



# Paper Illustrations for the Gospel

By Andrew Garvey-Williams

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## Introduction

Paper is cheap, it is easy to get hold of and is very versatile: you can fold it, write on it, or even burn it. It can come in different thicknesses, grades and qualities, and in a range of colours.

The following ideas use this versatile substance - along with some practice and creative story telling - to grab attention and illustrate gospel truths. They can be presented as a talk in front of a crowd, one-to-one on a train journey or over a cup of coffee (or something stronger!). The main idea is to give you ideas that are cheap and easily resourced.

Do practice beforehand with a friendly audience who will give you some honest criticism!

For a more in depth explanation of conjuring see the companion document 'A Touch of Magic' by Joe Ridgely.

## Ticket to Heaven

A simple paper tear story. The story is not accurate theologically, which needs to be acknowledged! But at the end it does allow you to ask (and answer) the question, 'How do you get into heaven?'

All you need is one piece of paper. The paper can be any size depending on where you perform, but should be rectangular. It is easy to perform for a small gathering around a table, but it could also be a talk in a church if you have a sketchboard and stick the pieces on. This you can do with blu-tak; or by spraying the sketchboard paper with spray-mount or putting lines of double-sided Sellotape across the board beforehand.

### The story.

*Fold the paper as you start to tell the story.*

Ask if any enjoy the dentist's waiting room or standing outside the headteacher's office. Two men stand nervously outside the gates of heaven waiting to get in after they had died.

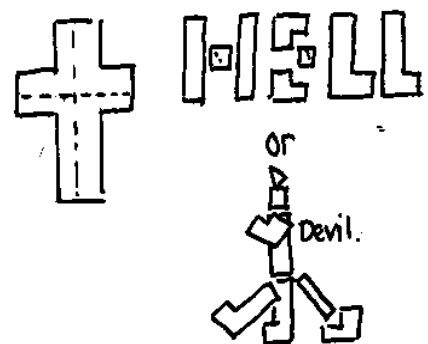
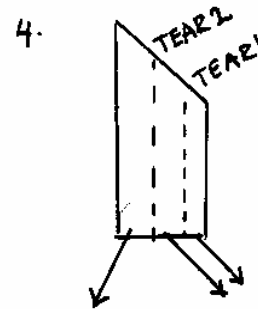
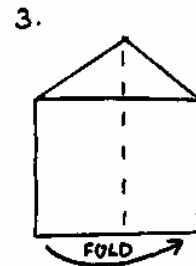
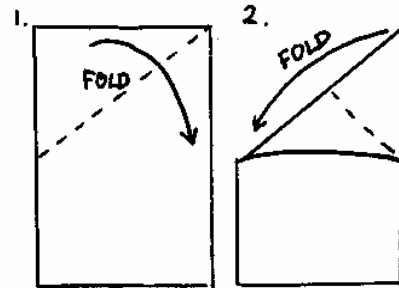
After an awkward silence, Albert turns to Bill and asks; "Do you think you'll get in?" "Sure," says Bill, "I didn't live a bad life. Yeah, I broke the speed limit a few times, but I was a good husband and dad,.. (Mention a few other good works). God's a good bloke, He's supposed to be loving an' all."

Another silence, eventually Bill says, "What about you?" "Well, I know that I don't deserve to get in that's for sure. I did plenty of things that I'm ashamed of and sorry about. Just before I got my ..er.. 'call up', I met this bloke and he gave me this ticket (*show folded paper*), said if I showed it to God it would get me in."

Another silence while Bill takes this in, gradually he gets more unsettled as he wonders if he's missed out on this ticket. "Give us a piece of your ticket." "Would love to, but the bloke who gave it me told me it wasn't transferable." Bill then grabs the ticket and in the confusion it gets torn (*tear paper*) and both men end up with a piece.

Just then God comes to the gate. He asks Albert, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" Albert gives Him his paper (*unfold to reveal the cross*). Explain how God welcomes him in not on the basis of what he has done, but on what Jesus has done. Then God calls Bill, who confidently gives God his paper expecting the same welcome (*unfold his pieces to reveal 'Hell' or the devil*). Explain that he is rejected because he depended on his own goodness, not Jesus.

At the end explain that this is just a story and that you don't believe there really is a gate and waiting room, etc. But we will all die and face God. How can we get into heaven? Give the gospel.



# The Race of Life

This is a well tried, but fun illustration. The applications are numerous (see 'A Touch of Magic' for another application).

**Preparation:** Beforehand prepare the 3 rings as in the diagram. They can be made from newspaper or any other paper. Make sure that they are long enough that the twists are not immediately obvious. Beforehand cut a small hole in each ring to help the participants get started. You also need three pairs of scissors.

**Presentation:** Ask three volunteers to come up. Explain that the circles represent three people's lives. All are involved in 'The race of life' - or as some call it the 'Rat race'.

Explain how the volunteers on the word go are to start cutting their circle along the dotted line. The first to get right round is the winner. Appoint sections of the audience to cheer for each of the contestants and a 'cheerleader' for each section. Set the volunteers off. Encourage audience cheering. At the end retrieve the pieces. Thank the contestants. In turn show the rings:

**One ring:** Say how this person lived a life caught up in routine, going round in circles, etc.

**Two separate rings:** This person 'came apart' under the pressure. Or this person lived a double life: one thing on the outside another on the inside.

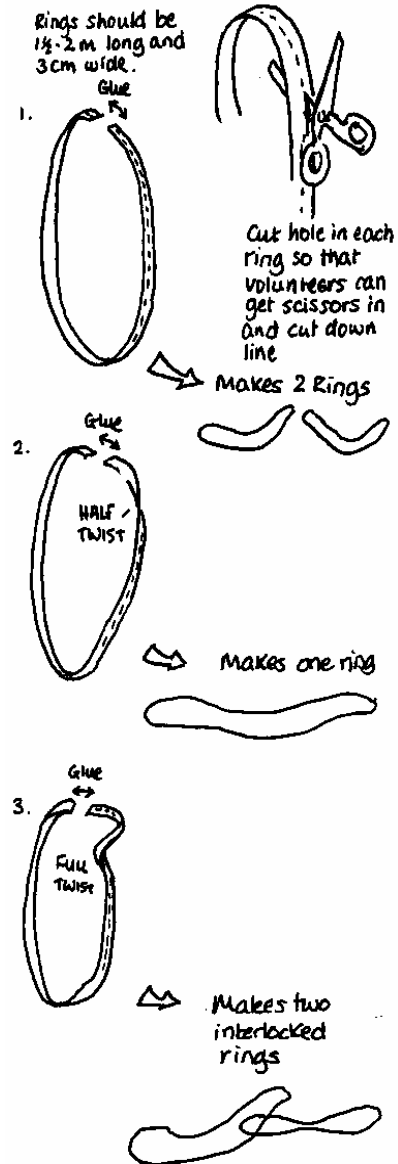
**Joined rings:** This person got caught in chains: habits, circumstances. He couldn't get free.

As you share elaborate and illustrate each one, suggesting their situation and circumstances.

Surely God intended more for each of their lives, as He does for ours. Explain how God wants us to have life and life to the full, but how so many never experience this because they reject Him. Explain sin.

Explain how Jesus came into this earth and lived a real and perfect life - contrast with the lives mentioned in the race.

He laid down that life and allowed us - Mankind - to crucify Him. Explain the gospel and how Jesus died, but rose to life never to die again. He is therefore able to offer real, eternal life to all who receive Him. End with your testimony.



# Burning Furnace

**Preparation:** You need a pad of paper (a sketch pad is best as it's paper is usually fairly thick), a saucer or something to put burning paper on, some matches and a pencil. Beforehand on the underside of the first sheet draw an A, an S, an M, and a crucifix with the pencil as in the diagram. You might want to check fire detectors and fire regulations of the venue where you are performing!

**Presentation:** Remove the first sheet and fold and tear as in the diagram. As you do this tell the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego up to the point where they are put in the furnace. Emphasise their faith in God even to death. Apply to us.

When you get to the two piles. Ask a volunteer to point to a pile. Use a 'Magician's choice' to ensure that pile A goes into the volunteer's hand and pile B is taken by you. In other words, if he chooses A, place it in his hand and close the fingers over it, and you take pile B. If he chooses pile B, say, "I'll take the pile you have indicated." Take that pile and place the other pile in his hand. It is the same outcome whatever he chooses, but he thinks he has made a fair choice.

Take pile B. openly write on the pieces: A, M, S and a cross (as similar in writing to the prepared ones as you can). Place the A, M, and S on the saucer (scrunch up the paper slightly to enable them to burn better). As you place the first three in the saucer, explain how our heroes were placed in a fiery furnace. Set light to the three papers in the saucer. Quickly add the paper with the 'cross' to the fire. Explain how when they were in the furnace a fourth figure appeared in the flames – 'one like the Son of God'. Let them burn completely.

Explain how when Nebuchadnezzar saw this, he called them out of the furnace. There was not a scorch mark on them. Ask the volunteer to open his hand and look at the papers. He will find the A, M, S and cross on them 'untouched'. Explain that when they came out the 'Son of God' wasn't actually visible to them, but they knew that God was with them always. Share how we can trust God at all times. He won't let us down.

## PREPARATION.

1.



LIGHTLY PENCIL 'A', 'M', 'S' + 't' on underside of first sheet in positions shown

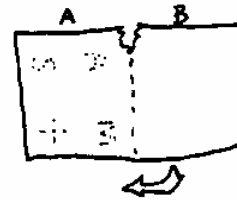
## PRESENTATION

2.



Remove first sheet. Fold - careful not to show pencil marks

3.



Tear sheet in half. Casually show right (B) sheet front + back. Place B under A. TURN PACKAGE OVER.

4.



Tear in half again. Place B under A. TURN PACKAGE OVER.

5.



Tear package in half again. B under A.

6.

Deal pieces one at a time alternately into two piles. First deal a piece to A, the next to B, etc.



A will have pencil letters and cross underneath. Put pile in spectator's hand.

B. is blank. Draw in pencil 'A', 'M', 'S' and 't' on each piece - as similar as you can to initial letters in pile B. Burn pile B. as described in presentation.

# Bad News Good News

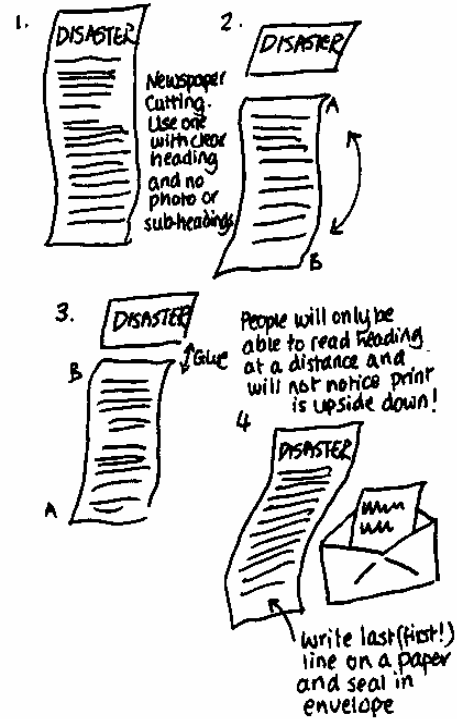
*Preparation:* Prepare the newspaper cutting as in diagram and the envelope with prediction in. In advance give the sealed envelope to someone in the audience to look after.

*Presentation:* Bad news makes newspapers. A good story for the journalist is when there has been a disaster or calamity somewhere in the world. Here's an example (show the cutting and read out the headline and gist of the story). When we read about such things some people ask, 'Where is God? Doesn't He know what's going on?' not all crises are reported in newspapers though (give an example of a minor 'crisis' in your life this week). Some personal crises are minor like that, but others are more significant (give examples: unemployment, bereavement, etc.). Does God know? Is He there?

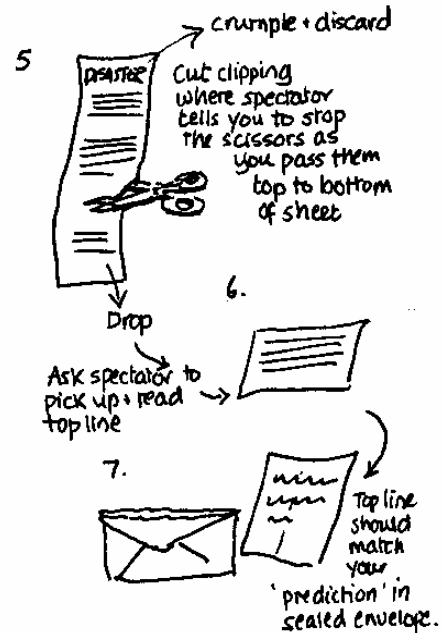
Proceed with the trick. As you pass the scissors down the paper, ask someone in the audience to tell you when to stop and cut the news clipping. When they say stop, cut the paper right across and let the bottom piece drop on the floor. Discard the top piece in a natural way. Ask the volunteer to come up and read the top line. Mention that beforehand you made a prediction in an envelope. Ask the person holding the prediction to come up, open the envelope and read the paper inside. It will be the same line.

Explain how God knows everything. He knows even before they happen, the crises in the world and in your life and mine. He gave Man freedom to make choices - not a robot. He knew, even then, that Man would make wrong choices, rebel and turn from God. He knew this rebellion would separate us from Him and be the reason for many of our crises. But God cares. He knew that he had to enter our world in Jesus and suffer death on a cross - what seemed a disaster, a crisis! But God delivered and raised Jesus: death could not hold Jesus. Jesus' death (that's bad news) becomes our salvation (that's good news)! Explain the gospel and give a personal testimony.

## PREPARATION



## PRESENTATION



## New Creation

*Preparation:* There are many ways to change one thing for another using the special envelope illustrated. Pop whatever you want to end with into one of the envelope compartments beforehand and you are ready!

*Presentation:* Show the envelope. Hold open the empty compartment to show it is empty. Place whatever it is that you want to change into that empty compartment. As you speak distract attention for a moment by laying the envelope down, or transferring it from hand to hand. As you do this turn the envelope over. Open other compartment of the envelope and bring out the previously hidden item. Show envelope empty.

Application ideas:

Miracle on Straight Street. Have two cards: draw on one a happy face, on the other an angry face. Hide the happy one in the envelope. Talk about Saul the hater of Christians. Show angry face. How God met him on the road to Damascus and sent him to a house on Straight Street (the envelope). Put the angry card in the envelope. Explain how God dealt with him and transformed his life. Explain gospel and give personal testimony. Reveal happy face. Emphasise how Paul had new life, new purpose, new joy, etc.

Born again. Explain the importance of having a new start, a new life. Show cards with picture of tadpole and caterpillar. Place in envelope and share how both naturally are born again. Bring out from envelope cards with frog and butterfly. Explain how we need to be born again and how this is possible.

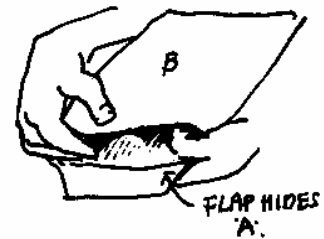
Water into wine. Jesus turns water into wine. The envelope is big clay water pots. Put in card with picture of a glass of water. Bring out a card with picture of a glass or bottle of wine! Most of Jesus' miracles involve a change and can be illustrated with the envelope: E.g. Mud on closed and blind eyes, wash in pool (envelope), eyes open.

### PREPARATION:

1.  A4 manila envelopes are excellent.  
Make sure that you glue right to the edges.
2.  Place card in side 'A'.

### PRESENTATION:

3. show side B. Open compartment and show empty.



4. Place second card in 'B'



5. While distracting attention, turn envelope over. Remove card from 'A'. Show 'A' empty.

## Eye of the Needle

These are puzzles or 'genius tests'. In each case there is one solution that is not apparently obvious!

*Preparation:* Prepare either device – or both! – as in the diagram. A playing card is ideal, but any card will do. The rings can be finger rings or small curtain rings. The device(s) can be kept in a pocket or wallet until an opportunity to share arises.

*Presentation:* Challenge a spectator to solve the puzzle. Explain what they have to do:

In A they have to release the rings and thread without cutting or tearing the card or thread and without untying the thread.

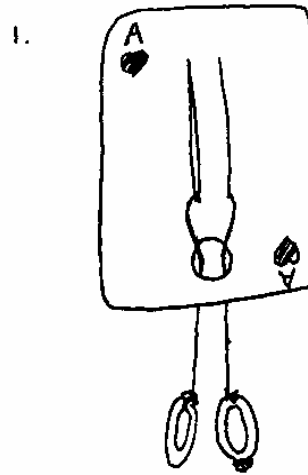
In B they have to separate the pieces without cutting or tearing them.

*Applications:*

As they attempt it, you can explain Jesus' words about the eye of a needle and how difficult it is to get into heaven. Share how people are tempted to cheat their way in, to tear the card. There is only one way and that way may not be obvious, but it is so simple when you know how! Explain the gospel and the one way to heaven. If they have not worked out the puzzle, offer to show them the one way to solve the puzzle!

Another application is to talk about the tangles and knots we get into in life, and when there seems to be no way out without tearing the whole thing apart and hurting ourselves and those who we love at the same time. Share how Jesus offers a solution. Share the gospel.

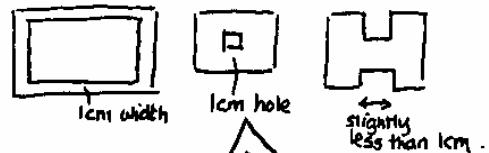
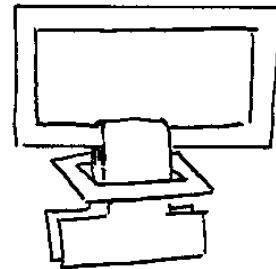
Or talk about Jesus and how, when rejected, beaten, whipped, crucified, dead and buried, it would be an understatement to say his life was in a predicament from which there seemed no escape. Share how God got him out through the resurrection and how He can get us out by the same resurrection power. Explain the gospel.



SOLUTION :



2.



SOLUTION :



# Sheep from the Goats

*Preparation:* You need 16 playing cards (16 characters from a set of 'Happy Families' cards work better with children). You need a square of paper folded to make 16 squares as in the diagram, and a pencil or pen.

*Presentation:* Ask for two volunteers and give each 8 cards. Let them look at them and see that they are all different. Explain that on earth there are many differences between people. We could talk about different nationalities, boys and girls, old people and young people, etc. When God looks down on the earth he sees two kinds of people: sheep and goats! Explain what Jesus meant and what is the difference between sheep and goats in his illustration. Explain gospel and how you can become a sheep.

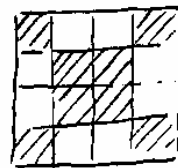
Explain that to help you, you would like one volunteer's cards to represent the sheep, and the other volunteer's cards the goats. Ensure that the volunteers know that you are not saying that they are a goat or a sheep!

Alternating between the two volunteers, ask them to call out the name of each card. As they do, write a name down in each of the squares on the paper. Make it appear that you are doing this randomly, but make sure that A's cards are on the squares shaded in the diagram, and volunteer B's are on the unshaded.

Share how the goats and the sheep are all mixed up on earth (start to fold the paper as in the diagram). Explain that we can't tell them apart. Sometimes it seems that bad people get away with evil and good people suffer. But, God knows who is who, and He will one day separate them (tear/cut paper into two piles). Open up the piles and get the volunteers to check the papers against their cards. They will find that they match. God knows all along!

2C	AH	3C	8H
3D	5C	5S	9D
7H	3S	6S	6H
7S	7D	4C	8D

C = CLUBS  
H = HEARTS  
D = DIAMONDS  
S = SPADES

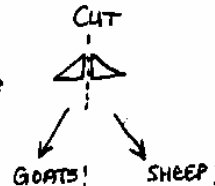
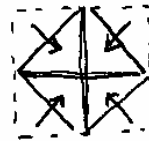


- sheep

- Goats

When filling in the squares, write the sheep in the squares shown here shaded. Goats in the others. It is a simple pattern to memorise.

FOLDING:





## Tree and Ladder

Two paper sculptures that are fun and attention grabbing. They can have applications on their own or you could tell a story using two or more paper creations.

*Preparation:* Use newspaper and roll as in the diagram. Hold roll in place with an elastic band or Sellotape ready to use. Experiment beforehand with how tight to roll the paper. You can also experiment a bit with half sheets or, in the tree, rolling up several sheets to make the tree bigger.

*Applications:*

*Tree:*

The tree could appear in a talk about the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. It could be used in talking about a family tree, i.e. someone's genealogy, upbringing, etc. It could be a money tree for a talk on success - after cutting the paper, put the scissors in your pocket and at the same time grab a handful of coins from your pocket. Pull out the tree with the hand holding the coins and as you do so let the coins fall through the 'leaves' in a shower. It appears as though the coins have fallen from the tree.

*Ladder:*

What about Jacob's ladder? Or the ladder of success? Or building a ladder to heaven?

*Combinations:*

You could use a combination of such paper sculptures to tell a story. Besides the tree and ladder, most of us have learnt in days gone by to make hats or boats out of paper. You could also use tears like 'Ticket to Heaven' (mentioned earlier).

*Example: Story of Saul of Tarsus*

Recount the story of a man who had everything, but nothing. He had a great family tree (*tree*). He was born of good Jewish roots – a good tribe among God's people. Not only that, he was born a Roman citizen, so he was in with the rulers! He worked hard to climb the social and religious ladder (*ladder*). He went to the best school and had the best teacher, Gamaliel. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Top rung. Surely God was pleased with him. Share how he completely missed God and ended up persecuting God's people. Share, how, on the road to Damascus, he met Jesus (*tear cross as in 'Ticket to Heaven'*). Explain how he then saw all that he held on to as important before was rubbish compared to knowing Jesus (*screw up all the ladder, tree, etc. and put in a black bin bag*). Personalise with your own testimony and apply to listeners.

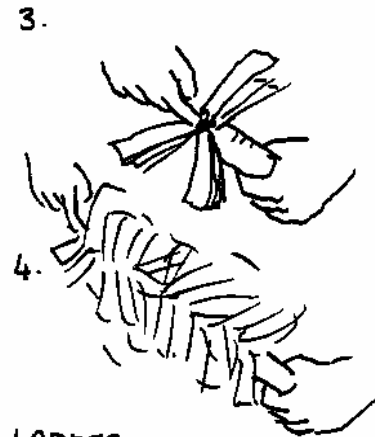
*Example: Story of Jonah*

Story of Jonah could be told using paper models and tears. Check out a book of origami (usually easily available in your library) and learn to make a boat and a fish. You could make a boat for Jonah to escape in, a ladder to go down into the hold of the oat, a fish to swallow him, a paper chain of people for all the people of Nineveh, a tree for the bush that Jonah tried to get shade from.

### TREE.

Open out sheet of newspaper (often easier to cut sheet in half.)

1. Roll newspaper snugly. Fasten with elastic band.



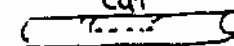
### LADDER

Use one sheet of newspaper.

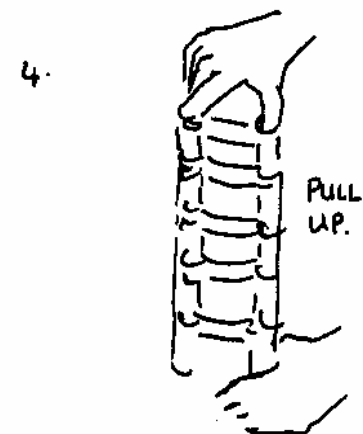
1. Roll



2. CUT



3. BEND



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[www.lifehope.om.org](http://www.lifehope.om.org)  
[info@lifehope.om.org](mailto:info@lifehope.om.org)