead of labeling the action itself. Some parents exaggerate in their reaction to children's mistakes, like saying to a child 'you committed a crime' or 'what you did is a catastrophe' or 'you did something I can never forgive you for,' some children are psychologically fragile, they get impression of themselves as very bad. This greatly affects the child's psyche because when a child believes himself to be bad, his self-confidence will decrease, and some children develop a poor self-image that sometimes causes them depression." Amira's concern regarding the deleterious impact of harsh labeling underscores a sophisticated understanding of human imperfection and the paramount importance of a compassionate approach to correction, deeply rooted in the understanding of human

nature as inherently capable of good yet susceptible to error. She found that stories rooted in religion is the best for convincing those parents on how to deal with their kids.

By emphasizing that mistakes are an intrinsic part of the human experience and that self-correction and seeking resolution are perpetually accessible, Amira effectively teaches parents and children about the reality of human imperfection while simultaneously instilling hope and preserving self-worth. This aligns seamlessly with psychological concepts of growth mindset and restorative practices, which are central to a healthy developmental journey.[273] Narratives frequently remind individuals of the boundless capacity for compassion and forgiveness, encouraging them to seek amends after committing errors. For instance, the narrative of Jonah, who repented after abandoning his mission, serves as a powerful reminder that even exemplary figures can err, and that compassion encompasses all who sincerely seek to rectify their actions. This narrative instructs children that committing errors does not define one's inherent worth; rather, the response to those errors—through sincere self-correction and seeking resolution—is what truly matters.

This approach fosters a healthy self-image and psychological resilience, effectively preventing children from internalizing a debilitating sense of being inherently "bad." It also cultivates empathy and understanding towards the imperfections of others. Developmental psychology emphasizes the cultivation of a balanced self-concept, wherein individuals acknowledge their human limitations while simultaneously recognizing their inherent dignity. By teaching children that mistakes are opportunities for growth and avenues for seeking compassion, educators like Amira are equipping them with a robust framework for navigating their own imperfections and those of others, thereby fostering a compassionate and realistic worldview. This helps children to develop a sense of self-worth grounded in their capacity for growth, rather than being solely contingent upon external validation or the absence of error.

Layla, an educator, further elaborated on this: "We tell them the story of Adam and how he made a mistake, yet he was not arrogant nor he lost hope. He just learned from

[273] Dweck, C. S. (2006). Mindset: The new psychology of success. Random House.

his mistake. It teaches them that everyone makes mistakes, even the first human, but what matters is how you respond. It's about learning and growing, not about being perfect." Layla's emphasis on learning and growth through mistakes reinforces a positive and forgiving understanding of human nature, encouraging children to embrace self-improvement rather than succumbing to despair. This narrative provides a foundational understanding of human fallibility and the ever-present possibility of growth and rectification. Martin E. P. Seligman (2022) says: "When we accept our limitations and faults, we free ourselves to focus on our strengths and possibilities. Resilience grows from this realistic yet hopeful view of the self."[274]

This underscores the critical role of narratives in cultivating a healthy self-perception, one rooted in the inherent possibility of redemption and moral rehabilitation. Research indicates that narratives can provide a safe space for children to explore complex emotional and moral dilemmas, fostering self-awareness and the capacity for self-correction.[275]

This perspective resonates deeply with the psychological concept of an innate human predisposition towards prosocial behavior. Errors, within this framework, are understood as deviations from this fundamental nature, rather than an inherent corruption. Developmental psychologists, such as Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, extensively expounded upon the significance of self-accountability in the process of moral development.[276] They posited that continuous introspection and sincere efforts to rectify errors are indispensable for nurturing a virtuous character. Similarly, contemporary educational theorists emphasize that the overarching aim of character education is the instillation of proper conduct and etiquette, which encompasses recognizing one's shortcomings and assiduously striving for moral excellence. Amira's instructional approach, by prioritizing self-correction and restorative actions, directly cultivates this sense of accountability, thereby enabling

[274] Martin E. P. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Free Press, 2002, pp. 75–90.
[275] Ramamurthy, C., Zuo, P., Armstrong, G., & Zuo, J. (2024). The impact of storytelling on building resilience in children: A systematic review. Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 31(1), 108-120. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jpm.13008
[276] Hunter, C., & Eder, D. (2010). The role of storytelling in understanding children's moral/ethic decision-making. Multicultural Perspectives, 12(4), 211-217. [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15210960.2010.527593]

children to learn from their errors without internalizing a destructive sense of worthlessness. Stories of religious figures who acknowledge their mistakes and seek to make amends serve as potent and relatable archetypes for children to emulate, demonstrating that even respected individuals are fallible, yet their strength lies in their humility and readiness to rectify their actions.

Another interviewee, Omar, a father, educator and youth leader, further elaborated on the practical application of these lessons: “in such cases, we select the story of Prophet Yunus (AS) who made a mistake by leaving his people without getting divine permission to leave them. After realizing his mistake, he sought the divine forgiveness, and he got accepted back. This teaches children that even when they mess up, they can always seek to rectify their actions, and there is always an opportunity for reconciliation.” Omar’s example reinforces the concept of restorative justice and the accessibility of self-correction, providing children with a tangible model for seeking resolution and rectifying their errors. This narrative instills hope and encourages children to confront their mistakes rather than concealing them, fostering an environment of honesty and self-improvement. The emphasis on the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation through such stories helps children develop a secure attachment to their community and a belief in their capacity for positive change.

- **Narratives as Foundational Tools for Cultivating Resilience, Gratitude, and Forgiveness**

Interviewees consistently underscored how narratives served as powerful vehicles for imparting the virtues of patience and gratitude in children, thereby equipping them with the capacity to navigate adversity with resilience and to appreciate positive circumstances irrespective of challenges.

Afnan, a mother and school teacher, elucidated the profound pedagogical utility of a narrative, such as the story of Job from various traditions, in conveying complex virtues: “We had some difficulty in understanding the concept of fate and the virtue of being patient in prosperity and adversity. I found that the story of Prophet Ayyub (Job) (AS) provides a clear example of patience and acceptance of fate. He endured hardship for a long period while maintaining respect toward God’s test and never expressed

objection, which reflects an essential aspect of faith — namely accepting fate. I used to tell my children this story to help them understand the idea of accepting fate and to explain the meaning of patience in simple terms. For example, they often complained about various situations, big or small, and reacted with anger or impatience. Through this story, I taught them to remain grateful and composed in both prosperity and adversity. Such stories help reinforce these moral lessons."

Afnan's explanation highlights the multi-dimensional nature of patience as conveyed through such narratives. It transcends mere passive endurance, encompassing an active, reverent acceptance of circumstances and a continuous state of gratitude, irrespective of life's ups and downs. She found in this story a good lesson helping children develop emotional regulation and fostering a positive outlook even amidst challenging situations.

The concept of patience is foundational to many ethical and spiritual frameworks, often intrinsically linked to trust in a higher order or the natural flow of events. Scholars across various disciplines have analyzed patience as a cardinal virtue enabling individuals to traverse life's trials while steadfastly maintaining their resolve and appreciation.[277] They meticulously categorize patience into distinct forms: patience in fulfilling obligations, patience in abstaining from detrimental actions, and patience in the face of calamities. Narratives of figures renowned for their unwavering patience and gratitude amidst extreme adversity serve as role-models for children. Contemporary educators frequently emphasize the efficacy of narrative in rendering complex philosophical concepts, such as determinism or the nature of suffering, accessible to young minds. The pedagogical approach used by Afnan, the aforesaid participant, by simplifying such a profound concept through a compelling narrative, ensures that children not only intellectually apprehend the idea but also emotionally connect with it, thereby fostering a deep-seated sense of contentment and reliance on wisdom and benevolence. This cultivation of patience and gratitude establishes a robust psychological foundation, empowering children to approach life's fluctuations with resilience and unwavering resolve.

[277] Ramamurthy, C., Zuo, P., Armstrong, G., & Zuo, J. (2024). The impact of storytelling on building resilience in children: A systematic review. Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 31(1), 108-120. [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jpm.13008]

Another parent, Fatima, a dedicated mother, echoed this sentiment: “We often tell them about religious figures’ patience during difficult times, like Prophet Yusuf (AS) when he faced persecution. This teaches them that even respected individuals faced hardships, and they endured with patience and determination. My daughter once told me in the course of hardship she went through: ‘I remember Prophet Yusuf when he faced 9 years of hardship however, he remained patient and faithful, I remembered his patience.’ This shows that internalize the narrative and remember at the time of need, especially when they grow up.” Fatima’s observation illustrates the direct application of prophetic narratives to children’s challenges, demonstrating how these stories provide concrete models for dealing with the injustice and hardships. The lives of resilient figures, replete with instances of patience, serve as an enduring source of inspiration for children to cultivate this essential virtue.

Among the other observations that are consistently reported by the interviewees is that narratives effectively encouraged children to practice forgiveness and reconciliation, thereby emphasizing the imperative of healing interpersonal relationships and transcending deleterious emotions such as jealousy and resentment.

Amira underscored the narrative of Joseph (from various cultural and religious traditions) as an exceptionally potent pedagogical tool for instilling these virtues: “Yes, through stories like Joseph’s, we work on concepts like forgiveness and reconciliation – how he forgave his siblings at the end of the story. This is one of the important things we can convey to children through the story: that he forgave them, he pardoned them, and told them this was snare of the devil that sown conflict between me and my brothers.” She further elaborated on addressing the complex emotion of jealousy: “I work on the concept of jealousy through Joseph’s story. In courses or behavior modification, we talk about feelings of jealousy. We say that the feeling of jealousy itself is somehow natural but what matters is the way how we deal with it. Sometimes jealousy is harmful when I feel I want to harm the person that has something better than me. Here I tell the story of Joseph when his siblings felt jealous of him and caused him harm – this was harmful jealousy that separated him from his family and made him live a life away from them. We talk about harmful jealousy that makes us create problems or go tell lies about our siblings or get them into trouble or lie about them.

While telling the story we use crafts, whenever possible, to make the story interesting and to capture the attention of children; such as this:




**Figure 5.2. Craft for the Story of Prophet Yusuf (AS)**

Amira's detailed exposition demonstrates how the multi-layered narrative of Joseph is strategically employed to address intricate emotional states like jealousy and to promote the transformative power of forgiveness and reconciliation. By meticulously differentiating between natural emotional responses and harmful behavioral manifestations, she guides children towards constructive emotional management and ethically sound conduct.

The narrative of Joseph, with its profound themes of sibling rivalry, envy, and the destructive consequences of unchecked jealousy, stands as a powerful and emotionally resonant narrative for instructing children on the critical importance of managing their emotional states. Psychological theories acknowledge that certain emotions are intrinsic to human experience, but it is the behavioral response to these emotions that

determines their moral valence.[278] Developmental psychologists emphasize the importance of emotional regulation and the cultivation of virtuous dispositions. Amira's methodology not only instructs children to identify their feelings of jealousy but also furnishes them with a clear conceptual framework for understanding its potential for harm and for consciously choosing righteous actions instead. This approach actively cultivates emotional intelligence and promotes harmonious interpersonal relationships within familial and communal contexts, thereby fostering a moral compass that guides children away from destructive impulses and towards constructive, compassionate interactions.

An interesting observation that emerged from the data is that while nearly all participants reported narrating the same stories to their children at certain developmental stages, each parent approached these stories from a distinct angle, tailoring them to the specific needs and circumstances of their child. For example, one parent, who described her children as emotionally fragile and struggling to cope with even minor hardships, drew on the story of Yusuf (Joseph) to emphasize the value of patience and resilience in the face of adversity. Another parent reported dealing with persistent issues of jealousy among her children and therefore highlighted the aspect of sibling rivalry in Yusuf's story, underscoring both its causes and its consequences. Similarly, another parent employed the same story to encourage her children to reconcile easily with one another, just as Yusuf ultimately reconciled with his brothers. She explained that in her household, even minor disagreements often led each child to take sides, and thus she narrated the story as a means of advising them to resolve conflicts peacefully. These examples illustrate how a single religious narrative can function as a versatile pedagogical tool, adaptable to diverse moral and emotional contexts.

However, I knew the story of Prophet Yusuf (AS) and was aware of its many moral lessons. Yet, unlike some parents, I had not previously thought about how to adapt or personalize it for my own children. As a researcher, this study provided me with valuable insight into how parents tailor religious stories to meet their children's needs. It also helped me realize how real stories like this can be used effectively to support

[278] Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. Review of General Psychology, 2(3), 271–299. [https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1998-07077-001]

children's character development. Through the data analysis, I learnt that the narrative of Yusuf (AS), with its intricate tapestry of betrayal, suffering, resilience, and ultimate reconciliation, stands as one of the most comprehensively detailed and emotionally resonant narratives across many cultures. Many parents believe that it's an ideal pedagogical instrument for moral education. There are numerous developmental psychologists and educators consistently emphasize the imperative of cultivating virtues like forgiveness, compassion, and repairing the damaged relationship among children.[279] Those parents that I met have applied theses developmental theories through real stories, which made it more efficient and productive according to them, Research in child development corroborates the efficacy of narratives as a medium for moral education in early childhood, particularly in conveying abstract concepts such as forgiveness and emotional regulation.[280] The methodology applied by Afnan, one of the parents, not only instructs children on the importance of forgiving others but also cultivates their understanding of the destructive ramifications of unchecked negative emotions, thereby providing them with a practical framework for managing their affective states and fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships. This approach actively cultivates empathy and promotes peaceful conflict resolution strategies.

Another interviewee, Nadia, a mother and school teacher, shared a similar experience: "We had some students who were constantly fighting and showed signs of hidden jealousy. I felt that I needed to explain the consequences of such negative feelings and how they can grow in the heart and lead to harmful outcomes. I prepared a small puppet-theatre activity for the whole class and told the story using simple tools, including a representation of the well where Prophet Yusuf's brothers threw him. We explained how negative emotions can develop over time and how Yusuf's brothers later felt regret, and how their lives were affected by their father's sadness until they eventually found Yusuf again. At the end, I asked the children what they had

[279] Denham, S., Neal, K., Wilson, B. J., & Pickering, S. (2005). Emotional development and forgiveness in children: Emerging evidence. In E. L. Worthington Jr. (Ed.), Handbook of forgiveness (pp. 337-350). Routledge, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313185236_Emotional_development_and_forgiveness_in_children_Emerging_evidence

[280] Ramamurthy, C., Zuo, P., Armstrong, G., & Zuo, J. (2024). The impact of storytelling on building resilience in children: A systematic review. Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 31(1), 108-120. [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jpm.13008]

understood. To my surprise, many of them said on their own that it is important to control oneself when feeling angry or jealous. Another student commented that if he ever feels jealous, he can try to improve himself instead of harming others. The class was around nine to ten years old. I enjoyed telling them the story, and I was even more pleased by how they responded to it. We later decided to continue these storytelling sessions regularly because we observed clear positive results in the classroom, and the relationships among the students became noticeably stronger. It was encouraging to see how the story was reflected directly in their behavior." Nadia's anecdote provides compelling evidence of the immediate and tangible impact of the narrative on children's conflict resolution skills. This demonstrates how the stories provide a blueprint for navigating interpersonal disputes with grace and humility, fostering a culture of forgiveness and shared understanding among peers.

I particularly appreciated Nadia's experience because it showed the teacher's thoughtful approach in dealing with the situation and her willingness to invest time in addressing a recurring problem in the class. I also recognize that many parents might respond differently, often choosing immediate solutions such as punishment, taking away privileges, or involving the parents of the child rather than addressing the issue from its roots. That's why I believe that this research may offer guidance to those who rely on quick disciplinary measures, as the example shared by the mother and teacher reflects a real and practical experience.

What touched my soul was Nadia's comment that she carried out this approach sincerely and without expecting immediate results. She understood that the impact might only become visible later in the year. In her view, children may not show the effect right away, but the story remains in their memory as they grow older—much like adults remember small details from their own childhood, whether positive or negative. As Nadia explained, the goal is to create a good and meaningful memory for the children through religious stories.

- **Narratives as a Pathway to Internalizing Universal Principles and Core Values**

Participants consistently explained how narratives actively facilitate a deeper comprehension of universal principles in children, ultimately culminating in a more personalized and intimate relationship with fundamental aspects of existence and a profound internalization of ethical and philosophical principles, such as the divine power, divine omnipresence, unlimited benevolence, and the belief in destiny, all presented in an age-appropriate and experientially relatable manner.

Amira articulated the role of narratives in conveying concepts such as religious determinism. She says “stories help explain complex religious and philosophical concepts in simple ways. For example, me as adult, I couldn't understand the meaning of belief in destiny in theology. However, when I studied the story of Prophet Job, I understood that this story truly represents this meaning.” This shows also how parents understand these narratives and interpret them as they understood, simplifying profound philosophical ideas, rendering them comprehensible to young minds.

Similarly, Asma, a mother and educator, shared how narratives can instill the trust in divine providence, such as the story of Abraham and his wife Hajar. Asmaa explained that they usually choose stories according to the occasion, using them to support children’s psychological needs while also instilling a value that will stay with them. Asmaa said “For example, when teaching the rituals of Hajj, including walking between Safa and Marwa seven times, we tell the story of Prophet Ibrahim leaving Hager in the desert. We clarify to the children that Ibrahim was a prophet acting under divine command, and that Hager understood this. The main point we emphasize is Hager’s trust and confidence in divine providence. Once Hager learned that this situation was divinely commanded, she accepted it with certainty that she would not be abandoned.”

When telling this story to older children, Asmaa said they explain the moral lesson and encourage them to understand that following divine guidance and believing that it is ultimately good can help them face difficulties. According to her, the idea presented to children is that when a guiding principle is followed, there can be a positive

outcome, even if it is not immediate. When telling the same story to younger children, Asmaa focuses on simpler elements, such as how Hager was rewarded with water and how a community later grew around her as a result of her patience and acceptance. At the same time, the story helps introduce young children to religious rituals such as pilgrimage.

Asmaa added, some might think that principles such as trust in divine providence are too advanced for young children to understand. However, she said that Children's parents noted that children do learn these ideas over time and begin to develop a form of inner strength. They observed that children who are exposed to such stories are not "empty from inside," but instead show signs of having an internal sense of reassurance and stability. Asmaa's reflections show how these narratives are used to communicate themes of trust, patience, and commitment to moral principles, especially during challenging circumstances.

Asmaa added that that such narratives help children to shape fundamental understanding of the cosmos, know their ontological position within it, and their perspective on life's inherent challenges and joys and that they are created for purpose, and they are never neglected; "One might think that's a bit exaggerating, however it was also surprising for me, as a teacher, to get that good feedback from parents." She said "the story of Hajar and her child Ismaeel (Ishmael) (AS) is very good example to teach children that one should always have faith and trust in God whatever the conditions are just like Hajar when she was abandoned in the arid desert with her infant son, and she asked Ibrahim, 'Has Allah ordered you to do that?" He said, "Yes". She said, 'then He will not neglect us.' We tell this and we repeat it to instructs children that even in moments of extreme vulnerability, care and provision are perpetually present. We also explain to children that Hajar tried to seek help. She started making circuits between the mounts Safa and Marwah, trying to find any help, which means that she had faith, yet she took action and exerted effort to get out of difficult situation and she was awarded at the end with the well of Zamzam. To further elaborate the story, we use sometimes tools explain it, such as this:




**Figure 5.3. The Well of Zam-Zam**

There are numerous narratives are full of instances that vividly illustrate universal attributes and principles. For instance, the narrative of Moses and a wise guide (from various traditions) subtly imparts lessons on the limitations of human knowledge and the hidden wisdom underlying seemingly inexplicable events, thereby reinforcing the concept of determinism and ultimate omniscience."

Some interviewees reported that children who regularly exposed to narratives developed a significantly enhanced capacity for psychological resilience and a deep-seated conviction that there is an active and benevolent involvement in their lives, even amidst profound difficulties and uncertainties.

Pedagogical theories frequently emphasize the narrative approach to philosophical education, as it facilitates a holistic understanding that integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Scholars highlight that narratives transcend mere historical accounts, serving profound didactic purposes by conveying complex spiritual and moral lessons in an engaging manner.[281] This narrative-based philosophical education provide concrete exemplars of how individuals responded to

[281] Salehi, A. (2016). The Role of the Quranic Stories and Parablesin in Islamic Education and Training. Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture, 1(1), 1-15, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311336713_The_Role_of_the_Quranic_Stories_and_Parablesin_in_Islamic_Education_and_Training

guiding principles, thereby modeling appropriate attitudes of submission, patience, and gratitude.

This approach aligns with the psychological construct of resilience, defined as the capacity to adapt effectively and recover from adversity. Research in positive psychology consistently indicates that a robust sense of purpose and a belief in a benevolent order serve as crucial protective factors that significantly enhance positive outcomes, even amidst considerable risk and adversity.[282] Narratives, thoughtfully presented by these educators, imbue children with a profound sense of meaning and purpose. They enable children to perceive their struggles not as random, meaningless occurrences but as integral components of a larger, benevolent plan. This perspective can foster a powerful sense of hope and optimism, which are indispensable for developing and sustaining resilience. Furthermore, the consistent emphasis on turning to inner strength and external support in all circumstances encourages the development of a secure attachment to a guiding framework, which can provide immense comfort and unwavering support during periods of stress.

This is entirely consistent with extensive scholarship on coping mechanisms, which demonstrates that beliefs and practices can serve as exceptionally powerful resources for individuals confronting life's challenges, providing them with a profound sense of meaning, enhanced perceived control, and deep emotional comfort.[283] By instructing children to turn to their inner resources and external support in both propitious and adverse circumstances, educators are not only imparting a fundamental belief but also equipping them with a potent, lifelong coping mechanism that can aid them in navigating life's vicissitudes with grace, fortitude, and enduring resilience. This fosters a worldview where even suffering can be imbued with purpose, leading to personal growth and a deeper, more profound understanding of life.

Khalid, a parent and active member of a children's program, shared how these stories foster a sense of the existence of divine power soothing the fear of children from anything: "We faced a problem with my son being very afraid of the dark, which made

[282] Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience in development. American Psychologist, 56(3), 227–238. https://ocfcpacourts.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Ordinary_Magic_Resilience_Process_000935.pdf
[283] Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1988). Stress, appraisal, and coping. Springer Publishing Company.

him unwilling to sleep alone at night. I tried several methods to help him, such as comforting him and assuring him that we were nearby. At the same time, I looked for a story that could strengthen and reassure him internally by reminding him that God sees us and is always with us, even more than a parent can be. I found that the story of Prophet Yunus (AS) was helpful for overcoming fear of darkness. I told him how Yunus was swallowed by a large fish and, despite the darkness of the sea, the night, and the fish's belly, he immediately trusted God, prayed sincerely, and was eventually saved. This helped me explain that even in dark or frightening situations, God is powerful and protective, even when we cannot see Him."

Khalid continued "I also bought him a book about the story of Yunus and the whale. Now, when it is dark, he sometimes whispers, "God is with me, watching over me." For him, it became a source of comfort rather than fear. He enjoyed the story, and over time, along with the other efforts, we were able to overcome his fear. I can sincerely say that the story alone did not solve the problem, but it served as a helpful tool, especially because it reinforces the idea of God's constant presence."

Khalid's observation illustrates how emotional concept like fear and anxious can be also dealt with through narrative, fostering a sense of security and a personal connection with the higher divinely power. This transformation from fear to comfort demonstrates the profound psychological and spiritual impact of internalizing these concepts through storytelling.

Another pivotal and frequently emphasized aspect of spiritual formation highlighted by interviewees was the significant transition from obedience predicated on external compulsion to obedience driven by an intrinsic appreciation and profound reverence for divine orders.

Amira eloquently articulated this core principle: "We teach children not to avoid wrongdoing out of fear of punishment, but out of appreciation and reverence for ethical conduct. For instance, a child should not lie—not because they fear retribution—but because they value truth and fear disappointing their own moral compass. This emotional and spiritual awareness is what we aim to instill from an early age." Amira's statement reveals a sophisticated pedagogical approach that endeavors to cultivate

intrinsic motivation for ethical conduct, transcending mere external compliance. She further elaborated, "We say: 'You don't lie because ethical principles are always present. You respect them, you fear deviating from them—not because you fear retribution, but because you value them.' It's like when someone deeply values another person—they try not to hurt them. Likewise, we try not to violate ethical principles." This vivid analogy underscores the relational dimension of their teaching, framing morality as an authentic expression of appreciation rather than a perfunctory adherence to rules.

This emphasis on the appreciation for universal principles as the primary stimulus for ethical behavior aligns perfectly with a mature and deeply internalized understanding of morality. This concept is embedded in many philosophical traditions, where the appreciation for universal principles is considered the apex of ethical living and the foundational bedrock of all moral action. From a psychological perspective, this approach strongly resonates with Self-Determination Theory, which distinguishes between extrinsic motivation (driven by external rewards or punishments) and intrinsic motivation (driven by internal satisfaction and genuine interest).[284] When children act out of appreciation and an authentic desire to uphold ethical principles, their motivation is intrinsically derived, leading to more sustained, authentic, and deeply internalized behavioral transformations. This stands in stark contrast to extrinsic motivation, which often yields only transient compliance.

Philosophers and educators have long posited that authentic ethical conduct emanates from appreciation and profound knowledge of universal principles, thereby engendering a desire to adhere to them out of devotion rather than fear. Contemporary educationalists underscore that ethical education significantly influences children's psychological development by fostering a deep, affective connection to universal principles, which in turn shapes their character and moral values.[285] Amira's statement

[284] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. American Psychologist, 55(1), 68-78. [https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2000-00923-008]

[285] Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 14-16, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234752469_Educating_Moral_People_A_Caring_Alternative_to_Character_Education

exemplifies the deliberate and conscious endeavor to cultivate such an internalized, appreciation-driven morality, which is a hallmark of mature ethical development. The overarching objective is to guide children beyond a transactional understanding of ethics—where virtuous conduct is merely rewarded and transgressions punished—towards a transformative paradigm where morality emanates from a heart devoted to universal principles.

Zainab, a homeschooling mother, shared a personal observation: "My youngest, Sarah, used to only engage in ethical practices when I reminded her. I started to read for her stories about individuals who exemplified strong moral character and their devotion, she started engaging on her own. When I asked her what encouraged her to do that, she said, 'I want to be close to these principles, like the exemplary figures.' It's not about me telling her anymore; it's from her heart." Zainab's anecdote powerfully illustrates the shift from external prompting to intrinsic motivation, driven by the inspiring examples of devotion found in narratives. This demonstrates how stories can ignite a personal ethical yearning, leading to voluntary and heartfelt acts of moral conduct.

Several participants also talked about this idea to count on divine providence and how it's important to be taught to children from young age. Yusuf further emphasized this point: "we tell the story of Noah and the flood to teach children about perseverance and trust in a larger plan, even when everything seems to be falling apart. It shows them that even in the face of overwhelming odds, if you have faith and follow guiding principles, you will overcome." Yusuf's example highlights how narratives of intervention and overcoming reinforce the concept of trust and provide a framework for understanding and enduring global challenges. This narrative instills a sense of hope and conviction that assistance is always available to those who remain steadfast in their resolve, fostering a resilient and optimistic outlook on life.

### 5.1.2. Effective Storytelling Methods: Using Interaction to Teach Values

Several parents and educators shared diverse and innovative pedagogical strategies employed to effectively transmit narratives to children, highlighting methods that optimize engagement, enhance comprehension, and facilitate the internalization of

moral lessons of religious stories. They consistently underscored the imperative of transcending passive reception, advocating for dynamic and interactive approaches that enable children to actively engage with the narratives on multiple cognitive and affective levels, thereby fostering deeper understanding and sustained retention. They frequently described the deliberate incorporation of various sensory elements into their storytelling sessions to render the narratives more vivid, memorable, and impactful for children. This approach aims to create an immersive learning experience.

Asma, mother and educator, meticulously detailed her pedagogical approach: “We regularly devote specific days or weeks to certain values, with the intention of developing that value in the children. For example, we have a week for altruism. During that period, we focus on religious stories that support the chosen value, along with related activities, and simple theatre plays that help children understand the meaning through practice. Children look forward to these days because they see them as enjoyable, and we involve them actively so that the value becomes more established. For instance, during the week of altruism, we told the story of the brotherhood between the *Muhājirūn* (Meccan Muslims) and the *Anṣār* (Medinan Muslims) that happened during the time of Prophet Mohamed (PBUH). We also teach them verses like this:

**"وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ"**

***“They give preference to them over themselves - even concerning the things that they themselves urgently need.”***[286]

And prophetic hadith, such as

**"لاَ يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّى يُحِبَّ لأَخِيهِ - أَوْ قَالَ لِجَارِهِ - مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ"**

***"None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."***[287]

We also watch videos on altruism,[288] hang paintings on the wall explaining that value, encourage them to search for verses, hadith, or poetry on altruism and write by hand, and we hang them in classes and corridors. We also did an activity in which we divided the students into two groups: one represents the emigrants from Mecca (the

[286] Verse (59:9) https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=59&verse=9
[287] Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 77, https://sunnah.com/muslim:45a
[288] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Fm-8-m60gs

*muhājirūn*), and the other represents the people of Madina. The Meccan group enters the classroom as if they are hungry, tired, and without a place to stay, while the students in the Madinan group share their food, offer their seats, and put the comfort of their "brothers" before their own. This acting activity is never forgotten. As a teacher, when I meet former students, they still remember these scenes clearly and say they cannot forget them. The same applies to other stories we present in similar ways. Following day, we try to see will students put this virtue into action. We place two students next to each other and give each of them a closed box, one containing two small items, such as candy, a pen, or any simple gift, and the other is empty. We then observed how each student responds when their partner opens an empty box. Surprisingly, many students choose to share what they have. Activities like this make children happy and help turn theoretical lessons into practical behavior. Each month, we distribute a short questionnaire asking whether their children have shown this kind of behavior, and we mostly receive positive responses; parents say that their children usually rehearse the play with their siblings at home, and explain its moral lessons imitating the way and tone they heard in the class." This interactive approach, integrating kinesthetic activities and games, transforms storytelling into an immersive, experiential learning modality.

Similarly, Layla, a mother and school teacher, emphasized the strategic utilization of visual aids: "We use pictures, puppets, and even dress-up to bring the stories to life. When children can see, touch, and interact with elements of the story, it becomes much more real and memorable for them." This aligns with educational research on the benefits of multi-sensory learning for young children, which suggests that engaging multiple senses enhances memory and comprehension.[289]

Many interviewees highlighted the effectiveness of encouraging children to actively participate in role-playing and dramatic re-enactments of narrative scenes. This method allows children to embody characters, explore motivations, and experience the emotional landscape of the story firsthand.

[289] Shaywitz, S. E., & Shaywitz, B. A. (2008). Overcoming dyslexia: A new and complete science-based program for reading problems at any level. Vintage Books. https://catalog.nlm.nih.gov/discovery/fulldisplay/alma9918283280106676/01NLM_INST:01NLM_INST

Omar explained: “After telling a story, we often ask the children to act out parts of it. For example, if it’s a story about conflict resolution, we’ll have them play the roles of the characters involved and try to find a peaceful solution. This helps them to internalize the lessons and practice applying them in a safe environment.” This approach is consistent with constructivist learning theories, where learners actively construct their own understanding and knowledge through experience and reflection.[290] Role-playing fosters empathy, problem-solving skills, and emotional intelligence by allowing children to step into different perspectives and navigate complex social situations. It also provides an opportunity for immediate feedback and guided reflection on their actions and choices within the narrative context.

Beyond mere reading or re-enactment, interviewees emphasized the importance of facilitating open discussions and encouraging critical thinking about the narratives. This pedagogical strategy aims to move children beyond surface-level comprehension to deeper analytical engagement with the story’s themes and implications.

Amira elaborated on her method: “After telling a story, we don’t just close the book and end the session, rather, we ask open-ended questions like, ‘Why do you think the character made that choice?’ or ‘What would you have done differently?’ We encourage them to share their feelings and opinions, even if they differ. And we never underestimate any view. This helps them to develop their moral reasoning and understand the nuances of ethical dilemmas.” This practice aligns with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is a social process and that cognitive development is enhanced through social interaction and dialogue.[291] By engaging children in discussions, educators help them to articulate their understanding, challenge their assumptions, and consider multiple perspectives, thereby refining their critical thinking and moral judgment. This active processing of narrative content ensures that the lessons are not simply memorized but are deeply integrated into the child’s cognitive and ethical framework.

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[290] Piaget, J. (1970). Genetic epistemology. Columbia University Press. https://www.rexresearch1.com/PiagetChildPsychologyLibrary/GeneticEpistemology.pdf

[291] Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press. https://w.pauldowling.me/rtf/2021.1/readings/LSVygotsky_1978_MindinSocietyDevelopmentofHigherPsycholo.pdf

Participants frequently described the deliberate incorporation of various sensory elements into their storytelling sessions to render the narratives more vivid, memorable, and impactful for children. This approach aims to create an immersive learning experience.

This pedagogical strategy aligns with the principles of experiential learning, wherein knowledge acquisition is facilitated through direct experience and active participation. John Dewey, an educational theorist, posited that learning is optimally effective when it is active, participatory, and intrinsically connected to real-life experiences, rather than being a passive reception of information.[292] By engaging multiple sensory modalities, educators facilitate a more holistic learning process, enabling children to construct meaning from the narratives in a more personalized and profound manner. Furthermore, the strategic deployment of visual and tactile aids supports cognitive development, particularly in early childhood, consistent with the theories of Jean Piaget, who emphasized the critical role of concrete experiences in foundational learning stages.[293] The anticipatory excitement described by one of the interviewees, Asma, also speaks to the profound influence of play and positive affective association in learning, thereby transforming education into an enjoyable and eagerly awaited activity. This multi-sensory engagement not only enhances memory encoding and comprehension but also cultivates a positive emotional valence towards the narratives and the values they embody, thereby laying a foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth.

Khalid, a parent, also highlighted the importance of making stories tangible: “We sometimes bring in props related to the story. For a story about a journey, we might bring a small toy animal or a model of a significant landmark. It helps them visualize and connect with the story on a deeper level. For example, when we told the story of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companion Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) reaching the Cave of Thawr, and how Abu Bakr entered first to make sure it was safe before the Prophet entered, we created the scene using simple materials available at home. We used plastic eggs and made the mountain from paper, which we

[292] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), https://dn720204.ca.archive.org/0/items/experienceeducat00dewe_0/experienceeducat00dewe_0.pdf
[293]Jean Piaget, *The Construction of Reality in the Child* (1st ed.; Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1954), https://www.scribd.com/document/141274053/Jean-Piaget-The-Construction-of-Reality-in-the-Child

painted with watercolors. We also drew a spider on paper, cut it out with scissors, and placed it at the entrance of the cave to represent the web. At home, we had toy soldiers of two different colors, so I brought some to represent the non-believers who were searching for the Prophet. When they saw the spider and the eggs, they turned away, believing that no one was inside.

We then explained the hadith:

***"I said to the Prophet (peace be upon him) while we were in the cave, 'If any of them looked down at his feet, he would see us under his feet.' He said, 'O Abu Bakr, what do you think of two people when God is the third of them?'"***[294]

Through this, we explained the meaning of true trust in God. There is a clear difference between only telling the story and using simple tools and creative acting with children. Even the time spent doing this becomes a memorable experience that they do not forget."




**Figure 5.4. The Story Behind the Cave of Sevres**

[294] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 62, Hadith 5, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3653#:~:text=Narrated%20Abu%20Bakr%3A,third%20of%20whom%20is%20Allah%3F%22

Khalid's use of props further exemplifies the multi-sensory approach, making abstract concepts concrete and enhancing the children's imaginative engagement with the narratives. This tactile interaction fosters a more memorable and impactful learning experience, bridging the gap between the narrative world and the child's physical reality.

- **Empowering Children as Storytellers and Tailoring Tales for Maximum Impact**

Several interviewees underscored the efficacy of empowering children to assume active roles in the storytelling process, enabling them to retell, interpret, and even generate their own narratives inspired by the original stories. This approach leverages peer influence as a potent educational catalyst.

Omar, father and school teacher, shared compelling observations regarding this dynamic: "When children act out the story and re-tell it in their own words, they internalize the lessons much more deeply. And often, they explain it to their friends in a way that resonates more than when an adult tells it. We sometimes take ideas from public pages on the internet and do them in the class. We acted out the story of the People of the Elephant in class using a simple setup similar to the one shown in the photo. Paper birds were hung from the ceiling, and paper elephants were attached to the children's tables. One group of students moved their tables forward to represent the army marching toward the Kaaba, while the miraculous birds coming from the sky. According to the story, an army led by Abraha set out with elephants to destroy the Kaaba, believing that doing so would draw people away from Makkah. As they approached, the elephants refused to move forward, and flocks of birds appeared carrying small stones, which they dropped on the army. The event ended with the army being defeated without any human intervention. This activity helped children understand the sequence of events by acting them out, making the narrative more concrete and memorable. After acting out, each group steps forward to say the moral lessons they learnt from the story. One group says that harmful intentions and unjust actions can lead to negative consequences, even when someone believes they are powerful or in control. Another group says that strength should not be used to harm others or to take what does not belong to them. Some other group says that the story

also highlights the idea that protection and safety can come in unexpected ways, reminding children that doing what is right is more important than seeking dominance or control. However, we can say all these moral lessons theoretically, but when they are said just after acting out the story, it fundamentally has big influence on children."



**Figure 5.5. Story of the People of the Elephant**

This dynamic interaction transforms children from passive recipients of information into active agents of their own learning and, crucially, the learning of their peers. The act of retelling necessitates deeper cognitive processing and comprehension, thereby solidifying the moral lessons within their individual cognitive schemata.

This pedagogical strategy is robustly supported by Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of development, which posits that learning is fundamentally a social process, and that children acquire knowledge most effectively through collaborative interaction with more knowledgeable peers and adults within their Zone of Proximal

Development.[295] When children assume the role of co-narrators, they are not only reinforcing their own understanding but also actively contributing to the collective knowledge and moral development of their peer group. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory further elucidates the profound impact of peer influence, wherein children learn through observational learning and imitation of the behaviors of others, particularly those with whom they identify.[296] When a child encounters a narrative from a peer, or observes a peer applying a lesson derived from a story, the message frequently carries greater salience and relevance than if it were solely conveyed by an adult. This collaborative and peer-driven approach cultivate a sense of ownership over the narratives and their inherent moral implications, thereby rendering the lessons more authentic and deeply embedded within their social fabric. It also fosters leadership competencies and self-efficacy in children as they assume the roles of storytellers and moral exemplars for their peers.

Fatima, a parent, noted the power of peer teaching: "My older child is 9 years old; he loves to gather his younger siblings who are 4 and 6 years old. He tells them stories that used to hear from me. The younger siblings attentively listen from him more than they listen from me sometimes!" Fatima's observation highlights the natural inclination of siblings to learn from each other and the effectiveness of peer-to-peer transmission of knowledge and values. This informal pedagogical setting reinforces the lessons in a relatable and engaging manner, demonstrating the pervasive influence of narratives within the family unit.

Interviewees consistently emphasized the critical imperative to adapt narratives to align with the developmental stage and cognitive capacities of children, thereby ensuring that the content is both comprehensible and maximally engaging.

Participants meticulously described their strategies for modifying the complexity, narrative length, and thematic focus of stories to correspond with the psychological and emotional capacities of distinct age cohorts.

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[295] Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner & Ellen Souberman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), https://home.fau.edu/musgrove/web/vygotsky1978.pdf

[296] Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, https://www.asecib.ase.ro/mps/Bandura_SocialLearningTheory.pdf

Asma elucidated her approach for younger children: “For children of very young age, we focus on simple, repetitive stories with clear moral messages, emphasizing trust and protection. We simplify the context and focus on the core lessons.” For children of older age, Omar noted: “With older children, we can delve into more complex narratives, which teach about wisdom, humility, and limits of human knowledge. We encourage discussion and critical thinking about the deeper meanings.” This meticulous tailoring ensures that the narratives are not only intellectually accessible but also emotionally resonant with the children’s current stage of development, thereby rendering the lessons relevant and impactful.

This pedagogical practice is established in developmental psychology, particularly the foundational theories of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson. Piaget’s stages of cognitive development underscore that children process information distinctly at various ages, necessitating adjustments in the presentation of complex ideas. [297] Erikson’s psychosocial stages emphasize the unique developmental challenges and tasks inherent at each age, suggesting that narratives can be strategically framed to address these specific needs, such as fostering a sense of initiative or industry.[298] By adapting the narratives, educators ensure that children are neither cognitively overwhelmed nor disengaged, rather they are appropriately challenged and actively engaged. This thoughtful adaptation maximizes the narratives’ potential as educational instruments, enabling children to progressively construct a more sophisticated understanding of ethical principles as they mature. It also exemplifies a pedagogical sensitivity that respects the child’s intellectual and emotional trajectory, thereby fostering a positive and enduring relationship with learning.

Ahmed, a parent, explained that storytelling must be adapted to the child’s age: “For my youngest, who is five, we focus on very short stories with clear actions. For my ten-year-old, we can discuss deeper meanings, like the political implications of historical migrations or strategic lessons from ancient battles. The same story can have different layers depending on the child’s age.” His perspective illustrates the flexibility of narratives and how their richness allows for age-appropriate interpretation and application. Several interviewees stressed that older children remain more engaged

[297] Piaget, J. (1954). The construction of reality in the child. Basic Books.
[298] Erikson, E. H. (1963). Childhood and society. W. W. Norton & Company.

when stories contain elements of adventure, mystery, and relatable challenges. Ahmed added, “My older child, who is 10, loves stories with a bit of action and suspense. When we tell them about historical conflicts or the challenges faced by figures like Joseph, they’re glued to sequence of events. It’s not just about the moral, but the journey, the struggle, and the triumph.” Zainab, a homeschooling parent, shared a similar experience: “We often turn the stories into mini-series, reading a chapter each night and stopping at a cliffhanger. This keeps them excited and eager for the next part. They start asking questions, predicting what will happen, and discussing the characters’ choices.” These accounts show how storytelling can become an engaging and intellectually stimulating activity that aligns with the developing interests and cognitive abilities of older children.

This strategy aligns with the concept of narrative engagement, wherein the structural and thematic elements of a story are meticulously designed to capture and sustain the audience’s attention. Educational psychologist Kieran Egan posits that effective pedagogy frequently involves tapping into children’s innate fascination with narrative, particularly elements such as wonder, mystery, and heroism.[299] For older children, who are developing more complex cognitive abilities and an enhanced capacity for abstract thought, narratives that present moral dilemmas, strategic challenges, and nuanced character development become particularly compelling. The strategic use of suspense and serialization, as described by Zainab, leverages principles of narrative psychology to cultivate anticipation and encourage active participation in the story’s unfolding. This not only renders education more enjoyable but also fosters critical thinking skills as children analyze character motivations and predict narrative outcomes. By presenting narratives as epic adventures replete with relatable human experiences, educators ensure that these stories remain vibrant and relevant to older children, thereby continuing to shape their moral and personal development in a dynamic and engaging manner.

Asma gave an example of a handmade model created to present the story of Prophet Ṣāliḥ and the people of Thamūd using simple materials such as cardboard for mountain-shaped houses, cotton and textured fabric to imitate stone surfaces, clay and

[299] Egan, K. (1997). *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding*. University of Chicago Press.

stones to form the water pool and ground, a plastic camel to represent the miraculous she-camel, and small crafted figures to depict the community, with handwritten Qur'anic verses placed around the scene to highlight key moments in the narrative. She said: "we told the story of the people of Thamūd, who lived in Al-Ḥijr, and gave general information that those people were strong and skilled, carving homes inside mountains but eventually turning away from God; Prophet Ṣāliḥ was sent to guide them, and a miraculous she-camel emerged from a rock as a sign, yet some rejected the message, harmed the camel, and faced the consequences after repeated warnings. The model helps children visualize the setting, understand the sequence of events, and remember key teachings. We then ask children what did they learn from the story, and all children's answers are accepted. For this story we carry two main moral lessons: even when people become strong, successful, or confident, they should remain open to sincere advice and avoid arrogance, and they should also offer advice to others in a positive and respectful manner, using kindness and good intention to maintain healthy relationships and support the well-being of those around them. Children definitely enjoy these settings especially when they join in making them."




**Figure 5.6. Story of Prophet Ṣāliḥ and the People of Thamūd**

Several interviewees articulated a firm conviction that religious narratives provide a clear and actionable moral compass, guiding children in their ethical decision-making processes and fostering a profound sense of personal and communal responsibility. For example, the concept of obedience, both to parental authority and to divine orders emerged as a central and foundational theme in the moral instruction provided by interviewees. Asma elucidated this meaning adding that we should also act smart in educating children, simplifying difficult concepts, and whenever possible do it as activity.

Interviewees acknowledged the influence of contemporary technology and the inherent challenges it poses to traditional storytelling paradigms. They described innovative strategies to adapt their pedagogical methods to maintain relevance and optimize engagement within a digitized environment.

Sara, a parent, shared her adaptive strategy: “It’s hard to compete with screens sometimes, but we’ve found that using animated versions of stories, or even creating our own simple digital storybooks, can really capture their attention. We then use these as a springboard for discussion, so it’s not just passive viewing.” Nadia added: “We’ve started using interactive quizzes and online games related to the stories. The children love the competitive aspect, and it helps reinforce the lessons in a format they’re familiar with, especially if I prepare a kind of reward after finishing.” These strategic adaptations demonstrate a pragmatic and responsive approach to integrating technology while meticulously preserving the core educational and ethical objectives of narrative transmission.

This proactive engagement with modern technology reflects a sophisticated understanding of the contemporary media landscape and its profound impact on children’s attention spans and learning preferences. While traditional oral storytelling remains invaluable, the judicious integration of digital tools can significantly enhance accessibility and appeal. Research on the utility of narratives in moral education for young children underscores the importance of employing diverse media to cater to varying learning styles and to sustain engagement within a technologically saturated

environment.[300] The crucial insight, as articulated by the interviewees, is not to supplant traditional storytelling but to augment it, strategically utilizing technology as a catalyst to deepen engagement and facilitate critical discussion. This thoughtful integration ensures that narratives remain relevant and impactful for a generation immersed in a digital world, thereby bridging the temporal chasm between ancient wisdom and contemporary modalities. It also exemplifies the inherent adaptability of education to evolving societal contexts, ensuring that its timeless messages continue to resonate with young minds.

### 5.1.3. Shaping Identity and Behavior: How Stories Build Community and Distinguish Character

Several interviewees observed that narratives aid children to distinguish between natural, constructive emotional responses and destructive, harmful ones, with a particular focus on the nuanced concept of jealousy.

Asma articulated this foundational pedagogical principle: “What led us to use stories of exemplary figures is that this is the most ideal thing we can tell, because we teach children that our first role model is an exemplary figure, so we must emulate their character. That’s why the first story we tell is from the biography of an influential person and how they dealt with children and how they behaved when they grew up.” Asma’s statement highlights the central role of exemplary figures as ultimate models in education. By introducing children to their lives and characters from an early age, educators aim to instill a profound desire to emulate their exemplary conduct, which encompasses all dimensions of moral, ethical, and personal living. The narratives of other influential individuals also serve as powerful archetypes of virtues such as patience, truthfulness, justice, and compassion.

[300] Husni Rahim and Maila Dinia Husni Rahiem, *The Use of Stories as Moral Education for Young Children*, International Journal of Social Science and Humanity 2, no. 6 (November 2012): 454-57, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269939320_The_Use_of_Stories_as_Moral_Education_for_Young_Children

This approach aligns with the concept of observational learning and social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals learn by observing the behavior of others.[301] Education places significant emphasis on learning through emulation and practical application, thereby rendering the lives of exemplary figures central to character development. Research emphasizes that education is highly effective in shaping behavior and personality, with narratives playing a crucial role in this process. By presenting these narratives, educators provide children with concrete, relatable exemplars of virtuous living, inspiring them to embody these qualities in their own lives. This fosters a deep, affective connection to the tradition of ethical conduct and encourages children to strive for moral excellence, thereby shaping their worldview and guiding their actions in accordance with universal values.

Layla, an educator, further elaborated: "We tell them stories of individuals who showed immense courage, kindness, and integrity. It's not just about telling them what to do, but showing them how it's done through the lives of those religious figures whom they like. Children naturally look up to heroes, and these stories provide them with real-life heroes to aspire to." Layla's observation underscores the power of narrative in providing tangible and inspiring models for children. This approach leverages children's natural inclination to admire and imitate, channeling it towards the development of positive character traits and ethical behavior.

Further to the above, several interviewees talked about the fact that shared experience of narratives contributes to the formation of a sense of community and a shared identity among children. This phenomenon is established in many sociological theories, such as those of Émile Durkheim, who posited that shared beliefs, collective rituals, and common narratives are indispensable for fostering social solidarity.[302] Durkheim argued that shared cultural elements play a crucial and indispensable role in generating a sense of collective consciousness—a shared set of beliefs, moral attitudes, and emotional bonds that coalesce individuals into a cohesive social unit. In this specific

[301] Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, https://www.asecib.ase.ro/mps/Bandura_SocialLearningTheory.pdf.
[302] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin; New York: Free Press, 1995), https://monoskop.org/images/a/a2/Durkheim_Emile_The_Elementary_Forms_of_Religious_life_1995.pdf.

context, the communal sharing of religious narratives and the consistent engagement in related activities serve as potent mechanisms for cultivating a sense of collective identity and deep social cohesion, thereby strengthening the children's sense of belonging to their community.

The concept of a shared moral and cultural lexicon resonates also with the philosophical insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who argued that language is not merely a utilitarian tool for communication but is, in essence, a form of life itself.[303] In this sense, the shared language of narratives creates a unique and vibrant cultural milieu among the children, a culture characterized by a shared commitment to ethical living, and a collective pursuit of personal growth. This shared cultural framework can provide children with an incredibly strong sense of identity and belonging, which is fundamental for their holistic social, emotional, and psychological well-being. It instills a sense of collective purpose and shared destiny, thereby preparing them to be active and responsible members of their community.

Asma noted the unifying power of these stories: "When children share one session of storytelling, they have something in common, a shared history. It builds bonds. They can talk about historical figures or allegorical tales, and everyone understands the lessons. It's like a shared language of good values." Ahmed's observation highlights how shared narratives create a cultural and moral common ground, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding among children from diverse backgrounds. This shared lexicon of stories becomes a foundation for collective identity and community building.

The very act of storytelling, transmitted organically from educators and parents to children, and subsequently dynamically from children to their peers and even their families, constitutes a powerful and continuous chain of intergenerational transmission of values, beliefs, and cultural practices.

[303] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (4th ed.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54889e73e4b0a2c1f9891289/t/564b61a4e4b04eca59c4d232/1447780772744/Ludwig.Wittgenstein.-.Philosophical.Investigations.pdf.

Amira shared a compelling observation that underscores this dynamic: “I constantly receive feedback from mothers after storytelling workshops and courses about the positive impact of the stories on their children’s behavior.” This feedback loop indicates that the lessons internalized from the narratives are not confined to the formal educational setting but are actively integrated into the children’s home lives, frequently leading to observable behavioral changes that parents readily perceive. This suggests a successful transmission of values from the educational environment to the familial unit, thereby reinforcing the intergenerational dimension of education.

This phenomenon speaks to the inherent power of narrative to forge a shared sense of purpose, meaning, and connection that effectively transcends generational divides. When children and parents share a common repertoire of stories, values, and experiences, it can significantly strengthen familial bonds and foster a more cohesive, supportive, and vibrant family environment. Furthermore, this process of intergenerational transmission is absolutely essential for the long-term vitality and cultural perpetuation of any community. As Margaret Mead argued, the efficacy with which a society successfully transmits its core values from one generation to the next is a key determinant of its long-term survival and flourishing.[304] Amira’s observation provides a powerful illustration of how the consistent acting out and sharing of narratives can contribute to the ongoing vitality and growth of a community, ensuring that its foundational values and heritage are faithfully passed down from one generation to the next, adapting and thriving in new contexts. This creates a living tradition that evolves with each generation, strengthening the fabric of the community.

Interviewees reported noticeable differences in the behavior and character of children who regularly listened to stories compared to those who did not have similar exposure. These differences appeared in various social situations. Children who frequently engaged with narratives were described as showing more prosocial behavior and polite manners, which became visible in their interactions both inside and outside their immediate community. Amira explained: “The stories definitely affect children’s behavior, and I often receive this feedback from parents after storytelling workshops because the meanings influence the child’s mindset.” Parents observed these changes

[304] Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (Garden City, NY: Published for the American Museum of Natural History, Natural History Press, 1970).

in different environments, providing consistent anecdotal feedback that storytelling seemed to have a positive effect on children's social behavior. Their comments suggest that the values children learn from stories may be reflected in their everyday interactions at home, at school, and in wider social settings.

This phenomenon aligns with established socialization theories, which posit that individuals primarily internalize norms, values, and behaviors from their social environment. In this specific context, the community, through the medium of storytelling, functions as an agent of socialization, actively instilling a moral framework. The observed behavioral disparities can be effectively understood through the lens of character education, a pedagogical approach that aims to cultivate virtues, ethical reasoning, and responsible citizenship. When children are consistently exposed to narratives that compellingly model virtues such as kindness, honesty, self-control, and compassion, they are demonstrably more prone to internalize these desirable traits and consistently manifest them in their daily interactions. This process contributes to the development of a strong moral identity, where an individual's sense of self is intrinsically linked to their ethical commitments.[305]

Furthermore, the very act of engaging with these narratives suggests a development of empathy and perspective-taking skills, as children imaginatively embody the characters and grapple with their moral dilemmas. This is supported by research on the role of narrative in fostering social-emotional learning. Martha Nussbaum argues, literature and storytelling cultivate a profound moral imagination and enhance the capacity for empathetic understanding, both of which are absolutely crucial for ethical citizenship and harmonious social interaction.[306] This also speaks directly to the concept of moral identity, where an individual's sense of self is fundamentally organized around core moral values and commitments. When children deeply internalize narratives, these stories become an integral part of their self-narrative, influencing how they perceive themselves and how they interact with the world around them. This creates a visible difference in their conduct, making them exemplars to their peers.

[305] Blasi, A. (1984). Moral identity: Its role in moral functioning. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), Morality, moral behavior, and moral development (pp. 128-139). John Wiley & Sons.
[306] Nussbaum, M. C. (1997). Cultivating humanity: A classical defense of reform in liberal education. Harvard University Press.

Several interviewees expressed a conviction that the impact of narratives extends far beyond immediate behavioral modifications, contributing to long-term character development and fostering a sustained, lifelong personal journey.

Khalid further emphasized: “These stories aren’t just for childhood; they become a part of who they are. My older children, even as teenagers, still refer back to lessons from these stories when they face tough decisions. It’s like they have an internal guide.” Khalid’s observation highlights the lasting influence of narratives on an individual’s moral reasoning and decision-making processes throughout their lifespan. This demonstrates how early exposure to compelling stories can establish a durable ethical foundation that continues to shape character and behavior into adulthood.

Asma articulated: “Through these stories, children understand that life has a purpose, and that even challenges are part of a larger journey. They learn that their actions have consequences and that they are part of a big universe, however they are the most important agent inside it.” This perspective helps children develop a sense of agency and responsibility, fostering a proactive approach to life’s challenges. Narratives often present characters who overcome adversity, find their calling, or contribute to a greater good, providing powerful models for children to emulate.

This aligns with psychological theories of meaning-making, which suggest that individuals construct meaning in their lives by integrating experiences into coherent narratives.[307] A strong sense of purpose and meaning has been linked to greater well-being, resilience, and mental health. By providing children with rich narratives that offer a framework for understanding their place in the world and the significance of their actions, educators are equipping them with vital tools for navigating existential questions and developing a fulfilling life. This cultivation of purpose extends beyond immediate goals, fostering a long-term orientation towards personal growth and contribution.

[307] Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/mans-search-for-meaning.pdf

- **Conclusion on the Full Findings**

Across all interviews, storytelling emerged as a central and intentional practice used by parents and educators. It was not described simply as a teaching technique, but as a meaningful part of daily interaction. Participants saw storytelling as a way to provide children with moral guidance, support cultural identity, and encourage emotional and cognitive development. Many parents viewed stories as a supportive alternative to modern forms of entertainment and a way to preserve focus, imagination, and meaningful communication within the family.

Storytelling was consistently described as a relational act through which adults share values, hopes, and cultural meaning with the next generation. For the interviewees, religious narratives served not only as educational tools but also as a means of strengthening emotional connection and transmitting shared traditions. Participants believed that stories helped children understand themselves and others, offering frameworks for interpreting their experiences and navigating social relationships.

The findings indicate that storytelling contributes to much more than the transmission of religious knowledge. According to parents and educators, it supports the development of empathy, resilience, critical thinking, and a stable sense of identity. At the same time, interviewees acknowledged certain challenges, particularly in balancing traditional storytelling practices with the realities of digital media, limited time, and changing cultural expectations. These tensions required parents to adapt their methods while maintaining the core educational aims.

Overall, the analysis suggests that religious storytelling can be an effective approach to supporting children's moral reasoning, character development, and cultural belonging when used consistently and carefully. The effectiveness of this practice appears to rely on several factors, including age-appropriate adaptation, regular engagement, interactive methods, and clear connections to everyday life. Parents who treated storytelling as an ongoing process rather than an occasional activity reported more positive outcomes.

Participants also highlighted the need for additional resources, guidance, and modern tools to help families sustain storytelling practices in contemporary contexts. Integrating traditional narratives with current knowledge on child development may offer new possibilities for improving the impact of storytelling and broadening its accessibility.

Taken together, the data shows that religious storytelling is considered by many families to be a valuable element of child-rearing, contributing to children's moral development and cultural understanding. With appropriate support and continued adaptation, these practices have the potential to remain relevant and beneficial across diverse communities.

### 5.2. Analysis of Interviews with Coptic Christians on the Interpretation of Bible Stories

Interviewees—including Coptic mothers, educators, academic tutors, church servants, and pastors—described the central role that Bible stories play in children's moral and spiritual upbringing. They consistently emphasized that these narratives help strengthen children's religious spirituality, guide their understanding of right and wrong, and strengthen their connection to faith. Participants explained that biblical stories are used to build character, teach patience, kindness, forgiveness, and honesty, and provide children with examples they can relate to in their daily lives.

Across the interviews, several shared themes emerged about how adults choose, interpret, and adapt Bible stories to the child's age and needs. Parents and educators highlighted the importance of simplifying the message for younger children, while offering deeper meanings to older ones. Many also discussed the emotional impact of storytelling, noting that children respond strongly to narratives that include struggle, repentance, and moral lessons.

The analysis that follows presents these common patterns, supported by direct quotations from the interviewees and informed by relevant scholarly work. A thematic chart is also included to summarize the main ideas identified across the interviews for easier reference.

Most of the Christian participants I interviewed in this study were Egyptians, and since the Christian population in Egypt is overwhelmingly Coptic Orthodox, the research is effectively limited to Coptic Christians. Consequently, the data presented in this thesis are derived mainly from Coptic Christians rather than from Christians of other denominations.

During the interviews, one striking observation was that the Coptic Christians consistently used the term *rusul* (messengers) when speaking about the Islamic prophets. This linguistic and theological nuance is not typically found among other Christian traditions, where prophets are more often regarded as kings, leaders, or prominent religious figures, but not as *messengers* in the Qurʾānic sense. Being attentive to this distinction allowed me to analyze the data with greater clarity, as it highlighted the specific theological framework of the Coptic community and shed light on concepts that would have remained ambiguous had I treated "Christianity" in general terms.

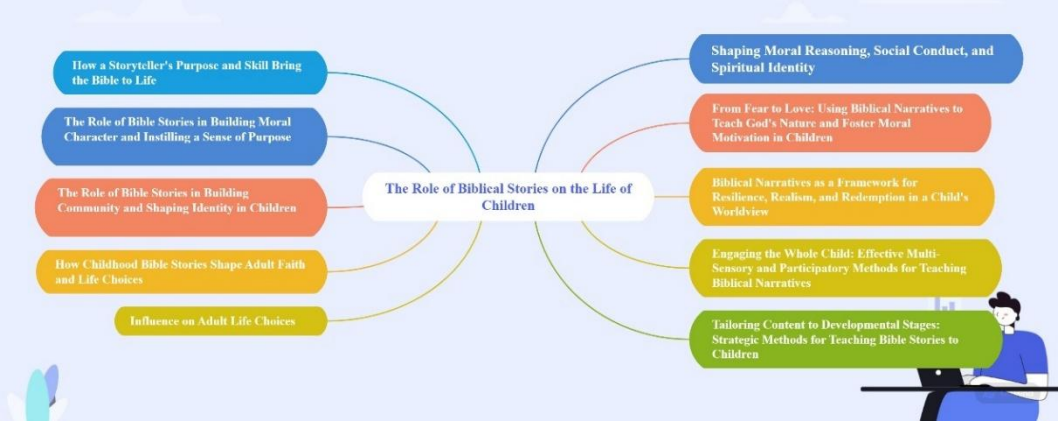



**Figure 5.7. Analysis of Interviews with Coptic Christians**

### 5.2.1. The Role of Biblical Stories on the Life of Children: Supporting Moral Reasoning, Social Conduct, and Spiritual Identity

The interviews showed that participants believed Bible stories play an important role in influencing children's attitudes and behavior. These narratives were not viewed simply as entertainment but as a way to introduce moral ideas, encourage empathy, and guide children in making ethical decisions. Many participants connected this

influence to the religious significance of the stories and their ability to present values in a clear and meaningful way.

Parents and educators shared several examples of changes they observed in their children's actions and habits after regularly engaging with Bible stories. They explained that these narratives often helped children experience the outcomes of positive behaviors, with a strong focus on applying the moral lessons in everyday situations.

Honesty was one of the most frequently mentioned themes. Interviewees described situations in which children chose to tell the truth, even when it was difficult, because of lessons they had learned from biblical narratives. Many participants noted that the idea of God's constant presence, and the desire not to disappoint a caring and loving God, was an important factor that encouraged truthful behavior.

Sarah, a homeschooling mother of three, shared a particularly striking anecdote: "My daughter, who is just seven, was asked by her grandmother to tell a friend on the phone, 'Tell her I'm sleeping.' My daughter immediately responded, 'No, Mama, I won't say that. Because by doing so, I'm not just lying to your friend — I'm lying to God.'" This powerful quote highlights a core tenet of character formation within this context: the internalization of divine accountability. What's more surprising is that during that week, we were working on the concept of truthfulness and refraining from the action of lying whatever the consequences are. One of the stories I told her is Gehazi's Big Mistake; that there was a man named Naaman, who was very sick. The prophet Elisha helped him get better — a miracle! Naaman was so thankful that he offered Elisha lots of gifts. But Elisha said, "No, I don't need them." Elisha had a servant named Gehazi. Gehazi was greedy. He ran after Naaman and told him, "Elisha changed his mind — he does want your gifts." Naaman happily gave him silver and clothes. But Gehazi wasn't honest. Elisha knew exactly what he had done — God showed him. Elisha confronted Gehazi and said, "Why did you lie? God saw everything. Because of your deceit, you will suffer for what you did." Gehazi's lie brought serious consequences. Later, I asked my daughter whether she had been afraid of the consequences of lying, and she said no. She explained that she simply no longer liked to lie because it is an action that the prophets do not approve of." The child's refusal to lie, framed not as an

act of defiance against her grandmother but as an act of reverence towards God, demonstrates a moral reasoning deeply influenced by religious instruction.

James Fowler posited the stages of faith development. where individuals progress from an egocentric understanding of faith to a more universalizing one, gradually incorporating a sense of divine presence and moral responsibility into their worldview.[308] Through exposure to religious narratives, children begin to construct a framework where their actions are judged not only by human standards but also by a higher, divine authority. Similarly, Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development, particularly the post-conventional level, emphasize moral reasoning based on universal ethical principles. These principles, in a religious context, can be shaped by teachings that prioritize truth and integrity.[309]

Gabriel Moran, a leading voice in religious education, stresses the vital role of narrative in shaping moral imagination. He argues that stories provide a crucial framework for understanding ethical dilemmas and developing a sense of moral agency.[310] Moran notes that "stories are not just about what happened, but about what ought to happen, and what kind of person one ought to be".[311] Rebecca, a seasoned Christian educator, further reinforced this concept, observing a clear distinction: "...children who had not been exposed to these stories, who had no one to tell them about the prophets or how to live rightly, were at a significant disadvantage. These stories teach children not only how to live but also how such teachings are still relevant today." [312] Her comment highlights the practical, real-world relevance of these narratives in guiding children's daily conduct and moral choices.

Further to the above, Interviewees frequently noted that Bible stories encourage children to be more inclusive and to engage positively with a wider range of peers, often moving beyond exclusive friendships or social cliques.

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[308] James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 117-213.
[309] Lawrence Kohlberg, The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 170-205.
[310] Gabriel Moran, Religious Education as a Second Language (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989), 72.
[311] Ibid
[312] Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009)

Maria, mother and Christian educator, vividly recounted using Bible stories as a tool of creating a united community. She says, “We tell children that we are not meant to love only few people. God created us to be a light among our peers—to always guide others toward the right path. We usually teach this concept to children who tend to have one sole friend and refrain from cooperating with others. We want the whole community to be united and to be all close to each other. One of the religious education principals we teach them is that Jesus once told His friends: “You are the light of the world.” He said it like this: imagine you have a little lamp at home. You wouldn’t hide it under a bowl — instead, you put it on a stand, so its light can shine and brighten the whole house. Jesus meant that each of us is like that lamp. God didn’t make us to shine only for our best friend or just one group. He made us to shine for everyone. When we show kindness, love, and help others, we are spreading God’s light. These kinds of stories usually encourage children to act according to religious instructions without feeling that they are obliged. They do this voluntarily just because they like playing the role model of Jesus Christ.” This example powerfully illustrates how biblical narratives are employed as practical tools for social-emotional learning, actively promoting virtues such as inclusivity and empathy.

Robert Coles, a distinguished child psychiatrist and author, extensively documented how children grapple with complex moral questions through stories, including those from the Bible.[313] Coles argued that narratives provide a vital moral compass, helping children navigate intricate social situations and develop a robust sense of responsibility towards others. He observed that "stories, especially religious ones, can help children develop a 'moral imagination',[314] enabling them to envision ethical responses to real-world challenges.

Furthermore, F. Washington Jarvis, in his significant work on Christian education, emphasizes the crucial role of biblical narratives in fostering a strong sense of community and collective responsibility.[315] He contends that these stories provide children with compelling models of behavior that extend far beyond individualistic concerns, actively encouraging them to perceive themselves as integral parts of a

[313] Robert Coles, *The Moral Intelligence of Children* (New York: Random House, 1997), 123.
[314] Ibid
[315] F. Washington Jarvis, *The Search for God: A Journey in Spirituality* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1990), 125-146.

larger, interconnected community. Maria's observation underscores the practical application of these narratives in shaping children's social competencies and their evolving understanding of their role within a broader social and spiritual context. This cultivation of inclusivity is not merely about social etiquette but about embodying a core Christian value of universal love and acceptance.

Another particularly significant finding from the interviews was the reported ability of children exposed to Bible stories to resist negative peer pressure and to steadfastly maintain their moral convictions, even when doing so meant going against prevailing social norms or the actions of their peers.

David, a dedicated Christian educator, articulated this proactive approach: "Sometimes, children think that if 'everyone else' does something, then it must be right. We help them understand that this is not true. They should do the right thing even if everyone is doing the opposite, that there is no problem with going against the flow. If the prevailing behavior is that 'everyone takes bribes to get things done,' we teach them: 'I will not do that because I fear God.' If everyone lies to escape consequences, we teach: 'I will not do that. Even if I'm punished, I will tell the truth.' To strengthen this principal, we usually tell the narrative of Daniel, who famously refused to defile himself with the king's food and remained unwavering in his faith despite threats. This narrative serves as a powerful archetype for moral courage and integrity. It provides a concrete, compelling example of such principled resistance, illustrating that true strength lies in adherence to one's convictions rather than conformity." David's insights, often drawn from the story of Daniel, highlight the intentional effort to equip children with the moral fortitude necessary to resist societal pressures that contradict biblical teachings.

This concept is strongly supported by James W. Fowler's stages of faith development, particularly the stage of 'Synthetic-Conventional Faith,' where individuals begin to internalize beliefs and values from their community. Later, they may progress to 'Individuative-Reflective Faith,' where they critically examine and personally commit to their beliefs, even if it means standing apart from the crowd.[316]

[316] James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 151-173.

Similarly, Alasdair MacIntyre, in his work After Virtue, powerfully argues for the indispensable importance of narrative in moral education. He suggests that individuals learn moral virtues not through abstract rules but by actively participating in and understanding the stories of their community.[317] MacIntyre posits that virtues are developed within specific social practices and traditions, and for Christian children, biblical narratives serve as a primary, foundational source for understanding and internalizing these virtues. David's statement vividly underscores the practical application of MacIntyre's theory, demonstrating how biblical stories are actively used to cultivate a moral identity that prioritizes divine principles over social conformity.

Another influential scholar, Craig Dykstra, emphasizes that Christian education's role in forming moral character extends beyond mere transmission of information. It involves "the shaping of dispositions and habits through engagement with the Christian story."[318] David's emphasis on teaching children to 'go against the flow' directly reflects this profound aim of character formation, preparing them to be ethical leaders rather than passive followers.

Beyond immediate behavioral changes, interviewees consistently observed that children developed an internal mechanism for self-correction and sense of accountability, not merely to human authority but, more significantly, to a divine one.

Grace, a seasoned Christian educator, elaborated on this: "For example, if a child finds themselves in a difficult situation, we teach them not to manipulate or deceive their way out. Instead, we teach them to admit their mistakes, apologize, learn from them, and accept the consequences rather than persisting in wrongdoing. In this situation, I tell a story teaching honesty and admitting mistakes. For example, the narrative of Zacchaeus when he takes responsibility for his wrongdoing. I tell them that Zacchaeus was a man who worked as a tax collector, and many people in his town believed he had not always acted fairly. He had taken more money than he was supposed to, and over time he realized that his actions had harmed others. When he finally understood the seriousness of his behavior, he did not try to excuse himself, hide what he had

[317] Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216-225.
[318] Craig Dykstra, Vision and Character: A Christian Educator's Alternative to Kohlberg (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 45-67.

done, or blame anyone else. Instead, Zacchaeus chose to admit his mistakes openly. He stood before the people and declared that he would correct his wrongdoing. He promised to return what he had taken and to repay those he had wronged. By doing so, he showed that a sincere apology includes both honesty and taking practical steps to make things right. Zacchaeus' actions illustrate an important lesson for children: when a person makes a mistake, the right path is not to cover it up or deceive others, but to acknowledge the truth, apologize sincerely, and take responsibility for correcting the harm. This story, among others, demonstrates that honesty and personal accountability lead to growth, healing, and restored relationships."

This observation, drawn from the broader impact of biblical teachings, points to a critical outcome of consistent exposure to biblical narratives: the cultivation of an internalized moral compass that guides children towards self-correction and responsible behavior.

The emphasis on admitting mistakes, offering sincere apologies, and accepting consequences reflects a mature understanding of accountability, moving beyond external pressure to internal conviction. This aligns seamlessly with Jean Piaget's theory of moral development, which distinguishes between heteronomous morality (where rules are imposed by authority, leading to obedience based on fear of punishment) and autonomous morality (where rules are internalized and based on mutual respect and cooperation).[319] The educators, through biblical teachings, are clearly fostering an autonomous moral reasoning where children understand the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions and take responsibility for them.

Furthermore, the concept of accountability to a divine authority powerfully reinforces this internal sense of control. As Erik Erikson suggested, the development of a strong sense of self and integrity is crucial for navigating life's challenges throughout life.[320] Biblical stories, by presenting characters who face moral dilemmas and demonstrate integrity, provide compelling models for children to emulate in developing their own sense of moral agency. Grace's statement underscores how religious education, through the power of narrative, contributes to the development of ethical framework

[319] Jean Piaget, The Moral Judgment of the Child (New York: Free Press, 1932), 106-194.
[320] Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 247-274.

that empowers children to make responsible choices and learn constructively from their errors, thereby fostering a sense of personal and spiritual integrity.

This also resonates with Carol Gilligan's influential work on moral development. While critiquing Kohlberg's male-centered model, Gilligan emphasizes the critical importance of relationships and care in moral reasoning.[321] The idea of not wanting to disappoint God, as mentioned earlier by Sarah, and the focus on repairing relationships through apology and acceptance of consequences, aligns perfectly with a relational ethic that is often fostered within religious communities. Grace's approach reflects a holistic model of moral education that integrates cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, leading to a more profound and lasting impact on children's character.

- **From Fear to Love: Using Biblical Narratives to Teach God's Nature and Foster Moral Motivation in Children**

Several interviewees highlighted how Bible stories serve as accessible vehicles for children to grasp complex theological concepts, such as God's omnipotence (all-powerful), omnipresence (everywhere present), and boundless love, all presented in an age-appropriate and relatable manner.

Hannah, mother and dedicated Christian educator, eloquently explained her approach using the story of Jonah: "Through this, they learn that God is omnipotent and that whatever is in God's will, He will accomplish. God wanted the city to repent, and if Jonah hadn't gone, the city might have been destroyed. We use this to show that each person is responsible for making positive changes in their home and community — just like Jonah went. According to the biblical narrative of Jonah and the city of Nineveh, God sent Jonah as a prophet to the people of Nineveh. The people there were doing wrong things and not treating others kindly. God wanted Jonah to go to them and remind them to change their ways and turn back to what is good and right. At first, Jonah did not want to go, and he tried to avoid the mission. But after facing hardship at sea and spending time inside a great fish, Jonah prayed, asked for help, and God saved him. Jonah then understood that God’s will cannot be avoided and that God

[321] Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 24-63.

always guides people toward what is best. Jonah finally went to Nineveh and delivered the message. When the people heard his words, they felt sorry for their actions and began to change. They treated each other better, acted kindly, and tried to live in the right way. Because of their repentance, the city was not destroyed, and God showed them mercy. Through this narrative, children learn that God is powerful and always accomplishes what He wills, that Jonah's message helped the whole city change for the better, and most importantly that every person can make a positive difference—at home, at school, or in their community and when we try to do good and encourage others to do the same, we help bring kindness and goodness into the world."

Hannah's insights demonstrate how the narrative of Jonah serves as a powerful pedagogical tool for conveying the attributes of God, particularly His sovereignty, as well as His profound desire for repentance and redemption. Hannah's emphasis on God's omnipotence and the idea that individuals can be instruments in His divine plan underscores a key aspect of spiritual formation. This aligns with the theological perspectives of John Westerhoff, who famously emphasized that faith development is a lifelong, dynamic process. Westerhoff argued that children learn about God not merely through didactic teaching but, more importantly, through active participation in the faith community's stories and rituals.[322] His model of faith as a continuous journey, rather than a static set of beliefs, suggests that narratives like Jonah's provide children with a dynamic and evolving understanding of God's active interaction with humanity.

Similarly, Jerome Bruner, a prominent cognitive psychologist, highlighted the indispensable importance of narrative in meaning-making. He argued that stories provide a fundamental framework for understanding human experience and for constructing one's reality.[323] For children, biblical narratives offer a structured and engaging way to comprehend abstract theological concepts by embedding them within relatable human experiences. Hannah's explanation vividly demonstrates how the story of Jonah is used not only to teach about God's immense power but also to instill a

[322] John H. Westerhoff, Will Our Children Have Faith? (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 79-103.
[323] Jerome Bruner, Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 11-43.

profound sense of individual responsibility within a larger divine plan, echoing Bruner's emphasis on narrative as a tool for both cognitive and moral development.

A crucial and frequently emphasized aspect of spiritual formation highlighted by interviewees was the significant shift from obedience motivated by fear of punishment to obedience driven by a deep-seated love and reverence for God.

Ruth, a thoughtful Christian educator with over a decade of experience in children's ministry, articulated this core principle: "We teach children not to avoid wrongdoing out of fear of punishment, but out of love and reverence for God. For instance, a child should not lie—not because they fear God will punish them—but because they love God and fear disappointing Him. This emotional and spiritual awareness is what we aim to instill from an early age. A well-known story in the Bible that illustrates this concept is the narrative of young Samuel when God first spoke to him. Samuel was a young boy serving in the temple under the care of the priest Eli. One night, while Samuel was sleeping, he heard a voice calling his name: “Samuel! Samuel!” Thinking it was Eli, he ran to him and said, “Here I am.” But Eli told him he had not called him and sent him back to sleep. This happened three times, and then Eli understood that it was God calling the child. He told Samuel, “If you hear the voice again, say: Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.” When God called again, Samuel replied exactly as he was taught. His words showed not fear, but respect, readiness, and love for God. From that moment, the Bible says that Samuel continued to listen to God faithfully, and “the Lord was with him.” We teach children that Samuel obeyed God because he loved Him and wanted to do what is right, not because he feared punishment, and that Samuel showed that real obedience comes from wanting to please God and listen to Him.”

Ruth's statement reveals a sophisticated religious approach that aims to cultivate intrinsic motivation for moral behavior, moving far beyond mere external compliance. She further elaborated, "We say: 'You don’t lie because God sees you everywhere and at all times. You respect Him, you fear disappointing Him—not because you fear retribution, but because you love Him.' It’s like when someone deeply loves another person—they try not to hurt them. Likewise, we try not to hurt God." This vivid

analogy underscores the relational aspect of their teaching, framing morality as an expression of love rather than a mere adherence to rules.

The emphasis on love and reverence for God as the primary driver for ethical conduct aligns with a mature and deeply internalized understanding of faith. This concept is rooted in Christian theology, where love for God is considered the greatest commandment and the foundation of all moral action. From a psychological perspective, this approach resonates with Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory. This theory distinguishes between extrinsic motivation (driven by external rewards or punishments) and intrinsic motivation (driven by internal satisfaction and interest).[324] When children act out of love and a genuine desire to please God, their motivation is intrinsic, leading to more sustained, authentic, and deeply internalized behavioral changes. This stands in stark contrast to extrinsic motivation, which often results in only temporary compliance.

Ana-Maria Rizzuto, in her psychoanalytic study of God images, suggests that early childhood experiences and narratives significantly shape a child's internal representation of God.[325] When God is consistently presented as a loving, benevolent, and merciful figure, rather than solely a punitive or judgmental one, children are far more likely to develop a secure and affectionate relationship with the divine. This fosters a genuine desire to please God out of love, rather than merely obeying out of fear. Ruth's statement exemplifies the deliberate and conscious effort to cultivate such an internalized, love-driven morality, which is a hallmark of mature faith development.

This approach is further supported by Don S. Browning, who argues for a pedagogy that emphasizes the relational aspect of faith. In this view, moral development is intricately intertwined with a loving relationship with God and a supportive community.[326] Ruth's emphasis on love and reverence over fear is a direct and

[324] Edward L. Deci and Richard Ryan, Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior (New York: Plenum, 1985), 11, https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_RyanDeci_SDT.pdf

[325] Ana-Maria Rizzuto, The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 177-208.

[326] Don S. Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 103-129.

powerful application of this relational pedagogy, aiming to build a faith that is both deeply personal and ethically robust. The goal is to move children beyond a transactional understanding of faith—where good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior punished—to a transformative one, where morality springs from a heart devoted to God.

- **Biblical Narratives as a Framework for Resilience, Realism, and Redemption in a Child's Worldview**

Some interviewees noted that children regularly exposed to biblical narratives developed a significantly greater capacity for resilience and a deep-seated understanding that God is actively involved in their lives, even amidst profound difficulties and uncertainties.

Amelia, a Christian mother and a volunteer in her church's children's ministry, offered a profound reflection on this: "The biblical figures—especially the prophets—lived life in its fullness: both its sweetness and its challenges. They faced difficult times and joyous ones alike, yet they knew how to act and respond wisely. They were very close to God and listened to Him. That is the model I wish to instill in my children. Life is not always easy or ideal; it contains both ease and hardship. However, teaching children to turn to God in both types of circumstances shapes their personalities and transforms how they perceive life in the future. The goal is for them to continuously keep their eyes fixed on God, recognizing how He shapes, forms, and acts in human life out of love—because we are created in His image." Amelia's insights highlight the core religious intent behind using biblical narratives: to cultivate unwavering resilience and an abiding trust in divine providence.

By presenting the lives of prophets as compelling models for navigating both adversity and prosperity with steadfast faith, educators aim to equip children with a robust spiritual framework for understanding and constructively responding to life's inevitable challenges. Amelia added “for example, we tell the story of Joseph when he was a young boy, he faced many hardships. His brothers were jealous of him, threw him into a pit, and sold him away from home. Joseph went through years of difficulty—living far from his family, working as a servant, and even being put in

prison for something he did not do. But through every part of his life, Joseph trusted God and stayed patient. The Bible says that "the Lord was with Joseph", and because Joseph stayed close to God, everything he did eventually turned to good. After many years, Joseph was given an important position in Egypt. From this position, he was able to help thousands of people during a great famine, including his own brothers who once harmed him. Instead of being angry, he forgave them and said: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Through this story we teach children that life includes both good times and hard times, but God is always with us. When we stay patient, do good, and trust God, He can turn difficult situations into something better. Joseph shows children that resilience, faith, and goodness matter, even when life feels unfair."

In psychology, the concept of resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity and adapt effectively to stressful situations. Research by Ann Masten on resilience in children has convincingly shown that a strong sense of faith and a supportive community are key protective factors that significantly promote positive outcomes even in the face of considerable risk and adversity.[327]

The biblical narratives, as thoughtfully presented by these educators, provide children with a sense of meaning and purpose. They help children to see their struggles not as random, meaningless events but as integral parts of a larger, benevolent divine plan, fostering sense of hope and optimism, which are essential for developing and maintaining resilience. Furthermore, the consistent emphasis on turning to God in all circumstances encourages the development of a secure attachment to a divine figure, which can provide immense comfort and unwavering support during times of stress.

Kenneth Pargament, who has dedicated his career to studying the vital role of religion in coping with stress,[328] consistently demonstrated that religious coping can be an exceptionally powerful resource for individuals facing life's challenges, providing them with a profound sense of meaning, enhanced control, and deep comfort. By teaching children to turn to God in both good times and bad. By doing so, educators

[327] Ann S. Masten, "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development," American Psychologist 56, no. 3 (2001): 227-238.
[328] Kenneth I. Pargament, The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 90-114.

are not only imparting a fundamental religious belief but also equipping them with a powerful, lifelong coping mechanism that can help them to navigate the ups and downs of life with grace, fortitude, and enduring resilience. This fosters a worldview where even suffering can be imbued with purpose, leading to growth and deeper faith.

Bible stories were also intentionally used to teach children about the inherent complexities of human nature, including humanity's profound capacity for both good and evil, and the universal need for divine redemption and grace.

Pastor Samuel, a church leader with extensive experience in children's ministry, shared his approach: "We don't shy away from the difficult stories. We teach the children that even great heroes of the faith can make mistakes. But we also teach them that repentance to God and seeking His forgiveness is fundamental. This helps them to understand that we are all human, we all make mistakes, and we all need God's grace. One of the stories I told is the narrative of Peter denying Jesus and then repenting; that Peter was one of Jesus's closest followers and loved him very much. But one night, when Jesus was taken by the authorities, Peter became scared. People asked him, "Aren't you one of His followers?" and Peter said "No, I don't know Him," even though he did. He said it three times because he was afraid. As soon as he realized what he had done, Peter felt very sad. He went away and cried, wishing he had been braver instead of afraid. Later, after Jesus returned to him, Peter said he was sorry. Jesus forgave him and trusted him again. For children, they learn that even good people can make wrong choices, and that being afraid or pressured can lead us to make mistakes and what matters most is admitting the mistake, asking for divine forgiveness, and trying to do better, and God's mercy is always open to those who turn back sincerely."

Pastor Samuel's willingness to engage with morally ambiguous narratives in the Bible demonstrates a deep commitment to providing children with a realistic and nuanced understanding of human nature. By presenting this narrative, Pastor Samuel is not only teaching children about the consequences of sin but, crucially, about the possibility of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. This approach aligns with the philosophical work of Paul Ricoeur, who has written extensively on the nature of evil and the

indispensable importance of narrative in understanding the human condition.[329] Ricoeur argues that stories can help us to grapple with the complexities of good and evil, and to develop a more compassionate and forgiving attitude towards ourselves and others.

By teaching children that even revered figures and "great heroes of the faith" are flawed and in need of redemption, Pastor Samuel is helping them to develop a more realistic and compassionate understanding of themselves and others. This can lead to a greater sense of humility, willingness to admit one's own mistakes, and a more forgiving attitude towards the failings of others. In a world that often presents a simplistic, black-and-white view of morality, Pastor Samuel's approach provides a much-needed dose of realism and grace, helping children to develop a more mature, empathetic, and compassionate faith. This fosters a sense of shared humanity and a recognition that everyone, regardless of their status, is in need of God's mercy.

### 5.2.2. Engaging the Whole Child: Effective Multi-Sensory and Participatory Methods for Teaching Biblical Narratives

Participants frequently emphasized the importance of moving beyond passive listening to active, hands-on engagement. Their shared their diverse methods and strategic approaches to effectively convey Bible stories to children. These methods often incorporated rich visual aids, dynamic physical activities, and invaluable opportunities for children to retell the stories in their own words, thereby deepening their understanding and ownership of the narratives. Several interviewees described their use of various sensory inputs to make stories more vibrant, memorable, and impactful. This often involved drawing direct inspiration from biblical examples of interactive and immersive teaching methods.

Sophia, a highly experienced Christian educator and a gifted storyteller, explained her methodology: “I incorporate visual aids and physical engagement into my storytelling, and I try to recreate the setting of the biblical story as much as possible. For example, when teaching the story of Daniel in the Lions’ Den from the Book of Daniel, I use

[329] Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 347-357.

simple toys to help children visualize it—plastic lions, a small figure wrapped in cloth to represent Daniel, and a cardboard box arranged like a pit, same as this photo:



**Figure 5.8. Daniel in the Lions' Den Visual Aid**

I explain to the children that Daniel was thrown into a den of lions because he continued to pray to God, yet God protected him throughout the night and the lions did not harm him. Using these tools, the children can see the scene in front of them, making the story easier to understand and remember. They learn that Daniel remained faithful and trusted God even when he was afraid, and that courage, trust, and doing what is right matter even in difficult situations. The hands-on materials keep them focused and excited, and the visual setup helps them connect the message to real-life situations where they may need to stay patient, calm, and confident in their values."

Sophia's approach to storytelling, which emphasizes multi-sensory engagement and contextual recreation, directly mirrors highly effective pedagogical practices. By bringing the biblical narrative to life through compelling visual aids and active physical involvement, she aims to deepen children's comprehension and their internalization of the profound lessons embedded within the stories.

This approach aligns with Howard Gardner's influential theory of Multiple Intelligences, which posits that individuals learn and process information in diverse

ways.[330] Engaging multiple senses—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—caters to a broader spectrum of learning styles, thereby making the stories more accessible, impactful, and memorable for a wider range of children. Furthermore, Maria Montessori's renowned educational philosophy, which strongly advocates for hands-on, experiential learning, finds significant resonance in Sophia's methodology.[331] Montessori firmly believed that children learn best by actively doing and by interacting directly with their environment, a core principle that Sophia skillfully applies by meticulously recreating the story's setting and atmosphere.

Sophia's method also reflects the principles of constructivist learning theory, where learners actively construct their own understanding and knowledge through direct experience and thoughtful reflection. As Jean Piaget argued, children build knowledge primarily through direct interaction with their environment.[332] By immersing children in the authentic atmosphere of the narrative, Sophia facilitates a personal construction of meaning. This is supported by Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the crucial role of social interaction and cultural tools (such as stories, visual aids, and shared activities) in cognitive development.[333] The educator's deliberate and creative effort to make the stories feel real and tangible significantly enhances children's engagement and retention, transforming the learning experience into something meaningful and lasting. This active engagement ensures that the stories are not just heard, but truly experienced and embodied.

A particularly unique and remarkably effective pedagogical strategy employed by interviewees involved actively encouraging children to retell the stories to others. This practice not only solidified their own understanding but also powerfully extended the stories' influence within their immediate social circles and beyond.

Sara, mother and Christian educator, detailed this innovative practice: "In Sunday School, we always assign a practical follow-up activity: the child must retell the story

[330] Howard Gardner, Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 73-276.
[331] Maria Montessori, The Absorbent Mind (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 165-192.
[332] Jean Piaget, The Construction of Reality in the Child (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 350-386.
[333] Lev S. Vygotsky, Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 79-91.

to two or three people—typically including their parents, friends, or playmates at the club or in the street. When the children return the following week, they share with us whom they told and how the person reacted. Treating them as co-narrators makes them more confident and involved. For example, one week we taught the children the biblical story of Jesus calming the storm, where Jesus and His disciples were in a boat during a strong storm, and while the disciples were afraid, Jesus stood and said, “Peace, be still,” and the sea became calm. One of the boys, retold the story to his friends in the club. He said it in his own innocent words: “Jesus told the big storm to stop, and it listened like a quiet baby. God always helps people who trust Him. Even if something looks scary, God knows everything and takes care of us.” His friends loved his way of telling it so much that they asked him to repeat it. When he came the next week, he proudly told us that even children he did not know gathered around him to hear the story again, and he became “the storyteller” of the group. His parents later told me that they were happy to see him gaining confidence and that other children admired him because he shared something meaningful. Moments like this show how storytelling helps children express themselves, remember moral lessons, and build positive social connections with others." This practice transforms children from passive recipients of information into active participants and enthusiastic disseminators of the biblical narratives.

By becoming 'co-narrators,' children not only reinforce their own learning through active recall and articulation but also become powerful agents of influence within their immediate social environments. This approach aligns with Lev Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which posits that learning is most effective when individuals engage in activities slightly beyond their current capabilities with the supportive guidance of more knowledgeable others.[334] In this context, the act of retelling the story to peers or family members serves as a crucial scaffold for deeper understanding and internalization of the narrative's meaning and moral implications.

Furthermore, this practice taps into the inherent power of peer influence, a well-documented phenomenon in developmental psychology. When children enthusiastically share these stories, they are not merely transmitting information; they

[334] Lev S. Vygotsky, Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 84-91.

are also implicitly endorsing and embodying the values embedded within them, thereby subtly shaping the moral landscape of their social circles. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes the profound importance of observational learning and modeling.[335] By encouraging children to retell stories, they are internalizing the narrative content, as well as modeling the positive behavior of sharing and teaching, which can have a significant ripple effect on their peers and family members.

Sophia's strategy leverages both cognitive and social mechanisms to maximize the impact of biblical storytelling, transforming what could be a passive learning experience into an active, communal, and deeply engaging endeavor. The built-in feedback loop, where children report on the reactions they received, further enhances their metacognitive awareness and powerfully reinforces the practical relevance and impact of the stories in real-world interactions. This also echoes the idea of participatory learning, where learners are actively involved in the educational process, leading to demonstrably deeper understanding and retention. As John Dewey famously argued, learning is best achieved through active engagement and direct experience, principles that this co-narration strategy beautifully exemplifies.[336] This approach ensures that the lessons learned are not confined to the classroom or home, but extend into the children's broader social lives.

- **Tailoring Content to Developmental Stages: Strategic Methods for Teaching Bible Stories to Children**

Interviewees consistently highlighted the critical necessity of tailoring both the selection of stories and the teaching methods to the specific cognitive and developmental stages of children. This careful adaptation ensures maximum relevance, comprehension, and engagement across different age groups; based on the age and evolving cognitive abilities of the children, ranging from those in early language development to those capable of more complex abstract understanding.

Chloe, a parent and dedicated Christian educator with a background in early childhood development, articulated her precise approach: "Yes, I tailor the stories according to

[335] Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977), 22-58.
[336] John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 25-50.

the children's age group and their cognitive capacity to grasp particular themes. For example, when they are very young, I start with simple stories that show how the apostles prayed and depended on God in every situation. One story I often use is the story of Peter in prison in Acts 12. The children love it because it is simple and focuses on divine miracles. It is a divine miracle for them. I tell them how Peter was kept in chains, but the believers gathered in a house and prayed sincerely for him. While they prayed, an angel came and opened the prison gate, and Peter walked out safely. The children learn from this that even when we are afraid or do not know what to do, we can talk to God, and He listens to our prayers, and also our beloved people are always praying for us. For younger children, I use very simple tools—like a paper chain to show Peter's hands being tied, a small toy door for the prison gate, and little candle lights to show the believers praying in the house. These visuals help them understand the story without overwhelming them. For the older children, I use stories that help them think more deeply about spiritual life and how to stay connected to God even in difficult times. One story they respond to very strongly is the account of Paul and Silas praying in prison in Acts 16. They had been treated unfairly and locked in a dark cell; they prayed and sang hymns to God. In the middle of the night, an earthquake shook the prison, the doors opened, and the prisoners' chains fell off. The children at this age understand the idea that faith is not only for easy days but also for moments of hardship. I use different tools for them—like simple drums or rhythm sticks to imitate the sound of Paul and Silas singing, small stones to show the prison floor, and written cards with short verses they can read aloud. This helps them reflect more deeply and connect spiritually with the message."

However, both narratives are similar, Chloe's emphasis on age-appropriate tailoring of biblical narratives underscores a fundamental and indispensable principle of effective education.

Recognizing that children at different developmental stages process information and abstract concepts in distinct ways, she strategically selects stories and themes that resonate most effectively with their current cognitive capacities. This approach is confirmed in Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which outlines distinct stages of intellectual growth, including sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete

operational, and formal operational stages.[337] For instance, younger children in the preoperational stage might benefit most from concrete narratives and vivid visual aids, while older children in the concrete or formal operational stages can engage more deeply with complex moral dilemmas and abstract theological concepts.

Similarly, Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development highlight the unique challenges and developmental tasks children face at different ages. This suggests that stories can be carefully chosen to address these specific developmental needs (e.g., stories about trust for infants, or narratives promoting initiative for preschoolers).[338] Chloe's methodology of introducing core Christian principles through the lives of biblical figures, beginning with foundational concepts like prayer and dependence on God, demonstrates a thoughtful and informed application of developmental psychology within religious education. This meticulous approach ensures that the spiritual and moral lessons embedded in the stories are not only understood but also internalized in a truly meaningful way, thereby fostering a gradual and organic growth in both faith and character.

The careful consideration of a child's cognitive and emotional readiness is crucial for the effective transmission of religious values, a principle that Chloe clearly understands and skillfully implements in her teaching practice. This tailored approach maximizes the impact of each story, ensuring it meets the child where they are developmentally, making the abstract concepts of faith accessible and relevant.

For older children, interviewees found that stories rich with elements of adventure, excitement, and dramatic tension were particularly engaging. These narratives effectively captured their imagination and made the embedded moral and spiritual lessons more memorable and impactful.

Chloe observed this preference: "It depends on their age. Older children tend to be drawn to stories that involve adventure. For instance, they love the story of Jonah where God sends Jonah to a pagan city to call them to repentance. We bring this adventure to life for children. They ask questions like, 'How did the fish not eat him?'

[337] Jean Piaget, The Construction of Reality in the Child (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 3-96.
[338] Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 247-274.

'What did he eat inside it?' 'Was he fasting?' The story of Jonah, with its dramatic elements of a tempestuous storm, a miraculous giant fish, and a challenging journey to a foreign land, provides an exceptionally compelling narrative that captures the imagination of older children, who are often actively seeking excitement, challenge, and a sense of the extraordinary" Chloe's insight that older children are captivated by adventure stories highlights the critical importance of aligning narrative content with the evolving interests and psychological needs of different age groups.

This approach is consistent with the findings of G. Stanley Hall, a pioneering figure in developmental psychology, who famously described adolescence as a period of "storm and stress," characterized by a heightened sense of adventure and a strong desire for novel experiences.[339] By framing the story of Jonah as an thrilling adventure, Chloe skillfully taps into this developmental need, thereby making the moral and theological lessons embedded within the narrative far more palatable and deeply engaging.

Furthermore, the strategic use of adventure stories can foster a sense of wonder, curiosity, and intellectual exploration, all of which are absolutely essential for spiritual development. Kieran Egan, in his influential work on imaginative education, argues that storytelling that actively engages the emotions and imagination is demonstrably more effective than purely didactic (instructional) approaches.[340] The insightful questions the children pose about Jonah's experience inside the fish eloquently demonstrate their active and deep engagement with the narrative and their genuine desire to understand the profound meaning behind the story. This approach not only makes the learning process significantly more enjoyable but also actively encourages critical thinking and thoughtful theological reflection, as children grapple with complex questions of divine intervention, human responsibility, and the very nature of God's power. By leveraging the inherent power of adventure, Chloe effectively transforms a religious lesson into a captivating and transformative experience that resonates with the developmental stage of her older students, fostering both

[339] G. Stanley Hall, Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 1:xiii-xx.
[340] Kieran Egan, The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 123-154.

enthusiastic engagement and a much deeper, more nuanced understanding. This ensures that faith remains dynamic and exciting, rather than a dry set of rules.

Interviewees thoughtfully acknowledged the impact of modern technology on children's attention spans and evolving learning styles. In response, they discussed and implemented various innovative strategies for adapting traditional storytelling methods to remain engaging, relevant, and impactful in an increasingly digital age.

Lily, a parent of two, offered a keen observation: "The current generation differs markedly from the previous one. Due to rapid technological development, children today often lack the attention span to sit and listen for long; they are constantly on the move. Moreover, in the Gospels, Jesus Himself modeled an approach to storytelling that was both interactive and contextual, but children now are accustomed to far faster forms of information. For example, when I tell my daughter, 'Come, I will teach you this thing from the Bible'—even if it is something related to her religious studies at school—she quickly responds by saying that there is no need, that she can simply search for it on Google or find a full explanation on YouTube. They know that all information, including religious material, is available instantly, without needing to search through the Bible or collect details from different chapters. When I noticed this trend, I decided to make use of it in a way that strengthens their religious learning rather than causing conflict, because this is simply the world they were born into. I agreed with them that every Sunday, during our family dinner, we would watch one Bible story together. Each girl has the responsibility of rewriting the story in her own words afterward, and we set a practical task for the week in which they try to apply the moral of the story in daily life. If someone forgets, another family member is expected to remind them. I would not claim that we follow this method perfectly—we sometimes miss a day—but we apply it most of the time, and it has helped us reach a middle ground. Since they are not interested in me teaching them the Bible directly, this became a way to keep them engaged while respecting the way they approach information in this digital age." Lily's astute observation about the impact of rapid technological development on children's attention spans highlights a critical and pressing challenge for contemporary religious education. Her response, however, is not to abandon traditional storytelling but to thoughtfully adapt it, drawing inspiration from Jesus's own interactive and contextual methods of teaching.

This demonstrates a pragmatic and responsive approach to pedagogy, recognizing that truly effective communication necessitates a deep understanding of the audience's evolving cognitive landscape. This perspective aligns with current research in educational psychology concerning the effects of digital media on learning. While some studies indeed point to potential challenges such as reduced attention spans, others emphasize the significant potential for technology to enhance engagement when integrated thoughtfully and strategically. Lily's proactive strategy of incorporating dynamic visual aids directly addresses the need for interactive learning experiences that can compete with the fast-paced, dynamic nature of digital content.

This also resonates with the concept of media literacy in religious education, where educators are actively encouraged to critically engage with contemporary media forms and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. As Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore argues in her work on religious education, effective pedagogy in a media-saturated world demands both creativity and a nuanced understanding of how children construct meaning from a multitude of diverse sources.[341] By drawing compelling parallels to Jesus's contextual storytelling, Lily provides a theological justification for adapting teaching methods, suggesting that while the core message remains timeless, its delivery must be responsive and relevant to the ever-changing cultural context. Lily's insight underscores the ongoing and vital need for religious educators to be innovative, flexible, and responsive in their approaches, thereby ensuring that biblical narratives remain vibrant, impactful, and deeply resonant for a generation accustomed to dynamic and interactive forms of communication. The challenge of maintaining profound engagement in a technologically advanced world is by no means unique to religious education; it is a universal concern across virtually all educational domains.

- **How a Storyteller's Purpose and Skill Bring the Bible to Life**

Several interviewees emphasized that the selection and telling of stories are by no means arbitrary acts but are, instead, driven by very specific and well-defined educational and spiritual objectives. Every story is chosen with a clear purpose in mind.

[341] Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, Teaching as a Sacramental Act: The Religious Education of Children (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 89-112.

Amelia, a Christian mother and educator, articulated her profound motivation: "I intentionally narrated these stories so they would retain them throughout their lives. One of the stories I always choose on purpose is the story of the Good Samaritan. I tell it because its message is unforgettable for children. It teaches them that kindness must extend to everyone, even to those we do not know or those who are different from us. The lesson is so simple that even young children can retell it, yet so deep that they carry it into adulthood. I tell them how Jesus described a man travelling on the road who was attacked and left hurt. Several people passed by and did not help him, even though they could have. But then a Samaritan—someone from a group that was not usually friendly with the Jews—stopped, cared for the injured man, washed his wounds, put him on his own animal, and took him to a safe place to recover. When children hear this, they never forget the image of the Samaritan stopping on the road while others kept walking. The purpose of choosing this story is very specific: to help children understand that love and compassion are not limited to our friends or our families, but must be shown to everyone. Even when they grow older, this story sticks in their minds. They remember that kindness is stronger than difference, and that helping someone in need is always the right thing to do. Sometimes we read it from book with images, to get their attention, such as this:

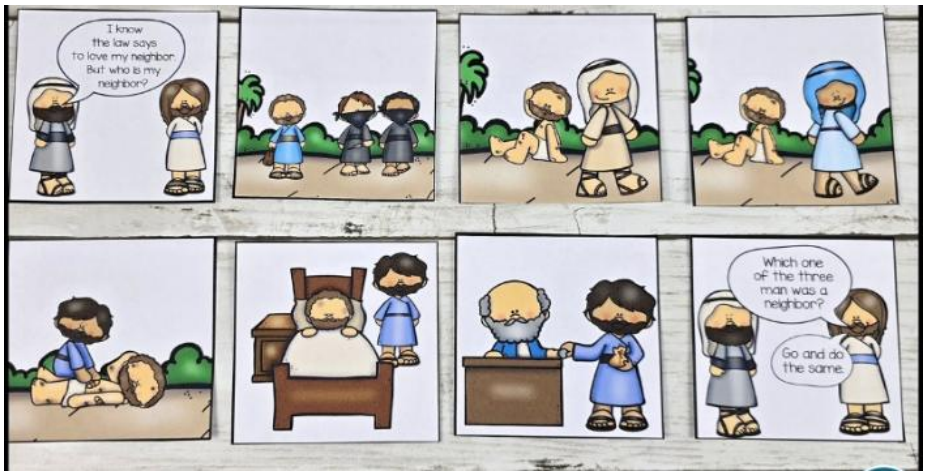



**Figure 5.9. Good Samaritan Story Sequence**

Amelia's method reveals a deep and abiding intentionality behind her storytelling practice. Her ultimate goal is not merely to entertain or to inform superficially, but to instill truths and foundational principles that will shape the children's way of thinking

and acting over the long term. This highlights the purposeful nature of religious education, where every narrative is carefully chosen and delivered with a specific developmental or spiritual outcome firmly in mind.

This approach aligns with the principles of curriculum design in religious education, where content is meticulously selected and thoughtfully sequenced to achieve desired learning objectives. Thomas Groome, a prominent and influential religious educator, argues that truly effective religious education involves a dynamic process of shared praxis. In this process, learners actively engage with their own lived experience, the rich Christian story, and the inspiring vision of a just and compassionate world.[342] Amelia's intentionality in narrating stories so children would retain them throughout their lives speaks directly to this long-term vision of holistic faith formation.

Furthermore, the role of the storyteller as a moral exemplar is implicitly, yet powerfully, highlighted. Children often learn not just from the explicit content of the stories but from the character, conviction, and genuine belief of the person telling them. Nel Noddings, a distinguished philosopher of education, emphasizes in her ethics of care, the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the student is absolutely fundamental to effective learning, especially in the realm of moral education.[343] The trust, respect, and affection children develop for their educators and parents significantly amplify the impact and resonance of the stories. This deep intentionality ensures that the storytelling is not merely a casual activity but a deliberate, sacred act of spiritual and moral formation, meticulously aimed at nurturing a lifelong, vibrant relationship with biblical truths and their practical application. This purposeful selection transforms storytelling into a powerful act of discipleship.

Interviewees consistently demonstrated a conscious and deliberate effort to interpret biblical narratives and to skillfully contextualize them for children. This crucial process involves making ancient texts vibrantly relevant to contemporary challenges, lived experiences, and the unique world of today's child.

[342] Thomas H. Groome, Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 184-232.
[343] Nel Noddings, Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 171-201.

Sophia, the Christian educator, underscored this vital role: "This enhances their comprehension and helps them internalize that these stories are not remote or mythical. Rather, the Word of God is still 'living and active' (Hebrews 4:12) and capable of transforming their lives today." Sophia's statement highlights the role of the storyteller as an insightful interpreter and a crucial bridge-builder between the ancient biblical text and the child's modern world. By emphasizing that the stories are not distant or fantastical, but "living and active," Sophia conveys the dynamic and transformative potential inherent in the biblical narrative. This interpretive act is absolutely crucial for making religious texts deeply meaningful and directly applicable to children's lives.

This approach aligns with Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, which emphasizes the profound importance of understanding texts within their original historical context while simultaneously recognizing their ongoing and vital relevance to the present moment.[344] Gadamer argued that true understanding involves a "fusion of horizons" between the reader (or listener) and the text, where the text's meaning is continually reinterpreted and enriched in light of new experiences and contemporary understanding. For children, this means actively helping them to see how ancient stories can speak directly to their modern challenges, their emotional experiences, and their moral dilemmas.

Similarly, Walter Brueggemann, a prominent Old Testament scholar, emphasizes the capacity of biblical narratives to evoke imagination and to create new possibilities for life and understanding.[345] He argues that the Bible is not merely a historical record but a living, breathing text that continues to shape human experience across generations. The storyteller, in this sense, acts as a vital mediator, facilitating the child's active and personal engagement with this living text. Sophia's explanation of using religious storytelling as a life-long method for upbringing spiritually and religiously guided children underscores the indispensable importance of a skilled storyteller who can effectively bridge the vast gap between the ancient world of the Bible and the contemporary world of the child, thereby ensuring that the stories are not just passively heard but are truly internalized, deeply understood, and practically applied. This active

[344] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: Continuum, 1960), 265-307.
[345] Walter Brueggemann, Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 19-56.

process of interpretation and contextualization transforms the biblical narrative from a static historical account into a dynamic, life-giving source of wisdom and guidance for children's lives, fostering a deeper, more personal, and enduring connection to the text and its timeless truths.

Isabella, another parent, provided a clear and accessible framework for this concept: "We share about three stories from the Bible during every session, all centered on holiness—how to be holy. In the Bible, 'holiness' means to be set apart for God. It means I belong to God, not to the devil. The devil constantly says, 'Lie, swear—it's no big deal,' and he makes sin look attractive. But being holy means standing against wrongdoing and resisting the flow." Isabella ‘s explanation of holiness as being "set apart for God" and actively resisting negative influences provides a clear and actionable framework for moral instruction. She added “the narrative of Daniel and his friends, who courageously refused to defile themselves with the king's food and remained steadfast in their convictions, provides a powerful and relatable illustration of what it means to be set apart for God in a challenging and often compromising environment.” By framing holiness not as an abstract theological concept but as a practical, daily commitment to righteous living, she empowers children to make conscious choices that align with their faith and values.

This approach is consistent with the virtue ethics tradition, which emphasizes the cultivation of moral character through the deliberate development of virtues. As Aristotle famously argued in his Nicomachean Ethics, virtues are not innate but are habits of character that are acquired through consistent practice and dedicated education.[346] In this context, Bible stories serve as rich source of moral exemplars and practical guidance for cultivating the virtue of holiness.

Furthermore, the concept of holiness as active resistance to the "flow" of negative influences resonates deeply with the psychological concept of self-regulation. Self-regulation involves the crucial ability to control one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in pursuit of long-term, valued goals. By teaching children to embrace

[346] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 18-44.

holiness, Isabella is essentially equipping them with the vital psychological tools necessary to resist temptation, make choices that are consistent with their deeply held values, and develop a strong internal moral compass. This holistic approach to moral education, which skillfully combines theological instruction with practical application and psychological insight, is a powerful and effective tool for shaping the character and behavior of children. It helps them to build a strong inner resolve against negative influences.

The profound theme of forgiveness, encompassing both divine forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation, was frequently highlighted as a key lesson taught through Bible stories. The story of Joseph, with its powerful narrative arc, emerged as a particularly prominent and effective example told by parents to convey these complex concepts.

Daniel, a dedicated Christian storyteller and a pastor's assistant, explained his method: "We also teach them about forgiveness through the story of Joseph. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, but when he became a powerful ruler in Egypt, he forgave them. We teach children that just as God forgives us, we must also forgive others." Daniel's use of the story of Joseph and his brothers is a resonant narrative for teaching the complex and often difficult concept of forgiveness. By highlighting Joseph's extraordinary act of grace towards those who had deeply wronged him, the storyteller provides a concrete, tangible example of how to respond to hurt, betrayal, and injustice with compassion, understanding, and a desire for restoration rather than revenge, especially when we become powerful.

This approach aligns with the extensive work of Robert Enright, a leading researcher in the field of forgiveness studies. Enright has developed and implemented educational programs specifically designed to teach forgiveness to children and adolescents, demonstrating its profound benefits.[347] His research has shown that learning about forgiveness can lead to significant improvements in mental health, a reduction in anger and resentment, and the cultivation of more positive and constructive social relationships. The storyteller's emphasis on the intrinsic connection between divine

[347] Robert D. Enright, Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 25-78.

forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness is also highly significant. By framing forgiveness as a direct response to God's boundless grace and mercy, the storyteller elevates the act of forgiving from a mere social convention or obligation to a deeply spiritual practice and act of faith.

This approach is consistent with Christian theology, which emphasizes the paramount importance of forgiveness as a core tenet of the faith and a reflection of God's character. Miroslav Volf argues in his book Exclusion and Embrace that forgiveness is not simply about letting go of past hurts; it is fundamentally about creating a new, hopeful future based on genuine reconciliation and transformative love.[348] By teaching children about forgiveness through narratives, the storyteller is imparting a vital moral lesson and providing them with a powerful, lifelong tool for building healthy, restorative, and deeply meaningful relationships, both with others and with God. This fosters a culture of grace and understanding within the community.

Another recurrent theme in the interviews is the divine justice and the inevitable consequences of one's actions—both positive and negative.

Eleanor, a dedicated Christian parent, explained her approach: "We use the story of Ananias and Sapphira to teach children that one must not lie — even if their parents tell them to. They lied to the Apostle Peter, and the consequences were severe. This teaches them that there are consequences for our actions, and that God sees everything." Eleanor's use of the story of Ananias and Sapphira, while a stark and sobering narrative, is employed to impart a crucial and unforgettable lesson about the importance of honesty and the reality of divine justice. By highlighting the severe and immediate consequences of their deception, the story serves as a powerful deterrent against dishonesty and unequivocally reinforces the profound idea that all actions, whether good or ill, have consequences, both in this life and, from a theological perspective, in the next.

[348] Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 120-140.

The Social Learning Theory[349] suggests that individuals learn about appropriate and inappropriate behavior by observing the consequences of others' actions. In this context, the story of Ananias and Sapphira serves as a vicarious learning experience, teaching children about the negative repercussions of lying without them having to experience those consequences firsthand. Furthermore, the story powerfully reinforces the concept of divine omniscience—the deeply held belief that God sees and knows everything. This belief can serve as a powerful internal motivator for ethical behavior, as children come to understand that they are ultimately accountable to a higher power, even when no human authority is present or observing.

While some might argue that using such a stark story could potentially be fear-inducing for children, Eleanor's clear intention is not to frighten but to instill a deep and abiding sense of moral responsibility and a healthy understanding of the consequences of mistakes. When presented within a loving, supportive, and theologically sound context, such stories can help children develop a moral compass and a healthy, reverent respect for the divine order and its principles. This fosters a sense of accountability that extends beyond human judgment.

Beyond moral instruction, Bible stories were also used to instill a sense of purpose and calling in children, helping them to perceive their lives as integral parts of a larger, divine plan and to understand their unique contribution to the world.

Michael, a passionate Christian storyteller and a youth pastor, shared his method: “We use the story of Esther to teach children that God gives every person a purpose, even when they are young. For example, Esther’s life shows this clearly. She began as an ordinary Jewish girl living far from her homeland, but God placed her in a very special position. When the king of Persia chose her to be queen, she did not know the reason at first. Later, when Haman planned to harm the Jewish people, Mordecai told Esther that she might have become queen ‘for such a time as this’. Esther understood that her position was not for comfort or honor, but for responsibility. She prepared herself with prayer and fasting for three days, and she asked her people to do the same. Even though approaching the king without permission was dangerous, she chose to do what was

[349] https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html

right. She went before the king, spoke with courage, and used her voice to protect her people. Children understand this story easily because Esther was young, just like many of them. Her bravery was not loud or forceful; it came from trusting God, thinking carefully, and standing up for what was right. We explain to children that Esther lived with purpose every day—from being kind in the palace, to listening, to praying, to making a brave choice at the right moment. God used her gentle heart, her courage, and her position to do something very important. This story helps children see that purpose is not only in big actions but also in being faithful, patient, and ready when the moment comes. Just like Esther, they may not understand at first why they are in a certain place or situation, but they learn that God can use them—through their kindness, honesty, and courage—to bring good into the world."

Michael's use of the story of Esther is a powerful and inspiring narrative for instilling a sense of purpose and divine calling in children. By highlighting how an ordinary young woman was chosen and used by God to accomplish an extraordinary and pivotal feat—saving her entire people—the storyteller inspires children to believe that they too possess a unique and important role to play in God's overarching plan.

This implicitly suggests a kind of vocational identity, which means developing a deep sense of purpose, direction, and meaning in one's life. William Damon, in his influential book The Path to Purpose, argues that having a clear sense of purpose is essential for psychological well-being and can lead to significantly greater resilience, motivation, and overall life satisfaction.[350] By teaching children that they have a special and divinely appointed purpose in God's plan, the storyteller is providing them with an invaluable source of hope and inspiration and actively helping them to develop a strong and enduring sense of vocational identity that guides their choices and aspirations.

Michael added "the compelling story of Esther can help children to develop a sense of agency—the empowering belief that they can indeed make a tangible difference in the world. By seeing how Esther's courage, strategic wisdom, and unwavering faith had a far-reaching impact on her people, children are actively encouraged to believe that

[350] William Damon, The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life (New York: Free Press, 2008), 33-58.

their own actions, however small they may seem, can have a significant positive impact on others and on their communities. This can lead to a sense of social responsibility, a deeper commitment to justice, and desire to use their unique gifts and talents to serve others."

Many interviewees articulated that the shared knowledge and understanding of Bible stories provide children with a common framework for interpreting the world and their place within it. This shared narrative creates a sense of unity and collective understanding within the community.

Olivia, a Christian educator and a Sunday School coordinator, elaborated on this: "We often use the term 'children of God,' not in the literal theological sense of divine progeny, but to express belonging to God. Being 'of God' means we are dedicated to Him, and therefore, we strive not to be engaged in wrongful behavior. One of the stories I use to help children understand what it means to be "children of God" comes from the Apostle Paul's teaching in the New Testament, where he reminds the early Christians that although they once lived in darkness, they are now "children of light in the Lord" and should therefore live in ways that reflect goodness, righteousness, and truth. In Sunday School, I simplify this message by telling it as a short narrative: I explain that long ago, many people around the early Christians acted in unkind or dishonest ways, but Paul wrote to them saying, "You belong to God now, so walk in the light. Do what is good, kind, and true." I tell the children that being "children of God" does not mean that God has children the way people do; rather, it means belonging to God and choosing actions that reflect His guidance. It means telling the truth even when it is difficult, sharing instead of being selfish, and keeping a gentle heart instead of giving in to anger. I find that children quickly understand this idea because they relate to the image of light and darkness. One student once summarized the lesson in her own words by saying, "If I'm a child of God, then I have to walk in the light—I can't do sneaky things in the dark," and this kind of simple reflection shows how clearly children internalize the message and link it to their everyday behavior."

Olivia's explanation of the term "children of God" reveals a deliberate effort to cultivate a shared identity among the children, an identity rooted in a common

commitment to God and a shared understanding of what it means to live a righteous and purposeful life. This sense of collective identity is an incredibly powerful force for social cohesion, providing children with a deep sense of belonging and a shared set of values that can consistently guide their behavior and interactions.

Emile Durkheim, a pioneering sociologist, argued that shared beliefs, common rituals, and collective narratives are absolutely essential for fostering social solidarity.[351] Durkheim believed that religion plays a crucial role in creating a sense of collective consciousness—a shared set of beliefs, moral attitudes, and emotional bonds that bind individuals together into a cohesive social unit. In this specific context, the communal sharing of Bible stories and the consistent use of common theological terms like "children of God" serve as powerful mechanisms for creating a sense of collective identity and deep social cohesion.

Furthermore, the concept of a shared moral and spiritual language resonates with the philosophical insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who argued that language is not merely a tool for communication but is, in essence, a form of life itself.[352] Wittgenstein believed that to truly understand a language is to understand a culture—a complex web of shared practices, beliefs, and ways of being in the world. In this sense, the shared language of Bible stories creates a unique and vibrant culture among the children, a culture characterized by a shared commitment to God, a common understanding of ethical living, and a collective pursuit of spiritual growth.

Many interviewees said that the very act of storytelling, passed down organically from educators and parents to children, and then dynamically from children to their peers and even their families, creates a powerful and continuous chain of intergenerational transmission of values, beliefs, and practices.

Sophia, a Christian educator, shared a compelling observation: "I know of children who influenced their own parents and brought them to church so they could learn these teachings and pass them on."

[351] Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1912), 415-447.
[352] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1953), 11e-88e.

Sophia explained: “One of the boys in our Sunday School became very attached to the gathering. He would go home and retell our talks to his mother, who was not religious and had never attended church. Over time, he kept asking her to come with him because he wanted her to ‘hear the stories the way we tell them.’ Eventually, she agreed—not because she had any prior interest, but simply because her son insisted so lovingly. After attending a few gatherings, she began encouraging another relative to join as well. It all started with the child’s enthusiasm. His engagement with the stories and the activities provided over there brought his mother into the community, even though she had never considered it before.”

This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "child-to-parent socialization," has been a subject of study by sociologists and developmental psychologists. V. K. Gecas, in his work on the family and socialization, noted that while parents are indeed the primary agents of socialization, children also play an active and often underestimated role in shaping their parents' beliefs and behaviors.[353] Sophia's observation provides a compelling real-world example of this process in action, demonstrating how the intergenerational transmission of values can be a dynamic, reciprocal, and two-way street.

This also speaks to the inherent power of narrative to create a spiritual connection that can effectively transcend generational divides. When children and parents share a common set of stories, values, and spiritual experiences, it can strengthen family bonds and foster a more cohesive, supportive, and spiritually vibrant family environment. Furthermore, this process of intergenerational transmission is absolutely essential for the long-term vitality and continuity of any community, particularly a faith community. As Margaret Mead, a renowned anthropologist, argued in her book Culture and Commitment, the way in which a society successfully transmits its core values from one generation to the next is a key determinant of its long-term survival and flourishing.[354]

[353] . K. Gecas, “Contexts of Socialization,” in Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives, ed. Morris Rosenberg and Ralph H. Turner (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 165-199.
[354] Margaret Mead, Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 1-94

Interviewees also reported noticeable differences in the behavior and character traits of children who regularly engaged with Bible stories compared to their peers who did not have such exposure. These disparities were often evident in various social contexts.

Children regularly exposed to Bible stories exhibited behaviors and mannerisms that set them apart in a positive light across various social environments, including their interactions with peers outside their immediate religious community.

Amelia, parent and Christian educator, explained "children who grow up hearing Bible stories often display cooperative and considerate behavior that is noticeable even in settings outside their church community. She described how these stories give children a strong foundation for interacting with others—teaching them not to lie, not to harm those who are weaker, and not to act unjustly. Parents frequently report that their children's religious learning positively affects the way they treat others, and similar feedback sometimes comes from teachers and other families." Amelia shared one incident involving her own daughter at school. There was a girl in her class who was generally avoided by others because she was often aggressive and pushed people away. Amelia's daughter asked her mother to pack an extra sandwich so she could offer it to the girl and spend time getting to know her. Over the course of a week, she gently tried to understand why the girl behaved the way she did, and in time, the girl opened up to her and shared her feelings. Their relationship changed, and the girl became more comfortable and less defensive. Amelia's daughter later told her, "Now I understand what it means to be a light to others—I made a positive change in my friend's life." Amelia explained that this kind of behavior reflects the moral lessons children absorb from biblical narratives, showing how deeply these teachings can influence the way they engage with the world around them.

Amelia's observation provides anecdotal evidence of the tangible and impact of Bible stories on children's social behavior. The remarkable ability of these children to actively perform the stories suggests a deep internalization of the narratives themselves and, crucially, their embedded moral lessons.

This phenomenon aligns with established socialization theories, which posit that individuals internalize norms, values, and behaviors primarily from their social environment. In this specific case, the religious community, through the powerful medium of storytelling, acts as a potent agent of socialization, actively instilling a unique and moral framework. The observed differences in behavior can be effectively understood through the lens of character education, an approach that aims to cultivate virtues, ethical reasoning, and responsible citizenship. When children are consistently exposed to narratives that compellingly model virtues such as kindness, honesty, self-control, and compassion, they are more likely to internalize these desirable traits and consistently exhibit them in their daily interactions.

To conclude, this comprehensive qualitative analysis underscores the multifaceted and profound impact of Bible stories on the behavior and character development of Christian children. The interviewees' testimonies reveal that these narratives are more than mere entertainment; they are viewed as potent, living tools for moral instruction, spiritual formation, and the cultivation of a distinct Christian worldview. The identified patterns—ranging from the transformative power of narratives to their pedagogical effectiveness, their role in moral formation, their social and communal impact, and their long-term influence—collectively paint a rich and comprehensive picture of how these stories are intentionally utilized and what are their perceived far-reaching effects.

The pedagogical strategies employed by the interviewees are equally noteworthy and demonstrate a good understanding of child development and effective educational practices. The deliberate shift towards interactive, multi-sensory, and experiential learning, coupled with the innovative practice of encouraging children to become "co-narrators" of the stories, showcases a highly effective approach.

The central role of Bible stories in moral and character formation is affirmed by the findings. These narratives provide relatable examples of essential virtues such as honesty, inclusivity, holiness, forgiveness, and accountability. By presenting moral dilemmas and their resolutions through the lives of biblical figures, children are provided with a clear and reliable moral compass that guides their ethical decision-making. The emphasis on self-correction, the acceptance of consequences, and the

cultivation of resilience and trust in divine providence equips children with life skills and spiritual foundation for navigating the complexities of the modern world.

Finally, the observed differences and long-term impact reported by interviewees provide compelling and consistent evidence for the enduring effectiveness of this narrative-based approach. The distinct conduct of children exposed to Bible stories in various social settings, their development of an enduring moral framework, and the lasting influence on their adult faith and significant life choices strongly suggest that these narratives contribute to a holistic, sustained, and deeply rooted character development. The profound differences noted between children who receive this exposure and those who do not highlight the unique and invaluable contribution of religious storytelling to the overall well-being, moral trajectory, and spiritual flourishing of young individuals.

In essence, this analysis reaffirms the spiritual and moral depth of stories to shape the next generation's minds and actions. The consistent and heartfelt testimonies from those on the front lines of religious education affirm that Bible stories are not just ancient texts or historical accounts but living, dynamic narratives capable of transforming lives and building character in truly lasting and meaningful ways

### 5.3. Comparative Analysis of Christian and Muslim Approaches to Religious Storytelling for Children

The interviews with Christian and Muslim parents and educators reveal several points of convergence as well as notable differences in how each community understands religious narratives and how they use them to shape children's moral, spiritual, and social development. Both groups affirmed that sacred stories form a central part of their child-rearing practices, offering models for ethical behavior, emotional regulation, and spiritual awareness. Interviewees from each tradition emphasized that these stories are selected purposefully, taught with clear educational aims, and reinforced through everyday examples. At the same time, differences emerged regarding the tools used in storytelling, the frequency with which stories are told, and the ways narratives are adapted to children's ages and needs. Christian parents often integrated visual aids, dramatization, and reflective dialogue, while Muslim parents more frequently emphasized practical moral lessons tied directly to prophetic

examples. Despite these distinctions, both communities viewed storytelling as essential for cultivating identity, shaping worldview, and transmitting values within the family and broader community.

### 5.3.1. The Role and Purpose of Religious Stories: A Shared Foundation

Both Christian and Muslim participants in this study share a strong belief in the high effect of religious stories. They both view religious narratives as potent tools for character formation, moral guidance, and spiritual development. For example, one Christian educator, Rebecca, stated, "...children who had not been exposed to these stories...were at a significant disadvantage. These stories teach children not only how to live but also how such teachings are still relevant today." This sentiment is also echoed by Muslim educators who see prophets' stories moral compass for children.

Both traditions emphasize the practical application of the lessons learned from these stories in children's daily lives. The goal is not simply to impart knowledge but to inspire virtuous behavior and a deep-seated sense of morality.

### 5.3.2. Key Similarities in Themes and Desired Outcomes

Despite the different religious contexts, there are similarities in the moral and ethical values that both Christians and Muslims seek to instill in their children through storytelling. These include, for example, Honesty and Truthfulness**:** Both groups emphasize the importance of stories in instilling values, such as honesty, often linking it to a sense of divine accountability. Sarah, a Christian mother, shared how her daughter refused to lie because she believed she would be "lying to God." This highlights the internalization of a moral compass guided by a higher power. Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The story of Joseph, a prominent figure in both the Bible and the Quran, is used by both Christians and Muslims to teach children about forgiveness. Amira explained how she uses the story to discuss "harmful jealousy" and the importance of forgiveness. Similarly, Christian educators use the story to promote inclusivity and empathy. Patience and Resilience**:** Both traditions use stories of prophets and other religious figures to teach children the virtues of patience and resilience in the face of adversity. Hana uses the story of Job to explain the concept of

patience and acceptance of fate. Similarly, Amelia, a Christian mother, emphasizes how biblical figures "lived life in its fullness: both its sweetness and its challenges," providing a model for children to follow. Self-Correction and Accountability**:** Both Christian and Muslim educators aim to cultivate an internal mechanism for self-correction. Grace teaches children to "admit their mistakes, apologize, learn from them, and accept the consequences." This is mirrored in the Muslim context, where children are taught that when they mess up against others, they should "apologize and do beautiful, kind acts to fix the mistake."

### 5.3.3. Distinctive Approaches and Emphases

While the core values are often similar, there are notable differences in the pedagogical approaches and the specific theological concepts emphasized in each tradition. For example, the Christian Emphasis on Divine Love and Grace is a prominent theme in the Christian interviews, they emphasize on a love-based relationship with God. Ruth, a Christian educator, stated, "We teach children not to avoid wrongdoing out of fear of punishment, but out of love and reverence for God." This is often contrasted with a fear-based motivation. The concept of Divine grace and the need for redemption is also central theme to teach children about human fallibility and the availability of forgiveness. On the other hand, Muslims Emphasize Submission and Divine Will. In the Muslim interviews, there is a strong emphasis on submission to Divine and the acceptance of divine decree. The story of Jonah, for example, is used to teach about God's omnipotence and the importance of fulfilling one's responsibilities. The concept of trust in God is also central, encouraging children to rely on God in all circumstances.

In short, while there are huge differences in the theological frameworks and pedagogical approaches, both Christians and Muslims share a common goal: to use religious stories to cultivate virtuous character and a strong moral compass in their children. The similarities in the values they seek to instill are much and suggest a shared understanding of the essential elements of a moral life. The most prominent difference lies in the underlying motivation for moral behavior. In the Christian context, there is an emphasis on a personal, love-based relationship with Divine, while in the Muslim context, the emphasis is on submission to God's will and the acceptance of divine decree.

### 5.3.4. Tools and Methods of Storytelling

Both Christian and Muslim communities employ a variety of tools and methods to convey these religious stories to children, adapting their approaches to suit different age groups and learning styles. For example, Christian educators and parents utilize a diverse range of methods to engage children with biblical narratives. These often include: Interactive Storytelling**:** Many interviewees emphasized dramatic retellings, often incorporating props, costumes, and different voices to bring the stories to life. Sunday School and Children's Church**:** Structured educational settings where stories are taught, discussed, and reinforced through crafts, songs, and plays. Bibles and Storybooks: Specially designed books with simplified language and illustrations make complex biblical narratives accessible to young children. These are often used for bedtime stories and independent reading. Digital Media: Some educators mentioned using animated videos, apps, and online resources to present Bible stories in a format that resonates with digitally native children. Memorization and Scripture Recitation: Encouraging children to memorize key verses and passages, fostering a deeper connection to the text and its teachings. Real-Life Application Discussions: Facilitating conversations about how the lessons from the stories can be applied to children's own lives and challenges. Similarly, Muslim parents and educators employ a rich array of methods to transmit prophetic stories and Islamic values, including, Oral Storytelling: The tradition of oral storytelling is deeply ingrained in Islamic culture. Parents and elders often narrate stories of prophets, emphasizing their virtues and struggles. This personal, direct transmission fosters a strong emotional connection. Islamic Schools and Madrasas**:** Formal educational institutions where children learn about Islamic history and the lives of prophets. These settings provide structured learning and peer reinforcement. Children's Islamic Books**:** Similar to Christian storybooks, these resources simplify complex narratives and make them engaging for young readers. They often include illustrations and moral lessons. Songs**:** religious songs often recount stories of prophets or convey Islamic values, making learning enjoyable and memorable. Role-Playing and Dramatization**:** Encouraging children to act out scenes from prophetic stories to deepen their understanding and empathy for the characters. Connecting Stories to Daily Life**:** Parents frequently link events in prophetic stories to everyday situations, helping children understand the practical relevance of these narratives. In conclusion, both Christian and Muslim traditions

share a profound commitment to utilizing religious stories as powerful tools for nurturing moral character, fostering spiritual growth, and guiding children toward virtuous lives. The effectiveness of these approaches lies in their ability to make abstract moral and spiritual concepts tangible and relatable for children, fostering intrinsic motivation for good behavior.

### 5.3.5. Most Prominent Differences

The most striking difference between the Christian and Muslim approaches, as revealed in the interviews, lies in the primary theological motivation for moral behavior and the specific emphasis within their respective narratives. Christian Emphasize on Love and Grace as Motivators. In the Christian context, a recurring and strong emphasis is placed on cultivating a relationship with God rooted in love and grace, rather than fear of punishment. For instance, a child should not lie—not because they fear God will punish them—but because they love God and fear disappointing Him. Christian educators aim for intrinsic motivation, where moral behavior stems from a genuine desire to please a loving God. Pastor Samuel, a Christian leader, stated: "We don't shy away from the difficult stories. We teach children that even great heroes of the faith can make mistakes. But we also teach them about repentance and God's forgiveness. This helps them to understand that we are all human, we all make mistakes, and we all need God's grace."

In contrast, the Muslim interviews highlight a strong emphasis on submission and divine will and divine decree as foundational principles. While love for God is certainly present, the pedagogical approach often frames moral behavior within the context of obedience to God's commands and acceptance of His plan, even if a person is not satisfied with it. The story of Jonah, for example, is used to teach about God's omnipotence and the importance of fulfilling one's responsibilities, as explained by Hannah, a Christian educator, in the Christian document. However, in the Muslim context, this narrative would likely be framed more explicitly around the concept of submission to God's command and the consequences of disobedience, even for a prophet. The concept of trust in divine is central, encouraging children to rely on God in all circumstances, recognizing His ultimate control and wisdom.

The Muslim narratives, particularly those of the prophets, often serve as exemplars of steadfastness, patience, and unwavering adherence to God's commands in the face of immense trials. While forgiveness and self-correction are taught, they are often presented within the framework of seeking God's pleasure and rectifying one's actions in accordance with divine law. The focus is on the perfect example set by the prophets and the importance of emulating their character as a means of drawing closer to God and fulfilling one's purpose. This is supported by the emphasis on the practical application of ethical principles within the daily experiences of children, as highlighted in the Muslim interview analysis. The narratives are seen as dynamic agents of change, capable of cultivating moral reasoning and fostering empathetic responses.

This difference can be seen as a nuanced distinction in emphasis rather than a complete divergence. Both traditions value love for God and obedience to His will. However, the Christian narrative tends to foreground the redemptive aspect of divine love in the face of human sin, while the Muslim narrative often emphasizes the perfection of divine plan and the importance of human submission and trust in that plan. These distinct theological underpinnings shape the way stories are told and the moral lessons that are drawn from them for children.

A notable difference between Christian and Muslim storytelling practices concerns the types of visual tools used. Christian educators often employ a wide range of materials—such as figurines, illustrated Bible scenes, and children’s books with images of biblical figures—because visual representation is generally accepted within their tradition. In contrast, Muslim parents avoid depicting prophets’ faces or bodies, since Islamic theology views imitation of prophetic figures as inappropriate and potentially leading to excessive veneration. For this reason, Muslim storytelling focuses on illustrating the events of the story and its environment while leaving the prophet himself undescribed visually. One interviewee explained this approach using the story of Jonah (Yūnus), shown through a simple homemade activity like the one in this photograph.



**Figure 5.10. Story of Jonah as Told by Muslims**

The sea was created using blue plastic sheets to represent the waves, small toy fish and a toy whale were added to illustrate the ocean environment, and a paper boat with cut-out human figures symbolized the sailors. On the shore side, textured material and a crafted tree represented the plant God caused to grow over Jonah after he was saved. Each labeled card highlighted a key moment of the story—for example, Jonah being cast into the sea, the whale swallowing him, the prayer he recited in the darkness, and the mercy shown to him afterward. By focusing on the setting and events rather than depicting the prophet himself, Muslim educators communicate the narrative effectively while remaining faithful to theological principles.

In contrast to Muslim practices—where depicting prophets visually is avoided for theological reasons—Christian educators commonly use illustrated figures to reenact biblical stories in a concrete and child-friendly way. In the example shown here,



**Figure 5.11. Story of Jonah as Told by Christians**

teachers use simple printed cut-out figures to narrate the story of Jonah. The materials include a small paper boat, two paper whales, and a child-friendly figure of Jonah himself, all placed against printed background scenes of the sea and the city of Nineveh. These elements allow children to follow the sequence of events visually: Jonah boarding the boat, being thrown into the sea, the whale swallowing him, and finally his arrival in Nineveh. The educators explained that these small figures help children maintain focus, visualize the narrative setting, and retell the story independently using the movable pieces. Such visual tools, widely accepted in Christian teaching, support multisensory engagement and reinforce understanding by enabling children to manipulate the characters and act out the story themselves.

# CHAPTER VI

# CONCLUSION

As I reflect on this research journey, it becomes clearer than ever how powerful stories can be in shaping a child's heart and mind. Across both Muslim and Christian traditions, the stories of prophets and biblical figures do far more than entertain — they teach, inspire, and quietly guide children toward becoming more compassionate, thoughtful, and morally grounded individuals.

Throughout this study, I found that when these stories are told with care — whether by a parent at bedtime, a teacher in the classroom, or even through modern digital tools — they help children make sense of the world and their place in it. Children do not simply memorize events; they connect emotionally with the characters, learn from their struggles, and begin to internalize values like honesty, forgiveness, courage, and patience.

One of the strongest findings is that the *way* stories are told matters just as much as *what* is told. Interactive storytelling, where children are invited to ask questions, reflect, and even re-enact what they've heard, leaves a much deeper imprint than passive listening. When supported by creative tools — from toys to animations — these ancient narratives take on new life, helping today's children relate to timeless virtues in ways that feel personal and relevant.

It also became clear that storytelling bridges gaps between generations and cultures. Whether Muslim or Christian, parents share a common hope: to raise children who are not only knowledgeable but kind, resilient, and morally aware. In a world where screens often compete for attention and instant gratification is the norm, these stories offer a quieter, richer space for reflection — teaching children that some lessons take time to absorb and some values are worth holding onto for life.

Most importantly, this research reaffirmed my own belief — drawn from both academic study and personal experience — that religious storytelling is not a relic of the past. It is a living, adaptable practice that speaks to the deepest needs of children today. The moral imagination it fosters will continue to shape the next generation — helping young hearts grow in empathy, faith, and integrity.

It is my hope that this thesis encourages more parents, educators, and faith communities to embrace storytelling — not as a simple pastime, but as one of the most meaningful ways we can nurture the minds and souls of children in an ever-changing world.

I would like to explain at the end the reason I chose this topic is that as a child raised in a religious family, the main form of entertainment at our household was stories and books—primarily religious stories of the prophets. This was due to the belief that other modern forms of entertainment, like television, video games, etc. were mere distractions that would not contribute to creating lasting memories as we grew up. Consequently, from a young age, I developed a profound passion for literature in all its forms. My mother worked as librarian, and as family members, we were immersed in the world of books. I share this story to illustrate how my family's decision to forgo television and instead encourage more intellectually and spiritually enriching forms of entertainment proved beneficial. With no alternative distractions, I immersed myself in literature, shaping my intellectual curiosity and passion for storytelling.

When I joined the university, I chose to study English Literature among all available options, as I felt it was the discipline most aligned with my interests and intellectual inclinations. Now, as a mother of two children, I follow in my family's footsteps. I have decided to refrain from providing my children with electronic entertainment before age 15. Instead, I offer them a wide range of primarily religious stories alongside various brain and trivia games. Additionally, I supply ample amounts of paper and craft tools, such as scissors, glitter glue, sticky tapes, etc., to encourage them to utilize their imagination in creating tangible toys by hand. Through reading and creative play, they nurture their imaginative capacities, forming meaningful connections with the stories they encounter.

As I progress in writing this thesis, I felt increasingly motivated to reflect on my own experiences and how storytelling, particularly religious storytelling, is fundamental to fostering lasting values, not only leave an indelible mark on one's ethical foundation but also have the potential to be passed on to future generations. Therefore, in this thesis, I have chosen to examine the role of religious stories in enhancing religious education for children. I explored their importance in developing children's capacity for imagination, language acquisition, and emotional expression. Additionally, I highlighted how religious storytelling engages with moral concepts, promotes ethical reasoning, and facilitates the internalization of faith-based values.

To substantiate my arguments, I presented examples of religious stories from both Islam and Coptic Christianity, such as the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, David and Solomon, Jesus, Moses, and Joseph. I also discussed how parents from different backgrounds introduce these narratives to their children. Furthermore, I presented examples of tangible three-dimensional religious toys, such as a Noah's Ark puzzle, Lego sets to construct the Kaaba and learn about its rituals, and puzzles representing the Last Supper. In addition, I conducted a qualitative survey, gathering insights from parents who have employed this approach to parenting. Through their responses, I explored the concrete spiritual impacts they observed in their children and how their approach shaped their children's moral and ethical development.

Thus, I would say that the purpose of this thesis was not to advocate for my perspective alone but to propose a shift in contemporary parenting practices. In an era where fast-paced nature of digital entertainment predominates—characterized by short-form videos, interactive gaming, and social media—the space for deep reflection and ethical contemplation is increasingly overlooked. Through this work, I hope to encourage parents to consider storytelling as a powerful tool in nurturing thoughtful, morally grounded individuals.

I also intend to expand this work into a book that collects a variety of religious stories suitable for young children, accompanied by crafts and activities I have gathered from social media, as well as those I have observed in schools, kindergartens, and heard about during interviews. There are much more examples of crafts and tools used by parents and educators to teach religious stories, but since the content of the thesis is

already big, I found it unsuitable to add more examples. The goal of the intended book is to compile all these ideas into a single resource that can serve as a reference for parents, educators, and storytelling facilitators—anyone interested in adopting this approach at home, in schools, or in storytelling circles. Through this, I hope to encourage the adoption of modern, creative, and engaging methods for helping children build a meaningful connection to their faith.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## FIGURES

Visual and Pedagogical Tools for Religious Storytelling

This appendix presents selected photographs and educational tools that were provided by participants during interviews or found on religious websites for children. These materials illustrate a variety of creative, interactive, and child-friendly approaches to introducing religious concepts and narratives from both Islamic and Christian traditions. The tools range from physical models and puzzles to interactive games, all designed to engage children in an age-appropriate manner and enhance their comprehension of prophetic and biblical stories. Some are open ended toys for kids so they can gain a close connection with religion.



**Figure A.1. 3D-Printed Images Encouraging Explaining Prayer**




**Figure A.2. Mosque-Building Activity Set**

Presented in dismantled form for children to assemble as shown in the reference image.

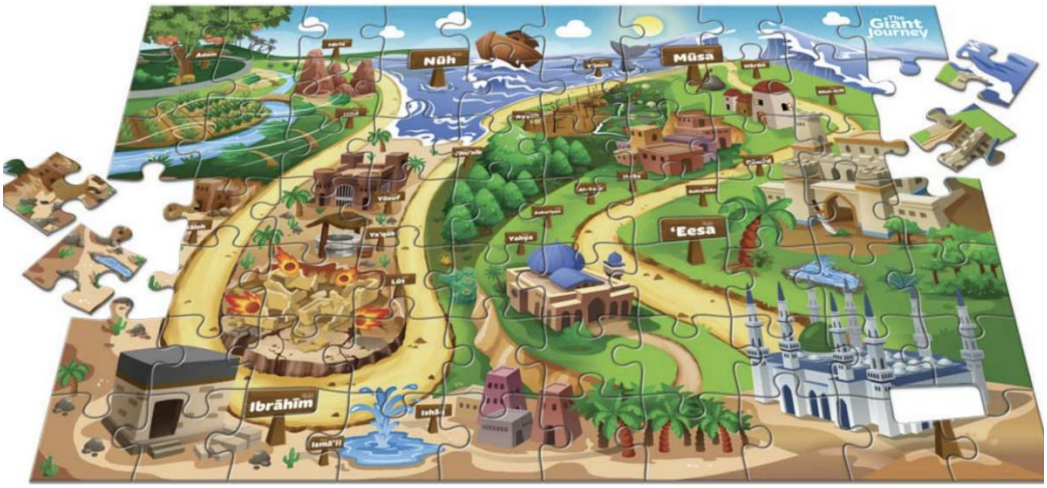



**Figure A.3. "The Path to the Prophets" Puzzle**

Each piece contains a symbolic element representing a prophet's story, designed to familiarize children with prophetic narratives.

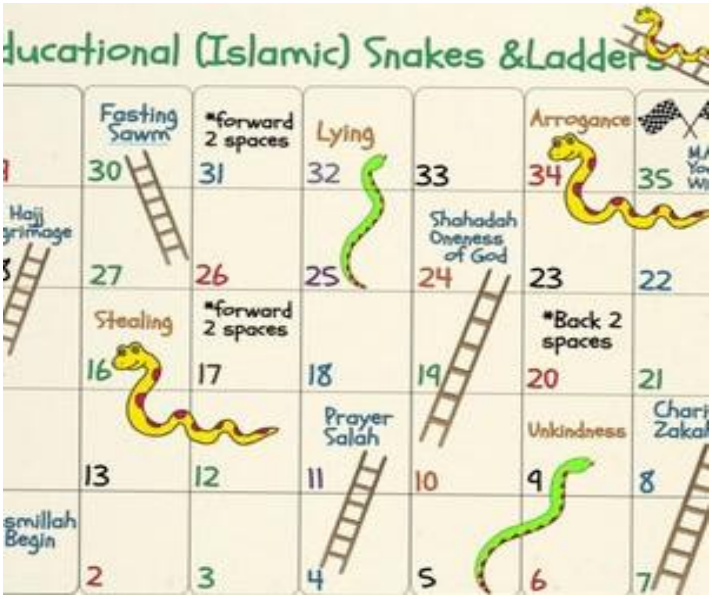



**Figure A.4. Islamic-Themed "Snakes and Ladders" Board**

A game aimed at teaching children the distinction between right and wrong.

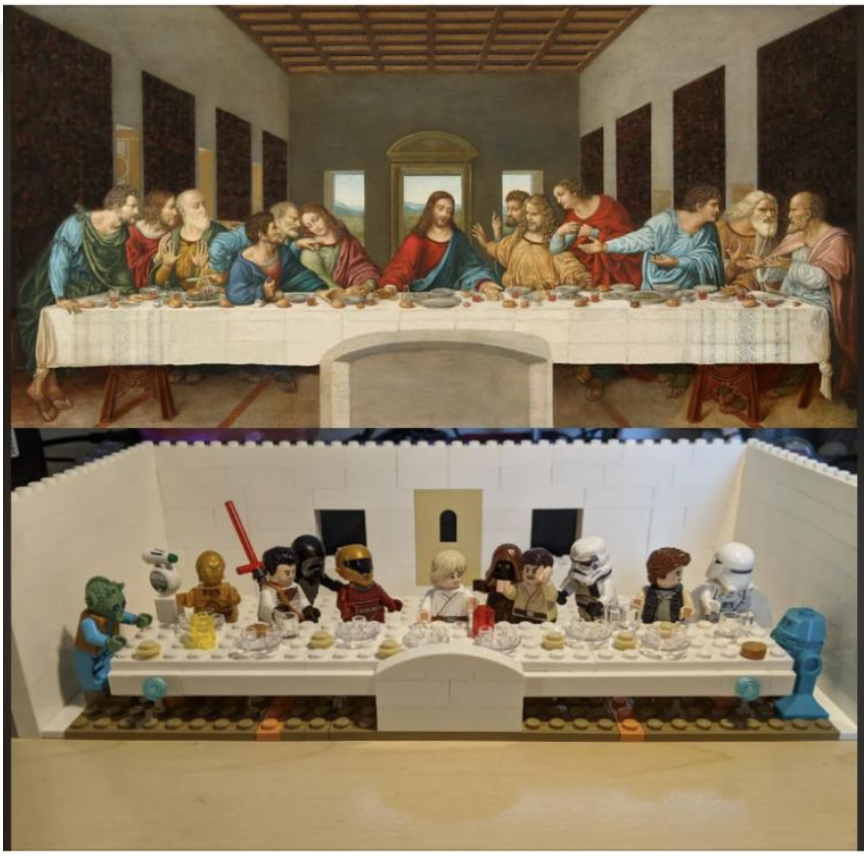


**Figure A.5. Lego Model of the Last Supper**



**Figure A.6. Biblical Account of Jesus Feeding 5,000**






**Figure A.7. Prayer Steps Puzzle**




**Figure A.8. Learning the Hajj Rites**

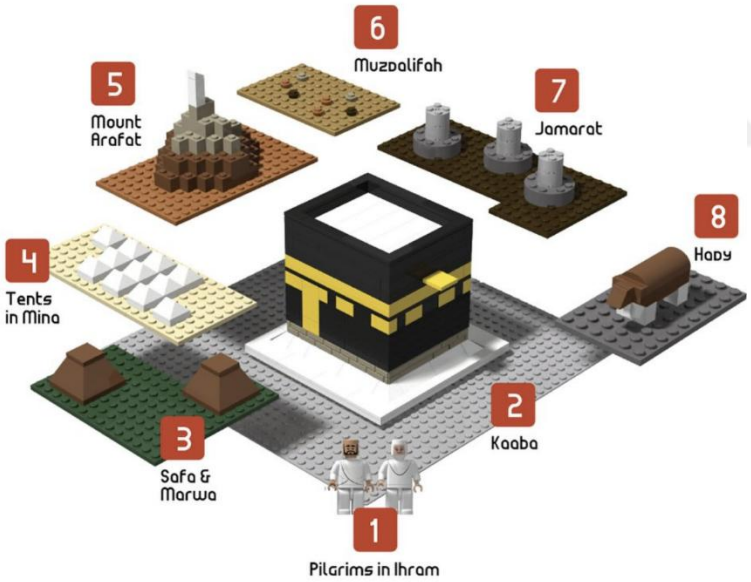



**Figure A.9. Hajj Rites Blocks**




**Figure A.10. Teaching Children the Five Pillars of Islam**

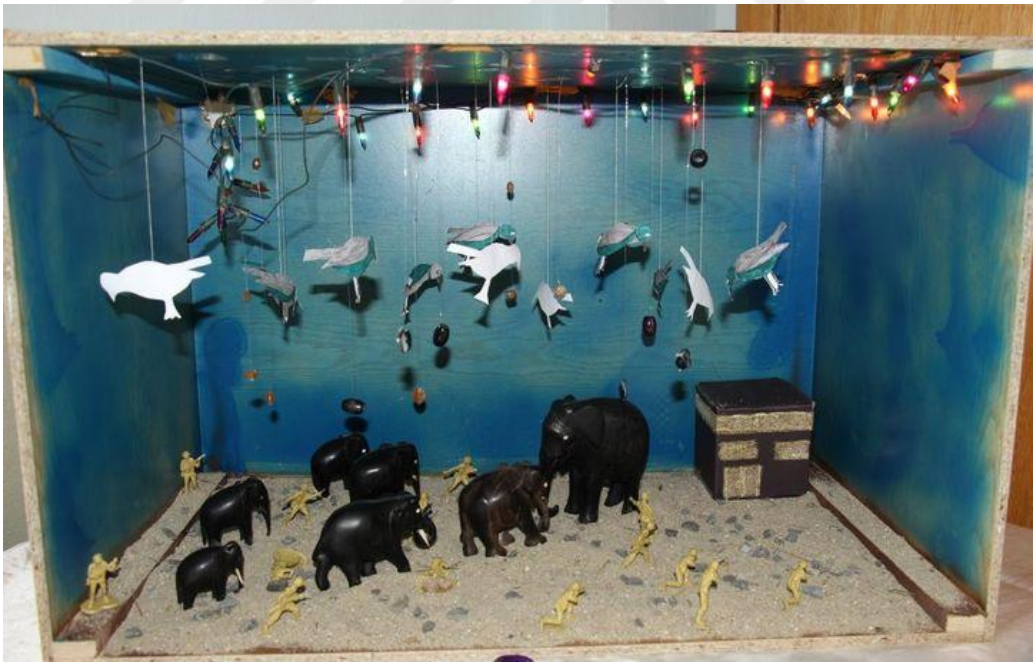


**Figure A.11. The Quranic Story of the People of the Elephant**



**Figure A.12. The Story of Musa's Mother Placing Him in the Nile**




**Figure A.13. The Birth of Isa (AS) and Maryam's Story**

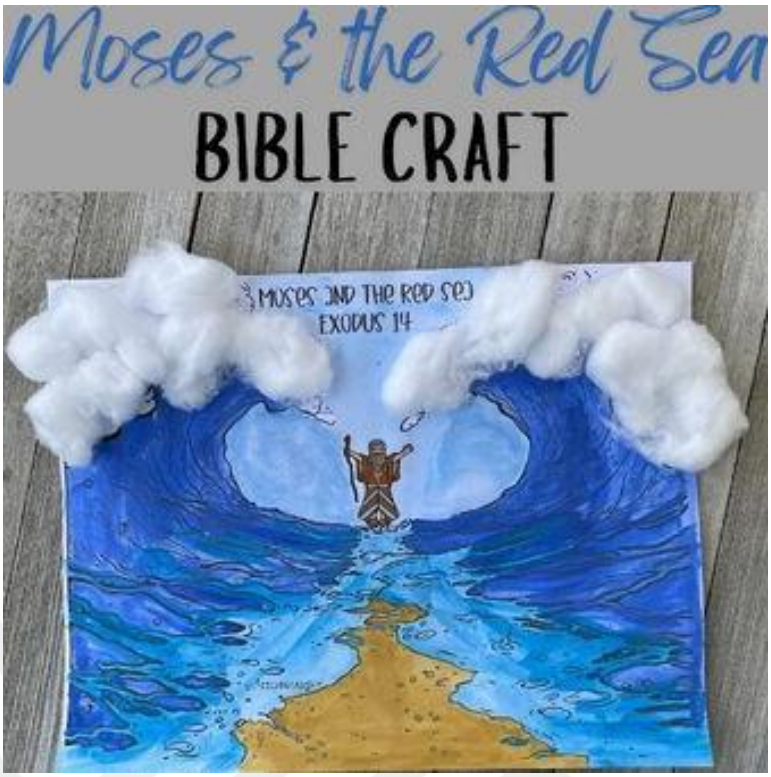



**Figure A.14. Moses and the Red Sea**




**Figure A.15. Noah's Ark Using Different Tools**




**Figure A.16. The Armor of God**



**Figure A.17. Jesus Calling the First Disciples Lego Set**[355]

[355] https://www.etsy.com/listing/1674710904/jesus-calls-the-first-disciples-in-lego



**Figure A.18. Resurrection Scene**[356]



**Figure A.19. Crossing the Red Sea Brick Set**

[356] https://shorturl.at/3LZbd

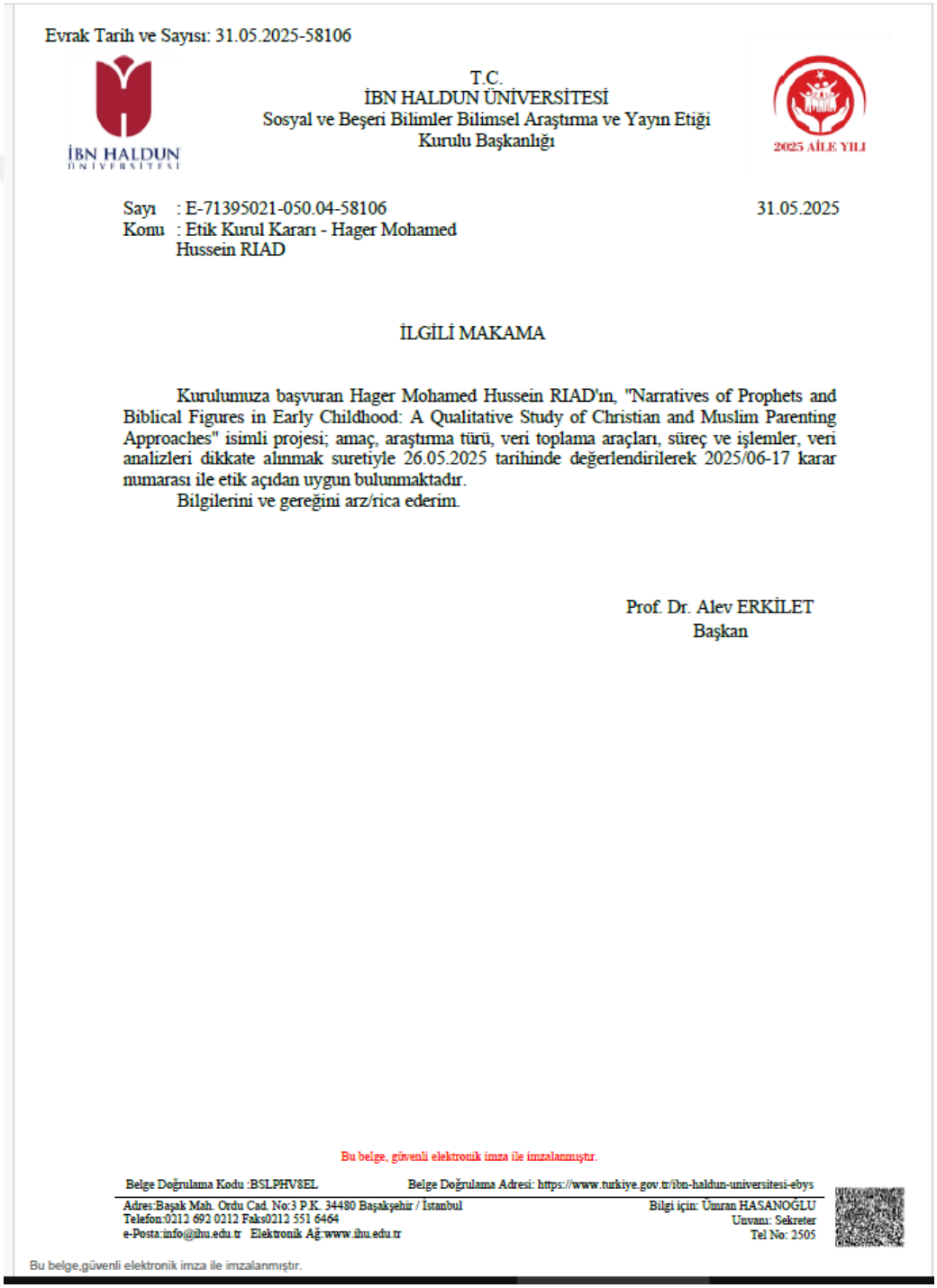


**Figure A.20. The Good Shepherd Lego Set**

# APPENDIX B

## ETHICS COMMITTEE PERMISSION

The Ethics Committee Permission Certificate is attached, along with the Questions of the Interviews conducted for the purpose of this study. The two versions of Questions in Arabic and English, directed to Muslims and to Christians are all attached.



Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 31.05.2025-58106

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Kurulu Başkanlığı

2025 AİLE YILI

Sayı : E-71395021-050.04-58106 31.05.2025
Konu : Etik Kurul Kararı - Hager Mohamed Hussein RIAD

İLGİLİ MAKAMA

Kurulumuza başvuran Hager Mohamed Hussein RIAD'ın, "Narratives of Prophets and Biblical Figures in Early Childhood: A Qualitative Study of Christian and Muslim Parenting Approaches" isimli projesi; amaç, araştırma türü, veri toplama araçları, süreç ve işlemler, veri analizleri dikkate alınmak suretiyle 26.05.2025 tarihinde değerlendirilerek 2025/06-17 karar numarası ile etik açıdan uygun bulunmaktadır.
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Prof. Dr. Alev ERKİLET
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