



**TRAINING SESSION**

# Illustrating Your Bible Teaching





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## 1. Introduction: Why Does This Matter?

### 1.1 OPENING DISCUSSION

- Think of a time when someone explained something to you in a way that really ‘clicked.’ What made it memorable?
- Can you recall a sermon, Sunday school lesson, or youth talk that stuck with you? What helped you remember it?

### 1.2 TEACHING POINT

God’s Word is **living and active** (*Hebrews 4:12*), not just a collection of stories. Our aim in teaching is not only to **inform** but to **transform** (*Romans 12:2*). Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (*John 17:17*).

**Illustrations help children and young people:**

- Understand God’s truth clearly
- Engage with the message
- See biblical truths in a way that makes them memorable
- Grasp complex ideas by connecting them to familiar concepts

## 2. What Is Illustration?

### 2.1 DEFINITION AND ANALOGY

The word *illustrate* comes from the Latin **lux**, meaning “light”—to illustrate is to **shed light** on something so that it can be seen clearly.

**Analogy:** Think of a light shining on a painting. The purpose is not to admire the light but to see the painting better. Likewise, an illustration should never be the main focus—it should help people see **Christ and his truth more clearly**.

### 2.2 QUOTE TO REFLECT ON

“The illustration is never to be regarded as an end in itself; it shines for the sake of something beyond.” – C.R. Brown

### 3. Is Using Illustrations Biblical?

#### 3.1 GROUP BIBLE STUDY

Assign each group one of the following passages and ask:

- What illustration is used?
- How does it help communicate truth?

Examples:

1. *Psalms 23* – “The Lord is my shepherd”: How does this image shape our understanding of God’s care?
2. *Ezekiel 37:1–10* – The valley of dry bones: What truth does this vision reveal?
3. *Matthew 13:10–17* – Jesus’ parables: Why did Jesus teach in this way?
4. *Luke 15:11–32* – The Prodigal Son: What does this story illustrate about God’s grace?

#### 3.2 KEY TAKEAWAY

Jesus, the perfect teacher, used illustrations constantly—**parables, word pictures, metaphors, and comparisons**—to communicate deep truths in ways his listeners could grasp, remember, and apply.

### 4. Why Use Illustrations?

Illustrations serve as **windows** to help us see biblical truth more clearly.

#### 4.1 THEY MAKE TRUTH UNDERSTANDABLE

Abstract concepts such as **grace, faith, or sovereignty** become clear through familiar images.

**Example:** Jesus used a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son to illustrate how God pursues sinners (*Luke 15*).

#### 4.2 THEY CAPTURE ATTENTION

A well-chosen story grabs attention and holds focus.

**Example:** Nathan confronted David’s sin with a story (*2 Samuel 12:1–7*), leading to conviction.

#### 4.3 THEY MAKE TRUTH RELEVANT

Application matters—illustrations help listeners see why God’s truth affects them personally.

**Example:** Jesus used everyday things—bread, water, vines—to explain spiritual realities (*John 6:35; John 4:13–14; John 15:5*).

#### 4.4 THEY HELP TRUTH STICK

Memorable images help truth remain in our hearts.

**Example:** God commanded Israel to set up memorial stones (Joshua 4) as tangible reminders of his faithfulness.

### 5. Types of Illustrations and How to Use Them

#### 5.1 STORY-BASED ILLUSTRATIONS

- Jesus' parables are the best examples.
- **Example:** The Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25–37*) vividly illustrates God's command to love our neighbour.
- **How to use it:** Find real-life stories that help young people understand the biblical truth you are trying to explain.

#### 5.2 ANALOGIES AND COMPARISONS

- Similes and metaphors make abstract truths concrete.
- **Examples:**
  - Simile: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed" (*Matthew 13:31*).
  - Metaphor: "I am the vine; you are the branches" (*John 15:5*).
- **How to use it:** Think of something common in your audience's life that parallels biblical truth.

#### 5.3 EVERYDAY OBJECTS AND NATURE

- Jesus pointed to **birds, seeds, water, and light** to teach about God.
- **Example:** A caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly illustrates new life in Christ (*2 Corinthians 5:17*).
- **How to use it:** Use physical objects during teaching.

#### 5.4 WORD PICTURES AND DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

- Good descriptions paint a picture in the mind.
- **Example:** Jesus calls believers "the salt of the earth" (*Matthew 5:13*), evoking images of preserving and flavouring.
- **How to use it:** Use vivid descriptions to bring Scripture to life.

#### 5.5 PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

- Paul often used his own life as an example (*Philippians 3:4–14*).
- **How to use it:** Be humble—tell stories that point to **God's work**, not your own greatness.

## 6. Practical Exercises: Improving Illustrations

### 6.1 ACTIVITY 1: FIXING WEAK ILLUSTRATIONS

- Provide weak illustrations (too long, off-topic, or distracting).
- Ask the group to suggest improvements.

### 6.2 ACTIVITY 2: LIVE PRACTICE

- Give each participant a Bible verse or topic.
- Ask them to create a short illustration to explain it.
- Share and give feedback as a group.

### 6.3 ACTIVITY 3: PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Where do I commonly find illustrations? Are they relevant to the young people's lives?
- Are they effective?
- How can I improve?

## 7. WHERE TO FIND GOOD ILLUSTRATIONS

A well-chosen illustration is drawn from **everyday experiences** that children and young people can easily relate to.

### Sources include:

- Nature, school life, friendships, family, sports, technology
- The Bible itself—full of rich imagery
- Children's literature, history, objects like a seed, mirror, or torch

### Tips for sourcing and using illustrations:

- Vary your sources to avoid predictability and include all children.
- Use real, up-to-date illustrations rather than only historical ones.
- Prefer true stories from real life, the church family, or known sources.
- Avoid making up stories just to make a point.
- Observe life intentionally—keep a notebook or digital list of strong illustrations.

## 8. Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

- **Illustration Overshadowing the Text** – A great story is useless if people remember the story but not the Scripture it illustrates.
- **Forgetting Context** – Illustrations should fit both the passage and the listener's world.
- **Being the Hero** – Avoid placing yourself at the centre. Illustrations should point to Christ.
- **Overcomplicating It** – Keep it **short and clear**—an illustration should illuminate, not dominate.

## 9. Conclusion and Prayer

### 9.1 FINAL REFLECTION

- What is one takeaway you will apply in your teaching?
- What is one area where you'd like to grow in using illustrations?

### 9.2 CLOSING PRAYER

**Heavenly Father,**

We thank you for the privilege of opening your Word and sharing its truth with the next generation. You have entrusted us with the task of teaching children and young people about who you are and what you have done through Christ. We recognise that this is a sacred responsibility, and we pray that you would equip us to handle your Word faithfully and wisely.

Help us to be **faithful**—never straying from the truth, never adding or taking away from what you have revealed. Guard our hearts against seeking to entertain rather than to edify, and keep us from using illustrations that distract rather than illuminate your truth.

Help us to be **clear**—to communicate your Word in a way that makes sense to young hearts and minds. May our teaching never be confusing or clouded, but always shine the light of your truth in a way that leads to understanding and conviction.

Help us to be **engaging**—not for our own sake, but so that children and young people would see the beauty and power of your Word. Give us wisdom to use illustrations that connect meaningfully with their lives, that help them see your truth at work in the world around them, and that lead them to know and love you more.

Most of all, Lord, we ask that our teaching would always **point to Christ**. May every story, every example, and every word we speak be used to magnify him, to reveal his goodness and grace, and to call young people to trust and follow him.

**Strengthen us in this work, and give us joy as we serve you.**

May your Spirit work through us, making your truth come alive in the hearts of those we teach.

**In Jesus' name, Amen.**