

## Interview with Sally Lloyd-Jones, Author of The Jesus Storybook Bible

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Whenever a gospel-centered book is published I'm pleased, but when one is published specifically for children I'm especially pleased. I want my children to be reading books that help them understand the gospel more deeply, books that point them to Jesus. So, when I heard about The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones, I was thrilled. Our family's copy arrived just over a week ago. My children are thoroughly enjoying it (and so am I). It is very well written and does a fantastic job capturing Scripture's big picture. Sally has served Christian families very well with this book. If you are looking for another resource that will help your children better understand the significance of Jesus' person and work, this is a book you'll want to pick up.

Sally graciously agreed to be interviewed about the book. My hope is that this interview will help make more people, particularly parents, aware of this excellent storybook Bible.

*Let me begin by asking the question that I'm fairly sure is on most everyone's mind. Given that you are British and a Christian, it's a question I know you've answered more times than you can probably count. Are you related to the Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones?*

I love being asked this because I am a huge fan of Dr Lloyd-Jones, and it usually means I've found someone else who is, too. But even though I am from the same passionate celtic corner of the world (Wales), no, I'm not related to him. It's all a bit of a let down, I'm afraid, and it's all I can do not to apologize (which I've written more about and had some fun with in my blog).

*When I first heard about The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every story whispers his name, I was thrilled that there was now a children's Bible story book that put Jesus at the center. What I especially appreciate about it is that you do this with 21 stories from the Old Testament. Why did you set out to write a children's book like this? Why did you feel the need to write a Bible story book that presents Jesus as each story's hero?*

When I first saw that everything in the Old Testament, is pointing to a child—the one who is coming—it blew me away. Suddenly, here was a way to read the Bible without it leaving you condemned (I'll never keep all the rules all the time) or in despair (how can I ever be as brave as Daniel? or David?).

I found it so moving when I started to discover how the Old Testament is basically one long record of failure—the failure of God's people time and time again to live rightly, to rescue themselves—and that the stories in the Old Testament are all getting us ready for the One who is coming. They are all signposts to the True Hero, the True King, the True Prince, the True Servant, the greater David, the greater Daniel. The Rescuer.

# LIVE IN THE STORY

As a child, I thought the Bible was packed with rules you had to keep (or God wouldn't love you) and heroes setting examples you had to follow (or God wouldn't love you). I thought, in short, that the Bible was all about me and what I should (or shouldn't) be doing. Until I read a Story.

It's the Story running like a golden stream underneath all the other stories in the Bible: the story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. Suddenly, I realized the Bible wasn't about me and what I should be doing at all. It was about God and what he had done. And it changed everything.

So, throughout the mapping out of the book and writing the stories, I was resolute in my determination to avoid even a whiff of moralizing in terms of applying the stories. The absolute last thing I ever wanted to ask a child was: "And what can we learn from David about how God wants us to behave?" The story isn't there to be an example for us to follow. If that were the point, Jesus would never needed to have come. We could have saved ourselves.

The story is there because it's true and because it's telling the bigger story—of the greater David who is coming. To do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves, to fight the battle we could never fight. To be the Hero we all need. To be our Rescuer.

I wanted children to know this Story—and to meet this wonderful Hero in the pages of this book. Because rules don't change you. But a story can.

*I know that you are a long time member of Redeemer Presbyterian Church where Tim Keller is pastor. What kind of influence has Tim Keller had on you as a Christian in general and as a writer in particular?*

Dr Keller's influence on me is profound. But Grace would be the first word that comes to my mind. Grace, grace and more grace! And his teaching is always all about Jesus. He opened my eyes to seeing Jesus in all the scriptures. And that's what melts your heart. And changes your life.

For me, as a writer, Dr Keller gives a rallying cry to the imagination every time he preaches! And I find myself more equipped and fired up to write. He has also helped me to understand that I honor God most when I use the gifts he has given me and freed me to pursue excellence in my writing and to see my writing as my ministry—my way to serve and bless others. I don't need to get out of my job to serve God. God has put me in my job to serve him here. And my job just happens to be to tell the best story I can. Whatever story that may be.

It blows me away to think... God is just as pleased with me for writing a little pink book shaped like a handbag that makes children laugh (HANDBAG FRIENDS) as he is with me for writing THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE. But it shouldn't surprise us should it? After all he is the same God who thought up the ostrich—and designed exactly how she would look when she ran!

C S Lewis said, "A book cannot be what a writer is not" and I've come to see that if grace and joy and redemption have transformed your heart and your life—it will also transform your writing. You won't be able to help it. Grace and joy and redemption will leak out into everything. The Story ultimately will be in everything you write—whether you meant it to or not.



*What Old Testament story in your book is your favorite and why?*

That's a great question and hard to answer. I think I'd have to say what children say when asked a question like this, "They're ALL my favorites!"

When selecting which stories to include (unfortunately I had to pick and choose!) and deciding which angle to take in each story, I chose the angle or the stories that moved me the most. So, I love them for different reasons.

But if I had to choose one, funnily enough I think that one of the hardest to write is probably one of my favorites: Leah and Rachel. I love it because it combats what I see my nieces already having to battle even at 4 and 5 years old—the message that beauty is what the world tells you it is—instead of what God says it is. God loved Leah and thought she was special and gave her the ultimate fairytale come true story: he made her a princess—one of her children's children's children would be a prince. The Prince of Heaven and Earth. The fairy tale really does come true. The Hero comes back for his lost treasure; the Prince comes back for the one he loves. And "the ending of our Story is Joy!"

*What did the process of writing this book do for you spiritually?*

It was like having a personal mini revival at my desk every day and at the same time, a personal major all out battle at my desk every day.

This was not an easy book for me to write or produce (as any of my faithful praying friends and family will attest!) and yet those things that demand most of you, cost you the most, push you the furthest, often end up being your most precious treasure of all. I am so grateful that the Lord didn't let me quit the many times I wanted to and that he protected the book and brought it out the way he wanted it.

From the outset, the Lord gave me a vision for this book that he also gave me the strength to keep hold of no matter what, even when it seemed impossible. I grew through it not just as a writer, but also as a Christian. I learned that despite all the internal resistance that comes up for me whenever I set out to do something new (all those reasons why you can't do this, shouldn't be doing that, should give up, are wasting your time, etc.) my job is to just get out of the way and let the Story through. I can't afford the luxury of self-doubt. Someone said that and I aspire to that.

Certainly by the time I'd finished writing the book, I had a whole new level of awe for the incredible Story I am part of. And I had definitely fallen more in love with its Hero!

*What kinds of reactions to the book have you received from parents and children so far?*

It sounds strange, but the consistent reaction from many adults is that it makes them weep. (I think that's good? Hope so!) Parents are reading it to one another as their devotional before bed. Pastors are using it to help them with their preaching. I heard someone call it, "the storybook for preachers".



And of course families are reading it together. Teenagers and college students have told me they are enjoying it. I heard from one dad that his young boys listen to each of the stories and as they near the end of each story, they whisper just one word: “Jesus.” I couldn’t ask for a better response. May all of us be whispering his name in all the stories of our lives!

So the book seems to be breaking out of the traditional audience for a children’s storybook bible, which I didn’t foresee and am thrilled by. I like books that break out of the mold.

With a children’s book you must distill everything down to its simplest form. Arthur Schopenhauer’s said, “use ordinary language to say extraordinary things”. The Story is extraordinary; using simple language lets it through more powerfully. I think adults are responding because they are hearing the complete plot line of the Bible told in its distilled form, and they are being reminded of the magnificent story that we are all a part of.

*I was recently telling a parent of young children about your new book and its objective. After quickly writing the title of your book down, she asked how she might learn to do what you do in the book with other Old Testament stories. I’m sure many parents will wonder the same thing. How might parents learn to discern how each biblical story whispers Jesus’ name?*

That’s a great question. I will just share what helped me, for what it’s worth.

Without a doubt, I could not have written this book if I had not had the benefit of Dr Tim Keller’s teaching. And he is the first one I credit in my acknowledgments. There’s always a point in every sermon he preaches, where everything looks to Jesus. It’s the turning point of the sermon. It’s the point where Grace comes in. So I’d recommend listening to as many of Keller’s sermons as you can—or other great sermons doing the same thing.

I also got hold of a tape series from a theological seminary to help me follow the plot line of Redemption from Genesis to Revelation. That will give you all the connections and fill in any gaps you may have and prime you to be ready to read the OT stories with Jesus in mind.

Then I prayed before reading each story in the OT to ask God to show me the angle to use. And then mostly, I let myself be guided by what moved me, knowing that what moved me I would write with passion and tears. As Frost said, “no tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.”

For each story I identified what character trait/truth of Jesus to draw out from that story (always many more than one). I thought about each story as building a portrait of Jesus. And told the story with that trait central in my mind so that the entire story turns on it.

Hans Hoffman said: “The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.” I keep that taped in front of my desk.



*Are there any other children's Bible story books that you would recommend to parents?*

I love the Beginners Bible because it broke the mold.

*Any plans to write a sequel?*

Not right now... but never say never!

I do have another Bible coming from Zondervan in the Fall (TINY BEAR'S BIBLE, September) but it's quite different—it's much shorter for a start, it rhymes, and...wait for it... it's entirely covered in fur! So...a slight change of pace.

Sally, thank you so much for taking the time to answer these questions. I know many people are excited about your new book. It's my prayer that God will do much with this book for His Kingdom.

Thank you so much for your interest Dan. It was my pleasure. It's God's Story and my honor to have been able to tell it. And as to God using this book for His Kingdom ... AMEN!