

# STORYING THE GOSPEL



## *Orality and Storying the Gospel*

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

*“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.”* Mark 4:33-34

*“Jesus became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.”* John 1:14 (The Message)

*“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”* Romans 10:17

*“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”* I Corinthians 9:19-23

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### QUOTES

*“Soft as some song divine, your story flows.”* Homer

*“When a bushman dies, a whole library is lost.”* African Proverb

*“Orality is a primary system. It can exist without literacy whereas literacy cannot exist without orality.”* Walter Ong

*“The problem with communication ... is the illusion that it has been accomplished.”* George Bernard Shaw

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“If what you say is true,” a ministry leader told the speaker who had just finished discussing the challenges that orality poses, “we will have to re-think everything we are doing.” Anonymous

“The vast majority of Christians today do not behave differently because they do not think differently, and they do not think differently because we have never trained them, equipped them, or held them accountable to do so... For years we have been exposing Christians to scattered, random bits of biblical knowledge through our church services and Christian education classes. They hear a principle here and read a truth there, then nod their head in approval and feel momentarily satisfied over receiving this new insight into their faith. But within the space of just a few hours, that principle or truth is lost in the busyness and complexity of their lives. They could not capture that insight and own it because they have never been given sufficient context and method that would enable them to analyze, categorize, and utilize the principle or truth.” George Barna

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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of the reading, activities, and discussion in this session, the cross-cultural witness candidate will be able to:

Explain how orality issues affect learning by...

- reviewing the characteristics of oral learners and oral cultures;
- contrasting the differences in oral learners and print or literate learners’ learning styles/communication styles
- understanding the stages of literacy continuum from oral to literate learning

Discuss the communication problems that orality issues bring to the presentation of the gospel message.

Understand the need to match our methods and formats of presentation to the learning styles and preferences of our listeners by...

- discussing how to use the circle of stories to build community and opportunities for ministry
- explaining how stories/narrative communication styles are uniquely fitted for ministry to oral communicators and communication of biblical truth
- learning how to prepare to story and how to be a good storyteller

Know what Chronological Bible Storying is and how it is used as a method of sharing the gospel among oral communicators

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### COMMON STYLE OF LEARNING

No one is born literate. We all learn slowly as a baby by listening, seeing, experiencing with our senses—imitating, watching models, being taught by parents, siblings, and other children the things we need to know. This beginning pattern of oral learning is the same universally.

In some cultures, somewhere along the way, printed materials or books begin to enter the picture. Words are not just sounds anymore, they are black figures on a piece of paper—figures that when formed in certain ways, equate with meaning. Children in those cultures can continue to learn in the universal way, but now they have a new style of learning as well—learning can become an individual event. Words can “make a point.” Literacy has entered their lives.

Depending on their circumstances, economic ability, intelligence and many other such things, that child can perhaps enter school, where more learning takes place and where literacy moves on to higher levels. Children who finish elementary school may move on to middle school and perhaps on to high school and on to college. Based on their desires and academic achievement, their status in society and many other factors, some of these students by the end of this process would be considered highly literate or primarily print preference learners.

A funny thing happens to these folks along the road to literacy. In order to become more and more literate, they began to let some of their first universal learning style go by the wayside. They

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*NO ONE IS BORN LITERATE.*

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have learned to learn differently, and they process new information differently. They may or may not even know it, but they communicate differently than those who along the way either never entered the road to literacy, or stopped along the way before becoming highly literate.

Those of us who have grown up in highly literate societies tend to think of literacy as the norm and oral communication (the beginning style of learning) as a deviation. That is not so. All societies, including those having a highly literate segment, have oral communication at their core. Oral communication is the basic function on which writing and literacy are based. When literacy persists in a culture for generations, it begins to change the way people think, act and communicate—so much so that the members of that literate society may not even realize how their communication styles are different from those of the majority of the world who are oral communicators.

There are some amazing principles of communication wrapped up in that last statement that we as messengers of the Gospel must hear.

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### CASE STUDY: RISKING A NEW PARADIGM

George and Susan were appointed as missionaries in 1987 to a Southeast Asian country to work in seminary teaching and in theological education by extension. During their training and orientation, they were privileged to spend considerable time in training related to Storying. They learned about orality and literacy issues and how the use of a less-literate based style might greatly improve their ministry. Much of the training done at that time was very literate in approach and dealt with lots of “lists”—learning languages and worldviews and culture, and it all sounded like something that would only be possible way down the road.

George and Susan’s first years on the field were in a seminary city and many of the students who came to study at the seminary left there “prepared” to serve. Yet many of them struggled at the seminary or, worse yet, struggled when they returned to their villages. Their preaching

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classes taught them to present sermons and teachings in styles that were counter-culture to the ways that they had learned in their villages and in their schools. Because they were good memorizers, they could often pass the tests, but understanding and applying what they learned was difficult. Listening to sermons patterned after what they had learned left you feeling like they had not really said what they meant to say. It was frustrating for them and frustrating for the listeners as well.

Several years later, George and Susan moved to a different ministry and a different city. There they helped to draw together a group of like-minded people from various organizations, all of whom were focused on bringing the gospel to a particular unreached people group. This group of cross-cultural missionaries worked together to better plan, use combined resources, and to pray and support one another.

Informal discussions over refreshments after the meeting revealed that few in the group were having much success leading people to Christ in this resistant and restrictive culture. Several discussed a storying workshop they had attended the year before George and Susan arrived and how they wished that it could be used in their ministries. George and Susan recalled their previous training and had their notes from the past. The group all agreed it sounded like a great ministry, but no one had really tried it before.

George and Susan had seen booklets on Storying, sample storying sets from other successful ministries in other countries, and heard the success stories and had even collected some themselves. But to step out and begin storying—how did one do it? How did they all get rid of the fear of doing it wrong?

Finally, the group decided that they would call themselves the “Nike Group” —and the motto became “Just Do It!” There were five to seven participants in the Nike crowd at first, and they all began to agree to pray for one another and to begin to ask God for opportunities to story.

### REFLECT #1

1. What were the issues that George and Susan observed in the life and training of the seminary students whom they observed?
2. Why do you think all of these ministry workers had received training, had all of these materials, and yet still had not done anything with the material that they agreed sounded like a good thing to implement?
3. How might the idea of banding together to try experiments and “just do it” spur the group on?

We’ll come back to this Nike Group later, but first, let’s look at some of the understanding they gained related to the people with whom they had come to share the Gospel.

## INTRODUCTION TO ORALITY AND LITERACY

### Definitions: Oral Learner/Oral Communicator

Oral learners are those people who learn best and whose lives are most likely to be transformed when instruction comes in oral forms. Their cultures transmit their religion, heritage, values and other important information by means of stories, proverbs, poetry, chants, music, dances, ceremonies, rites of passage and other personal experiences.

**Oral learners/communicators:**

- Value relationships in communication more than literate learners. They believe persons more than abstract truths. They often describe people by telling stories about them.
- Hang reality on sensory experiences. They “enter” the story and as they absorb sensory data they live the story in the present tense—seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and feeling what the persons in the story are experiencing.
- Organize information differently than literate-preference learners do to remember it.
- See words as “sounds” and not “letters.”
- Must repeat knowledge after it is acquired so that it will not be lost.
- Are good memorizers.
- Invite participation and dialog in their learning.
- Do not go back over notes and study.
- Cannot “look something up.”
- Do not own filing cabinets.
- Learn best through stories. They are not reminded of truths, teachings, principles or outlines. Instead, they are reminded of a story or event that has that truth or principles comfortably and clearly planted in it. The teaching is the story or the event, and the story or event is the teaching.

**Note:** Oral learners find it difficult to follow literate-styled presentations, even when they are made orally. Making something audible does not make it an “oral” style of communication. Not everything on a CD or audiotape is “oral.”

Their teaching comes largely through the spoken word; thus, these cultures are often called “oral cultures,” and the people living in them are called “oral learners.”

**Oral cultures:**

- Relational or group-oriented cultures. Their heroes are larger than life.
- Learn by apprenticeship, by modeling or coaching, which means one observes and practices without a great deal of explanation.
- Usually more traditional or conservative than literary cultures.
- Look to interaction with other individuals in order to think, remember, or recall what was said.

When many people in a culture are oral learners, it affects the whole culture and many aspects of people’s lives. Even if someone is highly educated, if his culture is traditionally oral, he usually prefers to learn through oral methods. Information is very clearly processed, stored and recalled in a very different manner than someone who prefers literate means of learning.

**Note:** “Oral learner” refers to the way you best receive new information. “Oral communicator” refers to the best way you communicate information. These are often used interchangeably, as are “literate and/or print learners” and “literate and/or print communicators.”

**REFLECT #21.** Would you rather read the book or see the movie?2. What do you remember from the sermon that you heard this week?  
3. Do you view being “illiterate” as a negative thing?  
4. From your initial understanding, do you see yourself as an oral communicator or a literate/print communicator? Or do you see yourself as both?

## LITERACY ~ IT ISN'T QUITE AS CUT AND DRIED AS WE THINK

Let's continue with our Orality and Literacy Overview to better understand literacy and its effect on our ability to communicate.

**Five categories of literacy** (or the five categories on the road from being a primary oral communicator to a highly literate communicator). These degrees reflect a continuum. We also see the five levels of difficulty in receiving the gospel in a simply literate format.

1. **Primary illiterates** cannot read or write. They have never “seen” a word. Words do not exist as letters, but as sounds related to pictures of events and to situations that oral learners are seeing or experiencing.
2. **Functional illiterates** have been to school but do not continue to read and write regularly after dropping out of school. Within two years, even those who have gone to school for eight years often can read only simple sentences and can no longer receive, recall or reproduce concepts, ideas, precepts, and principles through literate means. They prefer to get their information orally. Their *functional* level of illiteracy (as opposed to published data) determines how they learn, how they develop their values and beliefs and how they pass along their culture, including their religious beliefs and practices.
3. **Semi-literates** function in a gray transition area between oral communication and literacy. Even though these individuals have normally gone to school up to ten years and are classified in every country of the world as literates, they learn primarily by means of narrative presentations.
4. **Literate learners** understand and handle information such as ideas, precepts, concepts, and principles by literate means. The average literate person, on the way to becoming literate, has lost or given up a measure of his or her oral communication skills. Literates find memory more difficult than illiterates because they rely on written data as an aid to recall.
5. **Highly literate learners** usually have attended college and are often professionals in the liberal arts fields. They are thoroughly word/print-culture individuals.

Why is this important for us to know?

**As cross-cultural witnesses try to influence people in the first three categories of literacy using methods preferred by categories four and five, we can encounter major problems:**

1. Almost all missionaries are in categories 4 and 5—literate or highly literate style. Literates usually have lost much of the ability to learn orally or retain what they learn

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orally. So, they use the method they have mastered to try to communicate with oral learners who do not “hear” them.

2. When literate missionaries try to reach illiterates, they believe that one of their primary tasks is to train a corps of literate nationals who can go back to their people (but who then face the same problems communicating). Thus, the saying in many fields that “if you send a local believer to the seminary or Bible school to be trained, they’ll be of no use to the village” becomes reality.

3. Literate word culture individuals are unconsciously, habitually, and emotionally committed to expositional presentations. It is the nature of a literate communicator to outline, summarize and reduce to steps, the segment of information that is to be communicated.

It is important for us to understand where we fall in this oral vs. literacy continuum, because we tend to teach and present material in the style that we know and love best. We will default to this style unless we make an **intentional** effort at all times to keep our format in the best method of communication for our listener.

### REFLECT #3

1. If missionaries (who are primarily in Category 4 and 5) are basically going to teach and communicate with persons from Category 1, 2, and 3, what kind of problems might they face?
2. Think back to George and Susan’s seminary situation. Are there thoughts or new insights that you might have about that situation now?
3. Where do you fall in the oral vs. literacy continuum? Where do people to whom you minister here in the United States (or your home country) fall? Why is it important that you know the answer to these two questions?

“In missionary, cross-cultural settings, where many, if not most, of the focus people were illiterate and functionally illiterate, the Gospel has been primarily communicated by literate, word-culture methods. With the expansion of literacy in the Western world and the invention of the printing press, the gospel and Scriptures were thereby primarily communicated, explained, retained and illustrated by literary means, in highly expositional formats. Such a format was uncommon prior to the invention of the printing press and the advance of literacy in the West.”<sup>1</sup>

The result: Christianity became even more of a “foreign” religion and was proven so again and again by its packaging and format when its message was being shared among the world’s majority—oral communicators.

“The sad truth is that the Gospel is being proclaimed now to more people than at any other time in history, yet many of those are not really hearing it. Unfortunately, most evangelical leaders do not realize the magnitude of the problem. Those affected by it include the 4 billion oral communicators of the world: people who can’t, don’t, or won’t take in new information or communicate by literate means. Oral communicators are found in every cultural group in the world and they constitute approximately two-thirds of the world’s population! Yet we are not communicating the gospel effectively with them. We will not succeed in reaching the majority of the world unless we make some crucial changes.”<sup>2</sup>

ORAL PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL IS ESSENTIAL

Oral presentation of the gospel is essential in order to reach:

- the 1.5 billion of the 4 billion oral learners who have never been introduced to reading and writing;
- the 75 percent to 85 percent of Islamic women who are oral communicators (non-literate to functionally illiterate) and at least 65 percent of Islamic men who are oral communicators;
- the animistic peoples among whom Illiteracy is dominant;
- the peoples who speak 4,169 of the world's 6,809 languages who do not have even one book of the Bible in their heart language (the whole Bible is translated in only 414 of the 6,809 languages in the world.)
- the thousands of Bibleless peoples who will have no Scripture in their language for decades to come. [Scripture Source: Wycliffe International, December 2005]
- the over 50% of Americans who are illiterate or functionally literate;
- those whose language is not yet even written down much less has any Scripture in it;

Being able to read or not being able to read is not really the issue here. **The real issue is “What is the best way to present the gospel to our audience, any audience?”** How do we adapt the packaging of our message so that it is in the best possible format for it to be received—a format that makes it pleasing and attractive to our listeners, or at the very least does not present barriers to communication so that the message, whether accepted or rejected, is clear. Paul reminds us that we “become all things to all men so that by all possible means (we) might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22).

As the ones bringing the message, it is our responsibility to communicate our message in their terms. To effectively communicate with oral learners, we must meet them where they are. Let's move into their neighborhood (The Message New Testament, John 1:14) like Jesus did. In other words, let's match our methods and format to the learning styles and preferences of the oral and print communicators with whom we share.

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CASE STUDY: MAKING DISCIPLES OF ORAL LEARNERS<sup>3</sup>

In a dusty village in southwestern Nigeria, Rogers serves faithfully as pastor of a young church consisting of Yoruba farmers and their families. Three years into his pastorate, Rogers had the opportunity to attend a short course for pastors on chronological Bible storying. There he learned the ancient way of teaching that was new to him. He was encouraged to tell Bible stories in an accurate and interesting way and then lead the group to retell the story, discuss its meaning and relate the truths to their lives.

Upon arriving home, Rogers decided that on the following Sunday he would try out what he had learned. Because the conference leader had recommended telling Bible stories in chronological sequence, Rogers decided to begin with the story of the creation of spirit beings. He drew on several biblical passages to formulate this particular story as had been illustrated in the short course. Rogers told the Yoruba creation story. He used that as a bridge to the biblical



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narration of the story of the creation of angelic beings. He presented it as a story—without explaining it or exhorting the group. Afterward, he asked for someone to retell the biblical story and someone did. Then he asked them questions and led in a dialogue that helped them understand and apply the story.

Rogers was thrilled with their response. He also realized that his congregation had not really been understanding his sermons for the past three years. Rogers used the same approach the next Sunday and found the people eager to listen, to re-tell the story, and to ask questions, where before they sat in silence. Rogers discovered several important lessons about making disciples. He realized that to effectively disciple, one must first determine how one's people learn. He had not been aware that his preaching style needed to match the people's learning style. They lived in a relational culture with a strong oral tradition. They passed on their history in stories and proverbs. Rogers realized that he was a literate pastor trained in Western teaching methods. These methods didn't work well in his situation.

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*WHEN ROGERS CHANGED HIS  
METHODS, THE PEOPLE RESPONDED.*

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He decided to return to his cultural roots as well as model his preaching and teaching after the greatest teacher – Jesus. Before Rogers changed his teaching methods, he had been frustrated by his people's lack of response. He thought the problem was theirs, that perhaps they were not very intelligent. When Rogers changed his methods, the people responded; and he discerned that he had been the problem because he had not been communicating effectively.

**Let's reflect on Rogers' experiences with people learning through oral means:**

- Oral learners are intelligent people who learn enthusiastically and well. They can ask and answer difficult questions about the Bible *if they are taught using appropriate methods.*
- Using stories enables oral learners to pass along what they learn. Rogers could teach them the story one day and they could tell it the next.
- Stories can be used to make disciples of all ages, from children to adults.
- As oral learners become disciples, they need to discover the answers to their questions in God's Word. Even more so, the Holy Spirit can teach them as they listen to the story, teaching them the appropriate applications for their lives and culture.
- Making disciples of oral learners can be a fun experience for everyone involved!

### REFLECT #4

1. What did Rogers learn from this experience about his congregation?
2. What did Rogers learn about himself from this experience?

## CASE STUDY: THE CIRCLE OF STORIES

A friend tells the story of one day while on home assignment in the United States, he was praying for his people group when the Holy Spirit led him to make a serious self-evaluation – “How am I relating to the Indah people? Do I really love them, or do I just target them for

salvation?” Jack was disturbed by this soul-searching impression that came to him in prayer. He had been born in the country, spoke their language fluently and certainly was committed to ministry among the people.

Jack said that as he searched his heart, he realized there was some truth in that troubling revelation. Although he preached and ministered among the people, he really had never shared his personal life very deeply. He began to realize that as Jesus taught and moved about, He poured His life into the people. Jesus reached out in love and told stories the people could understand and relate to their own lives. His relationship with them was strong and personal. Through simple parables, the truth and love of God shined through.

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*DO I REALLY LOVE THEM, OR DO I  
JUST TARGET THEM FOR SALVATION?*

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So, Jack began to invest his life more deeply in his friends and in his local co-workers. He began to share his own personal stories so people would come to know and trust him. He was thrilled to see that, in turn, they would share their personal

stories back with him, causing him to understand all the better, their worldview, their lives, and their struggles. Many times, he would then have an opportunity to share a story or a verse from God’s Word with them, thus completing the circle of “My story draws out your story which allows God’s word to be shared.”

Telling our own stories, listening to others’ stories and sharing God’s story are all interconnected. This process is ongoing and repeatable (thus a circle rather than a straight line). He says, “I have learned that telling Bible stories is not enough. If we only tell Bible stories, that can become another means of “target practice.” Instead of shooting biblical principles or spiritual laws, we shoot stories, both Biblical and personal. We hope that these stories will find their mark among our target groups.

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*STORIES ARE WAYS THAT  
CONFRONTATIONAL IDEOLOGY AND  
THEOLOGY CAN SLIP THROUGH THE  
BACK DOOR INTO THE EMOTIONS  
AND TOUCH THE HEART.*

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Most of us would agree that using our own stories and listening to the stories of our hearers are important. In practice, however, many of us do not take enough time to do this. We urgently want to get to the “point.” We can’t wait to share the “truth.” What we rationally-oriented literates mean by “truth” are the principles and the facts that we have been taught and have read

all of our Christian lives. Our minds tell us, “If only they knew, if only they understood that they are sinners and need Jesus!”<sup>4</sup>

Oral cultures are very relational, very communal. No matter how wonderful our story is (and we have the greatest story ever told), it will be listened to more closely when told by a friend than by an outsider.

#### LAURA’S STORY, TO T’S STORY, TO GOD’S STORY ~ THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETED

One Indah woman’s life was changed by the story of Laura. Laura’s church in the United States had felt God’s leading to pray for an unreached people group, and they chose a large unreached group from Southeast Asia. About a year later, Laura wanted to meet these people

she was praying for, and so she agreed to help plan a trip to Indonesia to prayer walk with several women from her church. Laura remained firm when others began to back out because of the economic and political strife that took place with the change of government in Indonesia. So Laura went by herself. She stayed with a believer in a major city and went on prayer walks at several mountain villages in the region. She and her hostess visited in people's homes, and several showed her around their villages and went with her while she walked and prayed. An Indonesian lady, Mrs. T, joined Laura in prayer walking in her neighborhood and heard Laura tell her story through translation by the hostess.

Several years later, Mrs. T had become a powerful prayer warrior for her neighborhood. When the first Christian wedding took place in her village, all were worried because it was going to be an outside wedding. It rained all day in several places around them, but not in this neighborhood where the wedding took place. When neighbors commented on how lucky they were that it didn't rain, this Indah prayer warrior said, "Oh, no, it wasn't luck. I walked around the place where the wedding would be held and prayed that God would keep the rain away!"

She told me later, "I learned how important it is to prayer walk from Laura. I figured if she could come and walk around my village from 10,000 miles away, I should be doing it myself since I live here!" All of the villagers are now asking: what kind of special magic or knowledge does Mrs. T have that she can pray and God will hold back the rain?" Laura's story led to Mrs. T's story which led to God's story being told of His power to hold back rain.

#### REFLECT #5

1. What story from the Bible would support Mrs. T's story?

An Old Testament Example:

2. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-14 for an Old Testament example of how God used a story to change the heart of a king.

Tell Nathan's story in your own words. Why was such a simple story so effective with David?

3. In your opinion, why did Nathan take a chance on a story when literally the whole kingdom could have been at risk, and most assuredly his life was, if David did not respond well?

A New Testament Example:

Read "Why Communicate the Gospel through Stories?" by Tom A. Steffen, from *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, pp. 404-407.

4. How aware were you that so much of the Bible is actual story?

5. Answer the question posed in the Study Questions: If God conveyed the majority of the biblical message to the world through story, what does this suggest to Christian workers?

6. Steffen describes in his section about Jesus one of the most important reasons why using stories is so effective. Read again the section on "Jesus taught theology through stories. How did Jesus help change their worldview and open it to following Him through His stories?"

We follow the example of Jesus himself: "All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and he did not speak to them without a parable" (Matthew 13:34). Mark 4:33 tells us, "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything."

Stories are ways that confrontational ideology and theology can slip through the back door into the emotions and touch the heart. Worldview helps to shape our beliefs, behavior, and reality can be re-shaped by stories. Jesus and Nathan, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, were living proof of how stories can work with resistant and hard hearts.

INCORPORATING STORYING AND ORAL COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES  
INTO PERSONAL MINISTRY

**Know Your Goal / End Vision**

1. Keep the end vision in sight always, and be intentional about using the styles of learning that best communicate with your people. You have only begun to learn about oral learners and the different stages of literacy and its impact on the formatting of the message.
2. Ask God to give you a new understanding and remove any cultural biases related to issues of orality/literacy. Ask Him to help you to a land of oral learners and to re-shape your mind to be aware of orality issues and how you can move comfortably in and out of the different levels of literacy.

This first step of knowing your end vision is huge and must take place before you move on or you will only half-heartedly do the other steps. You are “becoming all things to all men, so that you might by whatever means win some.” (Paul’s quote)

**Know Your People**

1. Use good cultural adaptation principles, and study your focus people, learning their culture, their language, and their worldview. Begin a course of study that gathers information about their worldview that gets more and more in-depth as time goes by. Think of the ingathering of information as a marathon, not a sprint and take it deeper and deeper.
2. As you learn more about their worldview you will begin to note:
  - Barriers within that worldview to the Gospel
  - Bridges within that worldview to the Gospel.

In short, what within their culture will hinder their coming to the Gospel, and what would help or become starting points whereby the Gospel might be bridged to their culture?

3. Begin to use the circle of stories strategy discussed above and move into the relational, communal realm of your people.
4. Pray asking God to give you opportunities to use your stories with a person who has an ear to hear.

Really listen to their stories. The Spirit-led opportunities to share God’s stories will at first most likely be with individuals in one-on-one spur-of-the-moment opportunities.

5. Ask God for opportunities to begin to gather small groups of folks for a storying opportunity and the wisdom to know how and when to begin one.

Sometimes these groups grow from a particular individual or a “person of peace” who will open doors to a family or clan, to a neighborhood or circle of friends.

**Know Your Bible**

1. Reread the Bible with “God’s story” eyes. Learn the stories of the Bible. Understand how the

non-narrative portions of Scripture—poetry, prophecy, and the New Testament letters—fit into the overall story.

2. Let your heart be renewed by the stories of God’s dealing with men.

Ask yourself these questions about each story:

- What does this story teach us about God?
- What does this story teach us about Satan, the enemy and the accuser of the brethren?
- What does this story tell us about man (the people in the story), about ourselves and God’s dealing with man?
- Was there anything in particular that you felt this story really said to you?

These questions can become the basis of any discussion you have about any biblical story.

3. Re-visit an ancient oral communication form called memorization. Memorize key passages in the Old Testament and New, in both your language and also in theirs.

In other religions, even children are required to memorize large portions, if not all, of their holy book. Oral communicators are memorizers, and we need to be, too.

4. Practice telling the stories in your own mother tongue. Study the story, close your Bible, and tell it out loud. Check for accuracy and make adjustments. Tell it again until you commit it to memory (can tell it accurately without looking back at your Bible or “script”).

5. Write out stories in your newly adopted language (great language study practice).

6. As you study Scripture, ask yourself: What are the essentials, the basic foundational truths that a person of any culture must know, understand and receive before he/she is a follower of Christ? What might “church” look like in that culture? What has to be there for it to be “church”?

7. Make a list of these truths. Sample lists of foundational truths are available but make your own first. Refer back to it often. This list will be your core when you begin to set up storying sets for a specific audience or people group.

### Know How to Tell a Good Story

You, Too, Can Be a Good Storyteller! Here are a few pointers on preparation and actually telling your story.

1. **Read (or listen to) your story over and over several times.** You must read and read (or hear and hear) the story until you can tell it as if it happened to you and can be told in your own words. Think about the circumstances and atmosphere of the story. Imagine the story and its setting, as if you were there and in the story yourself. How would you feel if you were the person in the story?

2. **Practice telling the story out loud.** Practice in front of a mirror. Feel free to use movement or motion if it will enhance the story.

## STORYING THE GOSPEL

3. **Use an interesting and pleasing voice.** Pronounce your words well. Use voice variations and speed of speech to make the story seem as if it is really happening.
4. **Start your story with an interesting way to capture your listener's attention.** Plan your introduction so that it will grab your listener's attention and make him want to hear the rest of the story. In other words, perhaps it would be better to start with something more interesting than, "Want to hear a story today?"
5. **Use words that are understandable to the listener,** words that are simple and your own words. Don't memorize someone else's story in his words—**make the story your own.**
6. **Tell your story until it is finished.** Don't stop in the middle of your storytelling to give explanation, make additions or spiritual implications, or to explain the deeper meaning of the story. Finish the story; then you can give explanations, applications, etc., or explain the story's deeper meaning.
7. **Know your listeners and stay tuned in to their needs and attention level.** Try to keep each listener's attention while you are telling the story. As much as possible try to watch each person's face to know if the story is interesting to him and can be received well by that listener. Try to forget yourself and **concentrate on your listeners**—in other words, don't focus the listener's attention on you or on anything that you are doing. Rather focus the listener's attention on the story itself, praying all the while for the listener as you tell the story about what the listener is thinking about you or what you are saying or doing.
8. **Know your story well, and tell it well.** Remember all the parts that are important and get them in the right order, telling the story in your own words. A story that seems to be a part of us can be told with greater freedom and is much more satisfying to the listener.
9. **Know your story and tell it well.** Every little detail of a story does not have to be included for the story to be complete.
10. **Plan how to end your story well.** Make sure the listener feels the story has come to a close.
11. **Don't be embarrassed to share the story of salvation.** Allow the Spirit to lead in opening doors of opportunity.
12. **Tell your story as a "story."** Remember, you are not preaching a sermon or reporting on what God was doing.

## AND FINALLY, KNOW WHEN TO STORY

- Pray and boldly ask God for storying opportunities. Pray and ask others to pray with you for opportunities to story in groups—special events first and then regular weekly gatherings.
- **STORY!** Just do it!
- Evaluate so that you can recall what happened and improve your storying. Find others who story to share your storying experiences with routinely, and learn from one another.
- Keep studying and understanding the worldview of your focus people group.

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- Develop storying tracks or sets of stories that will connect with bridges to the Gospel for those people and will tear down barriers to the Gospel as well.
- Realize there are many kinds of storying — situational storying, fast-track storying, chronological Bible storying, and others. You will find much more about these kinds in the vocabulary section and resources listed later.

### REFLECT #6

1. Review the pages of this last section with a particular focus in mind. Go back and highlight through to mark two things with different colors:

- Leave “white” what you are already doing or already knew.
- Mark in Color #1 new things to you, or things that you must wait to do until you are somewhere else.
- Mark in Color #2 things that you could begin to do right now.

2. Focus on the things that you hear the Lord say to you that you need to do now. Is there someone in your learning group you can commit to pray for and who will pray for you in these areas? Pair off with someone in your learning community, share these action items with each other, and commit to pray for each other in these areas.

## WHAT IS CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLE STORYING (CBS)?

**Note:** Although many use the terms “storying” and “chronological Bible storying” interchangeably, CBS is a *more specific kind of storying under the general category of “Storying.”*

A missionary couple in a West Africa Muslim village explained how using chronological Bible storying helped them in their ministry. “My husband and I asked permission of the village chiefs to live among the people in order to learn more about them,” she said. “They knew we were missionaries. They asked if we were going to do evangelism. We asked them if they meant having a large gathering with singing and drums and showing a film. They said that is what they meant. We told them we would not do that. They asked if we were going to build a church. We asked if they meant by that to build a building. When they replied yes, we said we would not build a church building. Permission was given and we were given a house to rent, located among the people. ...

When we asked them to tell us what a Christian was, they replied, ‘I really don’t know except they are bad. They pray only once a week when they go into a building. They are drunkards and idolaters. You cannot trust them.’ When I asked who Jesus is, one young man said to his friend, ‘Isn’t he that guy in the movie?’”

“Our plans were simple,” the couple continued. “We lived among the people and attempted to show them Christ through our lives. We did not discuss the religion of Christianity or talk about the Christian way. We never discussed Islam, Muhammad or the Koran or the differences between Christianity and Islam. We were there to teach God’s Word under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We chose to use only the storying method, to teach the stories of the Bible chronologically and bring out the truths the people needed to know in order to understand the gospel.”

After a year of building relationships and “becoming worthy” to share by entering into the community and praying for the people in Jesus’ name, God began opening doors. They asked the chief for permission to share God’s Word in the village. He replied that he had watched

them and knew they were people of integrity. He gave them permission to do whatever they wanted. They began storying in small groups throughout the village and distributed storying cassettes to those who asked. The Imam used some of the stories in his sermons and gave his people permission to listen to the stories. During the next year, 20 individuals became believers and disciples of Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

The earlier story of Rogers and this story as well illustrate the use of chronological Bible Storying. CBS provides a way for oral learners to hear the stories of the Bible in an oral, sequential pattern that they can absorb and remember. The storyer selects and crafts stories that convey the essential Biblical message, in a way that is sensitive to the worldview of the receptor society. These stories are faithful to the biblical text, and at the same time are told in a natural compelling manner in the heart language. Because stories possess the power to actually change how people think, feel and behave, and to change the way they see the world, it is important to have a sequential, step-by-step process that leads the listeners to a new, biblical worldview, choosing stories that deal with the bridges and barriers to the gospel of that particular culture. These stories are told in much the same way that society conveys a treasured, true story.

**Chronological Bible Storying (CBS)** is the process of encountering God by telling the stories of the Bible. In CBS, we tell Bible stories without interruption or comment and we tell them in the order that they happened in time. Afterward, we discuss each story and its significance for our lives. Each story builds on those that came before; as a result, the overarching message of the Bible becomes clear and we discover our own place in God's story.<sup>6</sup>

## THE BASICS OF IMPLEMENTING CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLE STORYING

### **1. Storying is chosen because it is a primary communication vehicle of our focus people.**

Our people are oral communicators and respond well to narrative teaching, which also means they respond poorly to expositional literate based teaching.

### **2. Storying is based entirely on the Bible.**

The stories that will be used are the Bible stories strictly. Other's opinions of the Bible or commentary about the Bible will not be used in any way, shape, form or fashion within the story or the storying session. The attempt here is to build an Oral Bible for the listeners, one story at a time.

### **3. Storying is chronological and sequential.**

The stories begin at the beginning of the Bible and move forward through it, staying in the sequence of the Bible. You begin at the beginning and keep the stories in the order in which they fall in the natural story of the Bible. The Bible tells a story—God's story that continues on until this day in the lives of his followers and His church. Our goal is to give them This Story, beginning at the beginning.

### **4. Storying looks backward but never forward.**

When you story in chronology, you may refer back to anything that has happened previously to this story, but you never refer forward. You may not say, "later in Scripture we will see..." unless within your story it refers to the future. This principle is important to keep us on track in building the story step by step, a very important issue for oral learners. "Jumping around to



make a point” is one of the definitions of exposition—a definite no-no in storying. You may refer back, such as “You’ll remember when we talked about Abraham....”. In fact, review is extremely important in oral cultures. But never reveal future information.

**5. Stories are chosen based on the universal biblical truths to be communicated.**

Remember the list of essential biblical truths that you were asked to create in the “Know your Bible” section? That list helps guide you in the process of choosing what stories are essential as you plan your CBS story list. There are approximately 150 separate stories in the Bible. Which of these stories are the stories that your audience needs to hear to lay the foundation for them to receive these universal Bible truths? This list is one of the criteria you use as you cull down the list to produce your final set.

**6. Stories are chosen based on identified barriers and bridges in the focus people’s worldview.**

You recall that under “Know your people,” you were asked to begin to get really familiar with your people’s worldview and to know and list the barriers that were hindrances within their culture or society or country that would build walls to their receptivity of the Gospel. You were to identify bridges in their culture or even redemptive analogies (see Don Richardson’s Redemptive Analogy article in Perspectives Reader, pp. 397-403) that would help to smooth the way for the Gospel to be better received. Some stories will be chosen for the fact that they help to tear down some of those barriers or because they speak to maximize the bridges that are already there.

**7. Chronological Bible storying is structured to give an oral Bible to individuals and to develop their competency to share it orally.**

Our goal is always to share something that is reproducible and can spread exponentially. When CBS is used, we step by step build an Oral Bible for our listeners who in turn can and will become storyers themselves, building oral Bibles for others. People don’t wait until the end of their training and the receiving of their “certificate” or even until they have made a decision for Christ to spread or share the stories. We do, however, structure our sessions together so that we know that several things have happened: they have received the story free of any of our baggage or explanation. Just the story, please!

Discussion that follows allows them to discover the meaning of the story and flush out the biblical truth taught in this story, gaining insight related to the barriers or bridges to the Gospel that their culture faces.

They are allowed to re-tell the story and discuss it so that they are clear as to what the story really is, and will, therefore, go forth and tell it again correctly (thus passing on the Oral Bible to others). Your discussion can be drawn out by the four questions listed earlier (about God, Satan, man, and my insights) or from some you design yourself. The discussion still steers clear of the use of explanation or exposition for primary and functional oral communicators and allows the Holy Spirit the first opportunity to interpret the Scriptures for them, not our explanation.

**8. Storying is a “win/win” approach until the story of the crucifixion and resurrection when the major invitation is given.**

Storying is designed to avoid dealing with difficult issues or calling for decisions early on, moving on step by step toward Christ, His death, and resurrection, at which point we give people the opportunity to respond to “the Promised One” from the beginning—Jesus Christ.

We seek to avoid issues that will cause division or divert our attention from where we are. For example, in the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, we do not make a huge issue over the fact that the son was Isaac, as opposed to Ishmael, with Muslims. The same important points can be made that need to be made from the story (Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son, but God provided the substitute sacrifice) without having to argue about which son. Sometimes our answer might be, “We’ll deal with that in another story” if that helps us keep on moving. All knotty issues cannot always be dealt with by deferring, but if you can defer within the group, try to do so. We want the listeners to stay with us along the chronological path and not to stray off on a tangent if at all possible.

**9. CBS is predominately narrative with minimal exposition.**

Narrative is what makes it storying. You can do chronological Bible teaching and it not be narrative. Always evaluate your stories to see if you have remained true to oral, narrative principles. This does not always have to mean a told story. Drama, dance, songs, chants—these are narrative forms that can be used in place of an actual oral story. The story is told without explanation or interruption. But when exposition enters the picture, the story becomes cloudy to the listener. Either that or you have now added to the Oral Bible that you are building.

It is a daunting task to realize that what you tell will be thought to be Scripture/Holy Book to listeners if you say it is. Let that be your rule as you prepare your lesson. Stay true to the story.<sup>7</sup>

**REFLECT #7**

1. Summarize what you think Chronological Bible Storying is in your own words.
2. What questions come to mind about this method so far?
3. Why does CBS seem to fit so well with oral learners’ preference of style?
4. Would CBS fit in any ministry that you are involved in at present?

THE REST OF THE STORY: THE NIKE GROUP ~ JUST DO IT!

**As we prayed, we began to make plans to move forward.**

We looked at each other and said, “We all have 5-10 years of experience on the field, and surely by now we know the essential truths of salvation. Let’s list them.” And we did. Then we said, “Let’s all list together the bridges and barriers that we believe our people group has related to the gospel, and let’s interview other workers and find out what they think these are as well.”

We drew up our introductory list and added to it as time went along. One worker began a “deepening worldview” understanding ministry. She had those of us who were willing to do interviews with friends to find out deeper information related to a woman’s life in our people group. She gathered the information and shared it with us. She encouraged us to use these opportunities to share our stories with the ladies we interviewed and to learn their stories, praying for opportunities to share God’s story.

**Here is how He answered our prayers in the lives of our Nike teammates:**

He taught us how to experiment and be bold in trying to find ways to story and to use every day and special situations to share Bible stories. For example, that particular year, the Idul Adha Muslim Sacrifice Celebration and Easter both fell within the same week. The group worked up a set of 5 stories that dealt with the theme of sacrifice and that God always provided the sacrifice (way of escape) that was needed. The Story set included: Story of

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Prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice. Several within our group invited their neighbors or friends to their home during that special week and shared the story of these five prophets and the theme of sacrifice. Others used these stories in one-on-one opportunities, praying that some of these would lead to further opportunities to share.

Several began ministries to neighborhood children in their homes. They would have play/game time, sharing, food, and then a story time together. Parents were welcome to come as well and some did. Many of the stories of our faith and the predominant faith in the country were similar but with different understandings of what they mean. These afternoons were opportunities to build relationship and community, to build character and deeper understanding of spiritual issues and to also have the stories shared with parents as the children went home and repeated the stories.

One man used simple stories of the Greatest Prophets to teach English. He would write out a very short simple story about one of the major Prophets—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus and use these stories to teach simple English. He could tell the story in greater depth in their language during the teaching session and have time to discuss a little, or could do that one-on-one in follow up with the students.

Several began weekly storying time with workers in their homes or offices.

This story was how God started the storying group that Susan was privileged to be a part of:

Several small handfuls of believers had resulted from the ministry of our pastor's wife, Anna, and several other women up in some mountain villages near the large city where we lived. Each weekend for several years, Anna had journeyed each weekend up to these villages to teach. As these groups grew and local pressure and persecution began to happen, Anna was denied the right to come to their villages. After much prayer, we agreed to bring any of the believers

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*I WORKED FOR HOURS TO PREPARE  
WHAT AMOUNTED TO A LESS THAN  
ONE-PAGE STORY.*

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who were willing down to the city one afternoon a week to be disciplined and to be trained to be leaders in their house churches. The only criteria was that they be willing to come (our leadership criteria was set really low). There were 5 persons—4 men and 1 woman, from three villages who agreed to come. Anna and I would meet with them once a week. Anna felt strongly that we were to use storying with this group, and since we had been praying for opportunities in our Nike group, it appeared that God had answered our prayers.

Every week I would prepare the story. How to do this? I wasn't sure but we were all praying. The first time I prepared the story, you would have thought I was writing a dissertation. I had two or three translations of the English Bible, two translations of the local languages, four or five sample storying sets that I collected over the years. I worked for hours to prepare what amounted to a less than one-page story that I wrote up in the local language to make sure I could say it. I practiced that story and practiced that story. Whew, that was a lot of work!

Our sessions were planned to be about 2-3 hours. Our first meeting together we visited and got to know each other, talked about their situation and hopes for this group. Finally, it came time for the story.

## HOW DID OUR CBS STORYING SESSION WORK?

### The Story:

I opened the Bible to the story. I told the story like a story, in as natural a way as if I were telling you about an incident that happened to me yesterday (the first time I was very nervous and they were very gracious). When I got to the end of the story, I stopped. I closed my Bible. I said, “Let’s talk about this story a little bit.”

### The Discussion/Review of Story:

We then talked about these three questions:

- What does this story teach us about God?
- What does this story teach us about mankind or about ourselves?
- What does this story teach us about the Evil One? (If there is something there that does)

Then I would often ask: Anything else that you got out of this story? (Sometimes you would catch something about their culture or worldview from the dialog here, or about something confusing or difficult to understand for them).

### The Practice:

After our discussion, we would do one of several things:

We would have them split up into twos and practice telling the story to one another. We would have a few of them take turns telling the story back to the whole group. Occasionally they would act out the story as a drama.

If someone had the story a little off or incorrect, I rarely had to say anything. The group would usually straighten out the inconsistencies. They wanted to get it correct because they were planning to use the story as their message to their house group on the following Sunday.

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*BUT NO ONE CAN PICK THE RIGHT  
STORIES LIKE THE HOLY SPIRIT.*

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I left that first storying session encouraged and inspired to keep working, to believe that it would get easier. And it did. Each week, I would get rid of a few of my “translations” and storying sets. Finally, I was just down to my local Good News translation and my English modern translation. I would then open my Bible to the last story I told and read on until I was at the story that I felt the Lord wanted me to tell next. That’s how I chose my stories (I did follow very loosely one sample storying set’s list but did not stick to it altogether.)

In the second and following weeks, we would review the story from the past week, and set the stage for the new story to fit into the chronological sequence of stories, then tell the new story, discuss/dialog about it, and then review the new story and practice it. Some call the cycle **Review/New/Review**. Before long the group began to plan the other time—the worship time, the prayer time, and the sharing time. Anna would take a brief time to teach something practical that would help them be better neighborhoods, such as health practices, good financial principles, etc. Our Bible story time usually took about an hour or a little more, depending on how long the discussion time went. Some stories particularly spoke to heart

issues of their culture and would really spark lots of dialog and prayer. Stories that really spoke to barriers or bridges became apparent as they would often spend more time and really get a lot out of those stories.

I would love to tell you that I sat down at the beginning and listed out the stories that I would use from start to finish. I would have had to do that if I had had a time limit of how long the group would meet. For example, if my group had committed to meet for six months, then I would know I had 6 months x 4 weeks per month = 24 sessions, which would equal 24 stories that I could use from start to finish. What stories should I use to give them the essential truths to speak to the barriers that their culture dealt with, and to maximize the bridges within their culture so that they could share these stories more easily?

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*STORYING BECAME EASIER AND  
EASIER AS I DID IT.*

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I would have then chosen 24 stories, or figured out ways to combine stories so that I would have material for 24 sessions, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the invitation to follow Him as the One promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Rest assured that there are many sample sets these days, most of which are online and are geared to different audiences—Muslim women, Buddhist background cultures, women who are grieving—resources are there. But no one can pick the right stories like the Holy Spirit giving leadership week after week to someone who has planned as best she knows how.

Storying became easier and easier as I did it. Preparation time shrank considerably as I trained my mind to think like an oral communicator. Storying sessions became more informal and relational, with lots of dialog and lots of animation within and during the story. I noticed that lots of times the group would say what they thought the speaker would say next or react to what happened as I told the story. Their stories became more animated and more like real stories as they realized that we really were going to stick to this teaching/learning style, and not move back to what they were “used to” from literate-trained western and local believers.

Some have asked if we used pictures or picture sets along with the stories. There are pros and cons about the use of pictures. In the end, I decided not to use them. I didn’t want the stories not to be re-told because the person didn’t have a picture set. The local religion frowned on pictures of their prophets. Pictures sometimes look foreign. And oral communicators can develop pictures in their minds that beat most of the pictures I could find or produce. So we stuck to simply using stories. And we memorized key verses within our story that we thought were especially meaningful and important for their hiding God’s word in their hearts.

The ultimate point for me came when one of the men said to me one day, “We can do what you do!”—like that was a surprise to him or that it might be a surprise to me. I responded, “Of course you can!” And they did. They were growing in their faith; they were reproducing what they were learning. We were living out what Paul told to Timothy— “And the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will be qualified to teach others.” (2 Timothy. 2:2). I also told him, “You can do it better than I can, because your neighbors will listen to you, and you speak their heart language in a way that I cannot.”

REFLECT #8

1. Why were the Nike group members able to use stories now when they had not in their previous years of ministry?
2. Can you describe or outline (iterate for sure) what a CBS storying session might look like?
3. How does one make storying sets for CBS groups—how many stories and which stories are chosen and why?

CONCLUSION

Susan summed it all up, “I can honestly say that storying the Gospel with these small group of potential leaders is the most rewarding and exhilarating thing I have ever done in my ministry.” It was a step-out-of-the-boat, step-out-of-my-comfort-zone-but-into-theirs kind of ministry—fueled by the prayers of the Nike Group, who were also “just doing it.” But the Scripture says, “Faithful is He who calls you, and HE will do it!” And He did!

In those villages, the Word of God was not chained (2 Timothy 2:9), not by the lack of understanding of how the oral culture there received heart information, not by the government who refused to let outside believers come up and teach, and not by the minds of this little band of believers who originally thought they were not able to learn or teach because they had so seldom been able to reproduce what they had been taught with literate, expositional ways.

“We can do what you do!!” I pray that you will one day hear that same jubilant statement in a language that you do not yet know! May God equip you, empower you and embolden you to step into the challenge of taking the Gospel to the 4 billion oral learners to whom the Bible is a closed, foreign book in a language that they do not understand, often taught in strange ways that do not communicate and make no sense. God’s Word does not have to be chained for the oral communicators of the world. They should have a chance to hear!

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SELF-AWARENESS, SURVIVAL, AND SOLUTION

What do I need to do to prepare myself to be a good communicator at all levels of the orality continuum?

- I need to pray that God would open my eyes to the needs of the four billion oral communicators all around the world and next door and the realities of communicating with all categories from totally oral learner to a highly literate learner.
- I need to be aware of orality issues as I deal with people from all walks of life day by day and to understand that it is my responsibility to put my message in the best format whereby maximum communication can take place with anyone with whom I seek to communicate.
- I need to be aware where I fall on the literacy continuum and understand that I will default to communicate at my comfort level unless I intentionally plan to assess and meet the needs of my learners.
- I need to open up and begin the circle of stories in my sphere of influence, particularly with oral communicators in order to move into their communal,

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relational neighborhood and build the relationships that allow me the liberty to tell my story and His story.

- I need to begin to prepare myself to story by:

Knowing the people I work with/plan to work with, and studying their culture, language, and worldview

Knowing the message and the Book that I am sharing intimately so that the Holy Spirit can bring its stories to mind as I have opportunity to share them

Knowing how to story and practicing doing so with some familiar, well-loved stories of the Bible

Being bold and stepping out to experiment with storying in my current ministries or as the Holy Spirit gives me opportunity.

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## SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Those of us who have grown up in highly literate cultures may not be aware that much of the world does not process new information in the same way that we do. **Orality** is a term that refers to the whole scope of issues that are involved in determining how people produce and receive information, beliefs, new ideas, and how they make decisions. **Orality** also speaks to how to best present that information so that optimum understanding occurs and no barriers have to be overcome for the listener to even hear or understand the message, much less receive and accept it.

**Oral learners** receive new information or new ideas best in non-literate, non-print ways. **Narrative** styles of teaching or presenting information presented by persons who are in community or have built relationships with the listener will carry the biggest impact. Thus, oral learners learn best by stories or some form of oral communication that tells the story through chants, dance, drama, song, puppetry, or other means of non-expositional communication. **Literate or print communicators** can receive and do enjoy receiving information in this way as well.

Because **oral cultures** are much more relational, more communal, more traditional and more conservative in nature than print cultures, it is extremely important that those wishing to share the Gospel with these cultures understand the power of **story** and the power of the **communication circle of storying**. Understanding these principles will allow even more literate communicators to adapt their **format** or style of delivery of the message they wish to share so that it will arrive unencumbered by trappings that will distort the message or confuse the listener.

There are several kinds of **storying**, such as **situational storying**, using stories or illustrations to capture a point you are trying to make so that it will be remembered by oral communicators, **fast-tracking stories**, etc. One particular method of storying that has found success in working with oral cultures where there are a great many barriers to the Gospel within that cultural setting is the method of **chronological Bible storying**. Asking God to open opportunities to story until He has helped to draw together a small group with whom you can use CBS is very

important. Once you have listeners who have agreed to meet with you for storying sessions or to listen to stories, you must think through the **essential truths of salvation** that your listeners must know to come to faith, the **barriers** to the Gospel within that worldview or culture as well as the **bridges** or **redemptive analogies** that might be used as an inroad into that culture. Choose your stories to address all of these issues. The theme or purpose of your group will help you to choose the stories you tell as well as how you tell it. How many stories you tell will depend on the amount of time you will have with your group and the commitment you have made to them or them to you. Using CBS, you are seeking to move your listeners story-by-story (rather than step by step) closer to a more biblical worldview and an understanding of the Gospel and biblical truth, keeping the group in a **win/win** situation up until the time when a decision or commitment is called for.

Every believer, whatever his/her talents or gifting, can use stories to build relationships with others and to draw them closer to the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit can teach spiritual truths to those listeners through the hearing and **dialoguing** about the stories and the impact the stories will have in their hearts long after their first hearing. Modeling our ministry after **Jesus**, the greatest teacher, will mean that we use stories that will challenge worldview and slowly re-form our worldview into one that is in harmony with the biblical worldview.

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## SO WHAT?

### Imagine:

Most of us who are cross-cultural witnesses have had the privilege of knowing this good news of Jesus most, if not all, of our lives. Just imagine for a second what it would be like if:

- You had never had the privilege of hearing the good news of Jesus for all your life up until this moment.
- You had been trained from the day you were born to be a good Muslim or a good Buddhist and your family was very proud of your status as a follower of your religion's truth.
- You are engaged/married to someone who would be disgraced if they knew you were even thinking of listening to a "foreign message" about a "foreign god," or to someone who would be taken back by their family if that were the case.
- This total stranger, with whom you have no relationship, no trust—who is totally foreign in every way (language, background, looks, culture) wanted to talk with you today at a coffee house
- Being curious you were polite and tried to listen, but after some brief formalities he/she began to talk to you about "something" related to needing to do "something"—but it was all so confusing and strange and he/she was very difficult to even follow, not to mention you didn't want to look too interested lest you give the wrong impression to your friends, who were eyeing you from across the room, wondering when you were going to tell this foreigner that you all needed to leave. Later in the evening, you thought—I wonder what he was really talking about, what he was trying to say?

What do you imagine are the chances that you would be a "seeker," one open to listen to new truths, new beliefs and make new decisions if the Gospel had come to you in much the same



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way it is served up to most of the oral communicators with already almost insurmountable barriers between them and the good news of Jesus Christ?

Would you be a believer today if you had been born in China, in Indonesia, in the Middle East, in Africa, in the 10/40 Window?

Just imagine what that would be like, and pray for the billions who need for us to take a fresh look at our approach to share and to format the message.

### Lifestyle:

- Where in the literacy continuum did you fall? Draw a diagram.
- If you are a highly literate learner/communicator, what do you need to do to prepare yourself to be a good communicator in a predominantly oral world?
- Were there new insights that the Lord gave you while you were studying this session? Promptings or suggestions that He made to you? Stop right now and talk to Him about how you can incorporate those promptings into your lifestyle as a result of this study.
- Are you aware of the people around you enough to draw conclusions about their culture and the orality issues they face? Are you willing to be adaptable to them, or do you expect them to adapt to you?

### Missional Formation:

- Think back through your formative years as a Christian as well as your cross-cultural missions training you are receiving. How are those similar to the formats that we have been discussing for oral communicators? How are they different?
- How might “church” look in a primarily oral culture? How might it be similar to your church today? What might be the differences?

### Language and Customs:

- What do orality issues say about the importance of learning a new language well?
- What will it take for you to successfully “story” through a translator?
- Today’s youth “speak a different language” than many churches today. In fact, George Barna’s studies show that many Americans think that Baptist churches are irrelevant in today’s culture. How might an understanding of how our message communicates or is heard help us to better meet the needs of today’s culture in America?
- How has our culture instilled into us the idea that stories are for children, especially as it pertains to church and religion? Do you see the storying method as “baby food” instead of the “meat”?

### Stretch: Life on Life

- How much of the Bible would you have if all your Bibles were confiscated tomorrow? How well do we really know the Book that is truth in our lives? Make a commitment that you will get to know this Book more intimately in the coming week. Begin in Genesis—read a passage, close your eyes, and move into the story.

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Re-tell it in your own words, then go back and check to see what you left out. Make it come alive AS IF you were there.

- Take the challenge of moving into the world of an oral learner. The Scripture will come alive as you do.
- How open are you to being vulnerable and telling “your” stories? Review your life story up until today and see how God’s story has intersected with it. Be prepared to tell some of your stories as prompted by the Holy Spirit.
- Do some further study on what is called “secondary oral learners/communicators” or “post-literates” (see vocabulary terms and listing in additional resources). The challenge of secondary oral learners is one that we will face worldwide, in both America and around the world, as the media, television, and internet have totally changed the way that many people receive new information. How will we adapt to meet this challenge? How will you?

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR *STORYING THE GOSPEL*

**There is a wealth of materials on the internet that is available for your further study:**

<https://orality.net/> is the official website of the International Orality Network. *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* is the booklet that resulted from the Lausanne Conference Issues Taskforce Group on Orality.

#### *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*

It is a concise, clear booklet that I would highly recommend you to download or order the print version of through the above website. See Chapter 4 on How to Avoid Syncretism, Chapter 5 on how Deaf Ministry and Oral Culture ministries are very similar, and Chapter 4 “When Literates Stop Reading” for a good discussion of secondary oral learners, a very relevant topic for those working with today’s youth or in our modern culture. The Resources section in that booklet (a few of which I have copied below) will list for you numerous materials (books, CDs, DVDs, websites, etc.) that range from very academic to very practical. It also will inform you of the partnerships and networks that have formed to advocate for orality considerations and to provide resources and training. Their annotated resource list and bibliography will give you more sources than you can ever read and a library both on and off-line to continue your lifetime study of orality and storying.

#### *A Bible Storying Model for Short Term Mission Volunteers and International Service Corps Personnel* by J. O. Terry (1999)

The Slack and Terry manuals emphasize studying the worldview of the people group and custom-selecting Bible stories in light of that knowledge. That is the best way to maximize the impact of the Bible stories. But some Christians were not going to be among the people long enough to learn the culture and belief system well before selecting the biblical stories that they would tell. They asked if someone could provide an introduction to CBS and suggest a generic set of stories that might be used in a variety of cultural situations. The “short-term manual” or “ISC manual” as it is variously called, was designed to meet this need. Its generic nature is simultaneously a strength and weakness.

## Chronological Bible Storying: A Methodology for Presenting the Gospel to Oral Communicators

(2001)

Jim Slack and J. O. Terry provided the majority of the materials in this collection. It is similar to the East Africa edition but contains some later revisions and additional materials. Grant Lovejoy added some additional content that he wanted for use in a U. S. seminary classroom.

### Sharing the Message through Storying (1996)

Marvin and LaNette Thompson pioneered the use of Chronological Bible Storying in West Africa. Through personal experience, they learned how to adapt CBS for the specifics of the cultural and religious practices of the groups among whom they worked.

- It is written as a fictional story about an African man who learns to do CBS. So it uses a story to teach storying—a very appropriate approach in a part of the world with a strong storytelling tradition.
- It is written in simple style and simple vocabulary because most of those for whom it was originally written would read it in a second or third language. It includes a glossary of unfamiliar terms.
- In addition to the “how to” chapters, it also includes 55 biblical stories and suggested discussion questions.

<http://www.strategicnetwork.org>. Look under topics, choose communication, subtopic oral communication.

### The God’s Story Project

The 80-minute presentation, *God’s Story: From Creation to Eternity* (<http://www.biblevideo.org/>), presents the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. This panorama of Scriptures highlighting God’s plan to rescue fallen mankind is very good for evangelism and discipling. It is available in video, VCD (video CD), audiocassette, audio CD. In total there are over 200 language translations of God’s Story either finished, in various stages of negotiation or in script translation. This does not include the over one thousand languages that have also been requested. “Our desire is to partner with national Christians, willing to share the workload, to produce a tool for them to use for evangelism and discipleship in their country.” TGSP features a village-size backpack containing a VCD player, God’s Story on Video CD (VCD), a solar panel and a battery power source. These items enable an evangelist to deliver the gospel via God’s Story to homes and gatherings in remote areas where there is no electricity! Optional PA with wireless mike projects sound clearly to 500 feet. Script, discussion guide, and radio script are also available.

### New Tribes Mission

EE-TAOW!; EE-TAOW! *The Next Chapter; and Now We See Clearly*. Videos/DVDs. New Tribes Mission.

Discover the success of chronological presentations of God’s Word for effective church planting, discipleship, and correction of syncretism.

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Ford, Leighton. *The Power of Story: Rediscovering the Oldest, Most Natural Way to Reach People for Christ*. Navpress Publishing Group (July 1994) or Kindle Edition has this book description:

You have a story to tell. This book will help you tell it. In this age of high-tech communication and endless formulas for successful evangelism, the most effective way to lead others to Christ is, surprisingly, also the oldest, purest, and most natural—the same way that Jesus, Paul, and all the early evangelists told the great story of God’s grace. Dr. Ford says. “Evangelism is the result of God’s story intersecting with our story. He is the evangelist—not us.”

Klem, Herbert V. *Oral Communication of the Scripture*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1982.

The author builds his case for oral communication of the Bible based upon the prevailing literacy situation and oral communication preferences of the African people, and of the situation in Palestine during Jesus’ day.

Miller, Ted, Ed. *The Story*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1986.

*The Story* is an edited version of the Living Bible which presents the Bible story as a continuing and integrated narrative in which individual stories are identified. This volume is of great help in learning how to present the Bible narratively, especially during the time of the kings and prophets and later in the Acts and epistles.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London and New York: Routledge, 1982.

This is a technical treatise covering the modern discovery of primary oral cultures, some psychodynamics of orality, and oral memory, the storyline, and characterization. It is more suitable for those interested in a deeper study of orality and its role in communication.

Sample, Tex. *Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994.

Sample offers a popularly-written description of traditional oral culture in the United States and its implications for congregational decision making and ethics. This book is very helpful for understanding the unique dynamics of oral-culture churches, whether rural or urban.

Steffen, Tom A. *Reconnecting God’s Story to Ministry: Cross-Cultural Storytelling at Home and Abroad*. La Habra, CA: Center for Organizational & Ministry Development, 1996.

Steffen draws on a wide array of sources to build a concise but strong case for using Bible storytelling in ministry. He includes a good bibliography of missions-related books and articles related to the topic.

Walsh, John. *The Art of Storytelling*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2003.

This book is a practical guide to storytelling written by a storyteller who overcame his

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stuttering and fear to tell stories professionally. Walsh includes fine learning activities to use alone or with others. He discusses the use of stories both inside church and out.

### Chronological Bibles (from CBD's website)

- *Reese's Chronological Bible*, KJV, Bethany, 1977 (one of the first)
- *The Seamless Gospels*, Charles Roller, Destiny Image, 2005, paperback (the events of the gospels in Chronological order, adapted from the KJV)
- *The Daily Bible in Chronological Order: 365 Day Readings (NIV) NIV Daily Bible, Compact Edition, Softcover*
- *La Biblia Cronologica, Chronological Bible*, Publisher ortavoz/2008/Hardcover

Smith, F. LaGard. *The NIV Narrated Bible*, Harvest House Publishers, 1999. Hardcover

*NIV One Year Chronological Bible*, Tyndale House, 1995. Paperback

N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Lausanne Issue Group Paper on Orality

<sup>2</sup>Lausanne Issue Group Paper on Orality

<sup>3</sup>Excerpt from Making Disciples of Oral Learners (<https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54.IG25.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup>Paraphrased from an unpublished paper by Jack Colgate entitled "Three Aspects of a Storying Strategy for Evangelism and Discipleship," IC 2001. ([http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/25\\_3.PDFs/colgate.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/25_3.PDFs/colgate.pdf))

<sup>5</sup>Excerpt from Making Disciples of Oral Learners (<https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54.IG25.pdf>)

<sup>6</sup>Definition from <https://orality.imb.org/strategies/?st=1>

<sup>7</sup><https://orality.imb.org/files/1/459/Chronological%20Bible%20Storying%20-%20SWBTS.pdf>

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## AUTHOR

**Erica Parks** and her husband, Kent, served 20 years in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, mainly as strategy coordinators among Unreached People Groups. Erika now serves on the global leadership team of Mission to Unreached Peoples. She is a graduate of Valdosta State University in Georgia and Southwestern Baptist theological seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas. Erica leads seminars to train workers to reach "oral-preference" learners by using Chronological Storying of Scripture.

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