



# Family Style Theology

Welcome to FAMILY STYLE THEOLOGY! This is a six-part series involving select FAIRY TALES. We were inspired by an essay by J.R.R. Tolkien called “On Fairy Stories”. In this he muses on the timeless quality and benefit of the fairy story, entering into a magical universe where our usual rational defenses may be down. Ultimately, these fun stories stir up simple truths about ourselves, our God, and the greatest story we know in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. **Snow White**
2. **Pinocchio**
3. **The Little Mermaid**
4. **Cinderella**
5. **Jack and the Beanstalk**
6. **Lion King**

Take advantage of these ideas to engage your children in this discussion! These suggestions are in no particular order, and you do not have to do them all! Just have some fun. This is a wonderful time to just talk and explore the little things that spark your own unique conversations.

- **Listen to the podcast.** (30 minutes) Sit back and enjoy. No prep work is needed! In the case that you are not familiar with the Fairy Tale we discuss, you will hear one of my kids attempt to retell a short synopsis of the tale for the sake of our conversation in each episode.
- **Experience the Fairy Tale.** Read the original, watch the Disney version, or take in the musical production. There are different twists in every version of each Fairy Tale. Take a day to expose you child to some form of the story in our discussion.
- **Ask about your child’s favorite part.** There are no right or wrong answers, and you will hear my own kids give their responses to the same question during the podcast. This question is meant to help start the discussion through including each child’s thoughts. Take cues from the details that really interest your children. What did they love? Who made them angry? This is a great entry point for a meaningful discussion with your own kiddos.
- **Be on guard!** Every fairy tale is NOT simply a retelling of the story of Jesus Christ. In fact, there are many elements in fairy stories that do not reflect the truths of our God and our Savior. Freely talk about it all, especially focusing on the pieces that remind us of our great story in Jesus Christ. Namely, the “eucatastrophe”: a bad situation that turned out to have an incredibly happy ending. This hallmark and hope of a good fairy tale is reflected by our present bad situation turned eternally right by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Read “On Fairy Stories”** by J.R.R. Tolkien. Find the link here: <https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/fairystoriesbytolkien.pdf>
- **Adult resources:** For further study, check out the theological connections and additional resources we thought would be helpful discussion points in each Fairy Story. Surely, there are more. Be creative & have fun!

## Snow White

- **Introduction to Fairy Tales & the Eucatastrophe:** “The Gospels contain a fairy story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: “mythical” in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe.”(pg. 23) [On Fairy Stories, J.R.R. Tolkien](#)
- **Good vs. Evil:** “Hence you see again how God wishes us to pray to Him also for all the things which affect our bodily interests, so that we seek and expect help nowhere else except in Him. But this matter He has put last; for if we are to be preserved and delivered from all evil, the name of God must first be hallowed in us, His kingdom must be with us, and His will be done. After that He will finally preserve us from sin and shame, and, besides, from everything that may hurt or injure us.” [Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, the seventh petition of the Lord’s Prayer.](#)
- **Life after Death:** If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. [1 Corinthians 15:19-24 ESV](#)

## Pinocchio

- **Depravity:** “...Since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost.” [Augsburg Confession, Article II Of Original Sin](#)
- **Achieve salvation:** “For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, etc.” [Martin Luther’s Large Catechism, The Apostles Creed, Article III.](#)
- **Consequences for sin:** “And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life: thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." [Genesis 3:17-19 ESV](#)  
“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Romans 6:23 ESV](#)
- **True Salvation for Sinners:** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” [Romans 3:21-24 ESV](#)

## The Little Mermaid

- **Love is sacrifice:** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.” [1 Corinthians 13:4-8 ESV](#)

- **Want to be something else – exchange:** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [Romans 1:21-25 ESV](#)
- **Blessed Exchange:** “Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers? Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all.” [Martin Luther on Christian Liberty](#)

## Cinderella

- **Identity:** “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” [Romans 8:16-23 ESV](#)
- **Called to suffering:** “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [1 Peter 2:17-21 ESV](#)
- **Gods gifts in ordinary things:** Give us this day our daily bread. *What does this mean?* God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all wicked men; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. *What is meant by daily bread?* Everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as meat, drink, clothing, shoes, house, homestead, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful magistrates, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like. [Martin Luther's Small Catechism, The Lord's Prayer, The Fifth petition.](#)
- **Happy ever after:** “But the “consolation” of fairy-tales has another aspect than the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires. Far more important is the Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it... It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.” (pg.22) [On Fairy Stories, J.R.R. Tolkien](#)

## Jack and the Beanstalk

- **Kingdom of God looks insignificant:** It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world." [Matthew 13:32-35 ESV](#)
- **David & Goliath:** "And Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth.' And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David." [1 Samuel 17:33, 49-50 ESV](#)
- **Castle in the Sky – Kingdom is your right now:** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." [Revelation 21:1-5 ESV](#)

## Lion King

- **Drama– opposite of Fairy tale:** "But Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy. Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama, when that is presented as it should be, visibly and audibly acted. Fantastic forms are not to be counterfeited. Men dressed up as talking animals may achieve buffoonery or mimicry, but they do not achieve Fantasy" (pg. 16) [On Fairy Stories, J.R.R. Tolkien](#)
- **Christ not received by his own people:** The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [John 1:9-14 ESV](#)
- **Darkened hearts:** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools." [Romans 1:19-22 ESV](#)
- **Tragedy vs. Happy Ending:** "Far more important is the Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite—I will call it Eucatastrophe. The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function." (pg. 22)

It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality... But in the "eucatastrophe" we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater—it may be a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world. (pg. 23) [On Fairy Stories, J.R.R. Tolkien](#)