

Learning the Story “by Heart”

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Prepare to enjoy

There are different ways to learn a story. You will find the ways that work best for you. It’s great if you have someone to teach you, or others to work with, but often you’ll be on your own. Here is one approach to learning a story by heart. The goal is to “internalize” the story, not just to “memorize” it. It is to have the story become a part of who you are so you can tell it naturally. This takes time, so give yourself time. Relax and enjoy the process. The Spirit gives breath for life and storytelling...Remember to breath.

Learn the storyline

1. Read the story through, out loud, to get the sounds of it into the air.
2. Read it again. Say the words slowly enough that you can visualize the story in your minds’ eye, pausing after each sentence in order to allow an image to form.
3. Decide what the structure of the story is: how can it be broken into “episodes” (scenes or episodes)?
4. Write or type the story in sense lines and episodes.
5. Give each episode a title; underline verbal threads; circle characters; draw squares around notices of setting (time/place); list key words.
6. Create a simple storyboard outlining the structure of the episodes.
7. Stand up and move through the story, telling the basic story to an imaginary audience. Go all the way through, even if you have to make up parts. Then your imaginary audience can prompt you, using the storyboard only (not the full written story).

Learn the words

1. One episode at a time, work on getting those words off the paper and into your head. Practice, repeat, do gestures, say it while you walk or drive, going to sleep or waking up. It does require mental work and time, but it really IS possible! If it is hard for you, just learn a little at a time, saying a sentence over and over and making a chant, song, drama or game out of it.
2. Pray the story or whatever episode you are currently working on. Breathe deeply; ask God for breath and peace. Tell God what you know of the story. God knows the rest so don’t worry if you forget something. Listen to what God might want to tell you. Thank God for the story.

Explore original sounds and meaning

Once you have a good handle on the storyline and its words, explore how the story would have been told by the original storytellers and how it would have been understood by the people who first heard it. Look up key words in Bible dictionaries, consult commentaries, study maps and other graphics. Check out the Internet for resources. The commentaries will be more interesting and easier to read since you know the story. Reflect on how the original sound and meaning impacts and perhaps amends your understanding of the story.

Connect with the story

Review each episode of the story and consider how it connects with your life. What were the dynamics happening for the people then and there, especially the spiritual dynamics? Explore how you said things when you were in a similar circumstance: e.g., afraid, angry, Are there ways these same dynamics have been present for you? What questions arise in the story and how would you answer them? In whatever way you process things, do so in creative response; for example, journaling, poetry, drawing, sculpture, music, dance.

Tell the story

Tell the story to yourself, to another person, or to a small group. There is nothing like telling the story to learn it in your heart.