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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Scalable Experiments: Bible Translation, Church Planting, Disciple Making in the Digitoral Era

Gravelle • Arlund • Moon • Taber • LeFever • Evans
Terry • Rye

ION

INTERNATIONAL ORALITY NETWORK

THE LOGO

... a movement ... reaching the unreached
... engaged in all domains--including Church, Business and Education
... continuous ... multi-generational ... Spirit-led

Our new logo expresses the multi-disciplined and multi-faceted nature of the orality network.

... BLACK represents the lack of light (*lack of the knowledge of our Triune God*) among the people groups.

... SILVER represents the message of bringing the Gospel through oral teaching.

... RED represents the blood of Jesus. It is the act of salvation represented by Christ's blood/ sacrifice.

... GOLDen globe symbolizes the utmost value of people everywhere. We recognize people groups—not political boundaries.

The choice of the side of the globe represented is in recognition of our emphasis on the 10/40 window where most oral preference learners live.

These elements represent the ethos of the International Orality Network.

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Cover Photo

The Levant Arab peoples include several clusters of Arabs: Jordanian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Arabic Jewish, Chaldean, and Syrian Arabs. Levant, meaning East of Italy, covers a geographical land from Eastern Mediterranean to Greater Syria. Levantine Arabic is considered a language with urban and rural dialect distinctives. Daily oral Levantine Arabic usage has witnessed the pre-printing era, the printing age, and now welcomes the digitoral era. Cover Photo courtesy of A. Steve Evans; also know as 'babasteve' on the popular photo sharing site flickr.com.

The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain
with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.

Isaiah 50:4 (ESV)

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be provisioned. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement are welcomed.

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Editor's Notes

Samuel E. Chiang

In the inaugural issue of the *Orality Journal*, we noted that the "Gutenberg Parentheses" is now here. We might recall that academicians have labeled the period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century the Gutenberg Parentheses which was anchored to the printing press. Thus, it would appear that there is a vacuum, an interregnum.

Filling the Vacuum

The business sector has been quick to fill in the interregnum and have in fact started to label this era as the rise of the "digitoral" era. Googling "digitoral" yields 6,870 search results in 0.44 seconds. Clearly, "digitoral" is nascent in its usage. But is it fitting? Could it be used to describe the next chronos period?

In a book published by Harvard Business Review Press[1], noted speaker, author, and businessman Jonah Sachs seized the opportunity to describe this compound word:

digit + oral = digitoral

Sachs suggests that in oral traditions, "ideas begin in the mind of a creator, but their path to their audience is far less prescriptive. Instead of being processed through an elite device that replicates and delivers them directly, orally transmitted ideas must replicate themselves, passing from the mind of one listener to the next."[2]

In fact, Sachs further asserts how ideas get transmitted is through "meme", which is commonly described as a "unit for an idea, behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture."[3] This unit of information might mutate and the core message will be forgotten—or it may survive even though it might have been tweaked or adjusted. The best unit of information survives because it is memorable, compelling, and adaptable.[4]

Unsurprisingly, Sachs came to the conclusion that the "memes" which survive are stories, and that each one of us hold a worldview which is a collection of stories.[5] Establishing the "oral" tradition of the second half

of the word "digitoral" is not difficult, but what about the first part of this compound word?

Digit, amongst various meanings and usage, can denote part of a limb (finger), a number (in mathematics or science), or a unit of measurement. Sachs captures the meaning of digit well in the context of social networks. In the swamp of indiscretion, the messages sent through social media may get adjusted, tossed, twisted, rated, commented, shared, and perpetuated. Like the oral era, "ideas today are never fixed; they're owned and modified by everyone. They move through networks at the will of their members and without that activity, they die."[6] (Sachs is not shy to suggest why the "broadcast" era is not working.)

Conversely, in the twenty-first century, with social octane through networks and fuelling through 24/7 technologies, each powerful story may go viral with digital platforms sustaining and immortalizing the story.

From an idea-transmission perspective, and how a story gets moved along, a powerful combination of the spoken and hearing (oral) catalyzed with the technology that tethers social networks together, and 'digitoral' was birthed.

Rise of the Digitoral Era

One doesn't need to go far to taste the digitoral era. Ample antidotal experiences affirm the emergence of this era. For example, some time ago Sunday School teachers in the Philippines initially complained about kids in classes who were being disrespectful by sending SMS messages during teaching sessions.

In fact, some teachers were so ill-at-ease about this that they thought the kids were bullying the teachers through SMS messaging. While some of their suspicions might be true, little did they realize that the kids were talking about what they were learning in the class. The kids were passing on stories they were learning and the stories were alive because they were passing them on. My reinforcement of this story is also digitoral.

Another example is a group of congregants in a church in the United States who were really enjoying the sermon preached by the pastor. However, one

of them opened his iPad to check on a small detail of the sermon during the worship service. To this man's surprise, the pastor had spoken the entire message from "Sermon Central." As good as the message was, the digitoral story that got passed along was not the sermon, but the pastor who had taken the entire sermon from someone else. My reinforcement of this story is also digitoral.

Or who can forget Mitt Romney, 2012 U.S. Presidential candidate saying, "They brought us binders full of women" or "Oppan Gangnam style," the signature line from PSY, the Korean megastar's hit song with over a billion views on the Internet. The oral-visual effects were self-reinforcing and passed along and sustained on multiple platforms. Both items quickly went viral, with the video story of PSY continuing unabated.

Finally, I shall not soon forget the retired Bishop William Tuimising from Kenya who was addressing participants at the launch of the East Africa Orality Network. As he took his place at the podium, he jovially asked everyone to take out their mobile phone and switch them to 'on', noting how many people actually have the Word of God in digital form on their cell phones. The bishop read from his cell phone and provided a sermon. Participants not only SMS messaged a portion of his message, but also spoke of his avante garde method of keeping the cellular device in the 'on' position when most pastors would insist otherwise.

In this issue, we examine powerful experiments which are working and are scalable. Gilles Gravelle leads off with the implications of social networks in the work of Bible translation in the digitoral era. Pam Arlund looks at church planting through orality. Jay Moon describes one of the disciplines of orality and the use of powerful rituals in discipleship. Clyde Taber follows with calling the Church to consider visual media in the context of storytelling. Marlene LeFever continues in her column of how an oralized curriculum is working in India, and Steve Evans joins us with a column to remind us to "Mind the Gap." We are pleased to have the veteran storyteller extraordinaire, J.O. Terry, describe ten mistakes people often make. Tara Rye concludes with an insightful book review.

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. Since the network is based on the voluntarism of individual and organizational

members, this journal is your journal. This journal is online in PDF and also in audio format. It is available bi-annually, with provisions for printed editions. We aim to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news.

As a preview, our next issue fully features "The Seven Disciplines of Orality" and is due out in September 2013; we will also introduce 'laboratory' section to journey along those who are experimenting and implementing orality. We welcome submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement for future journal publications. We also welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions! Send your feedback to: oralityjournal@gmail.com.

On the journey together,

Samuel E. Chiang
From Manila, the Philippines

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1 Jonah Sachs, Winning the Story Wars: Why Those Who Tell—and Live—the Best Stories Will Rule the Future. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2012.

2 Ibid, 17.

3 See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme. Accessed January 7, 2013.

4 Ibid, 17.

5 Ibid, 21.

6 Ibid, 19.

Literacy, Orality, and the Web

Gilles Gravelle

Gilles Gravelle is Director of Research and Innovation with The Seed Company. His research and writing focuses on translation, missiology, technology, and strategic planning with the goal of improving mission and ministry models in general and Bible translation practice in particular. His PhD is from Free University, Amsterdam. He bases out of his home in Seattle.

Communicating the gospel through oral means is nothing new. There is arguable evidence that Synoptic Gospel material arose out of non-literacy, "a movement from saying to composition."[1] The written gospel eventually took on greater authority. Consequently, the recitation of the written gospel became the dominant way to communicate scripture to the non-literate masses. Even so, it seems unlikely that telling and retelling of scripture using natural, oral style ceased altogether. Perhaps it was just viewed as lacking authority, because literate priests and pastors were the official readers and interpreters of the gospel for the non-literate.

Does the resurrection of oral strategies indicate a return to former times when the oral and the written text peacefully coexisted, and both were authoritative?

The beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Europe (1517) brought radical ideas to the masses. One idea was that all people should be able to read and interpret the Bible. That would require increased literacy. Space doesn't allow for a description of how Johannes Gutenberg's printing press innovations created a hunger for more Bibles printed in more languages. Literacy in the Western developing nations surged soon after, especially with the democratization of education. Eventually, Western mission expansion spread the gospel and the notion that reading would be the primary way new believers engaged scripture translations.

The modern orality movement is said to have begun in the 1970s.[2] Due to growing interest among several mission agencies over oral strategies, oral scripture production began to increase in the 1980s and into the 1990s. Does the resurrection of oral strategies

indicate a return to former times when the oral and the written text peacefully co-existed, and both were authoritative? Later on, this relationship would not remain peaceful as written communication began seeking dominance.[3] Coinciding with the rise of oral strategies, the traditional Western assumption that print scripture is the primary medium for communicating the gospel is on the decline, even among literacy-oriented organizations like SIL International.[4]

HOW TO MAKE AN ORAL PREFERENCE SOCIETY PREFER READING

During the past two hundred years of Western mission expansion, and especially during the late modern period (1960-1990s),[5] church planting and Bible translation organizations believed that in order to have more success they would need to teach more people to read. Calling these people "print communicators" and a "print culture," Rick Brown writes, "They depend on reading and writing for communication of important information."[6] Bible translation agencies, most notably SIL International, brought this inherited bias to the cultural contexts where they worked. However, those locations were comprised of mostly oral communicators, defined as "people in cultures with little to no literacy."[7]

The solution was to make as many people as possible literate in their newly-written languages so they could gain access to the print translations the agency missionaries were producing. There was little consideration for discovering how non-literate people prefer to communicate important things. The bias toward print media and the assumption that only a written scripture text was authoritative made that generally unnecessary.

There were other reasons for wanting to make an oral society into a literary society. A 1981 SIL policy stated:

> Our normal goal is to promote literateness as a value for the community in general, to the point that the practice of reading and writing will continue without further assistance from us.

The words are revealing: the goal was to create a new value, presumably to replace the old value of oral communication. The assumption seems to be that, by virtue of being non-literate, oral communication was not a cultural value. Instead, it was a human development need. The policy statement shows some cultural sensitivity to local preferences, but the goal remains the same:

> When it is unrealistic or sociologically inappropriate to expect this from the community as a whole, our basic minimum goal is to bring about sufficient literateness to sustain the ongoing use of the vernacular Scriptures by some part of the community, plus whatever literateness is possible among the community in general… (our goal for the widest possible potential readership for the Scriptures).[8] *(Policy writers' parenthesis)*

Other literacy workers confirm the goal of at least increasing the number of readers in the community receiving the new translation: "For printed Scriptures to be used, the people who speak that language must be able to read."[9] For a Western worker, a natural assumption at this time was that print medium had primacy, and without readers the scriptures could not be used to any great extent.

This bias towards a print medium was not limited to scripture use issues. It came with other natural Western preferences for the printed text. However, some literacy promoters were concerned about the "overemphasis on learning to read to be able to read the Bible."[10] They wanted to link literacy to development as a way to self-improvement.

As another author put it, "Literacy is…a bridgehead to new frontiers of knowledge."[11] Books on agriculture, health, hygiene, and forestry would create paths for learning. One author suggested that an objective of literacy is also "to encourage literate tribal adults to read habitually for pleasure…"[12]

Much was also written on how literacy could protect people from exploitation.

These reasons for literacy are good and noble things, but they reveal an assumption about how knowledge is acquired. Western people acquire knowledge generally through reading. Oral societies acquire knowledge through hearing people speak, sing, and even chant. As a young translator working with a Papuan people, I often wondered why they seemed to always be singing the scripture verses we translated rather than reading and studying the passages in the printed booklets. After all, there were many capable readers in the village! The young people even recorded the scripture songs on cassette tapes so they could listen to them as they walked through the village with their boom boxes on their shoulders.

...oral styles and literary styles are two different things.

The idea that the scriptures could be more effectively learned and passed on through oral methods never really entered the Western workers' minds. However, one literacy worker got a hint when she wrote:

> They find that Cheyennes learn better through the "passive literacy" approach, and retain the knowledge longer. The general method is to have the material read or sung aloud, either by someone in person or by using tape recordings.[13]

Because the presumed success of a Bible translation project depended on literacy, this rather idealistic (in hindsight) goal to make an oral society into a literary society would require much effort. There were, in fact, a number of challenges.

First, the linguists and literacy workers quickly discovered that oral styles and literary styles are two different things. The people I worked with didn't like reading transcriptions of their own oral stories. There was too much unnecessary information. However, removing the extraneous information created confusion over the logical connection between thoughts in the written text. It turns out that developing a literary style would take some time. This widespread experience created the idea for writers' workshops.

Second, workers needed to ensure there was enough reading material on broad topics to generate interest in reading. Shell books (pre-

written templates for translation) were developed as an easy way to produce community development titles. Oral histories were also transcribed and put into print. Workers set up village libraries so people could have easier access to books. However, one of the biggest barriers to literacy often cited was the lack of money to produce enough copies.

Third, there was competition with the more dominant local trade language or national language. An assumption on the part of many linguists and literacy workers was that new readers and existing readers would give preference to their newly-written language because, after all, it was their language. In most cases, the people were indeed thrilled that their language now had an alphabet.

However, sociologist Anthony Pym states, "Stronger nationalization pressures from the lingua franca… cause a need to access lingua franca texts."[14] Even when primary oral communicators develop a literary language, there are still compelling reasons for them to "seek texts in other languages." More people were becoming literate in those languages. That meant more of the people would access the scriptures in a language they didn't understand nearly as well as their own mother tongue.

Thus, strong nationalization pressures threatened the whole Bible translation enterprise in places. Many believed then (and still do) that more and better literacy work could at least compete for readers in the local language. Therefore, efforts were made to convince governments to conduct primary school education, at least grades one through four, in the local language rather than the national language. It would help preserve the local language, encourage reading in that language, and would improve the students' ability to learn the national language.

After years of concentrated effort by many dedicated people to turn an oral society into a literary society, is there any evidence that a primary oral society now values reading over telling and hearing? Maybe the hindrances to this goal, mentioned earlier, have prevented it from happening. But is it a lack of readers and literacy materials that is the problem? Or was this goal a well-intentioned, but misguided notion?

For the remainder of this article, I will focus on the ultimate goal of literacy in Bible translation projects—that is, the translated

text being engaged and distributed in ways these social experimenters have always desired.

WHAT SCRIPTURE COMMUNICATION MEDIUM SHOULD COME FIRST?

Before going any further, let me say that suggesting a primarily oral society should remain in their primary oral communication situation is soft racism. People who promote this don't realize that such a comment reveals racial bias. Some Africans interpret Western proponents of orality as "white people implying that Africans can be kept in a state of illiteracy because this is their natural and preferred state."[15] The goal of this article is to examine natural scripture distribution; it is about diffusion through multiple paths.

It is difficult for people from a print culture to believe people from an oral culture can learn and recall significant amounts of information with accuracy by just hearing it.

If we now understand the importance of oral scripture distribution, why do so many mission agencies still assume that printed scripture should precede oral scripture? If they are supportive of non-print media in general, why do they still view those as secondary? There are a number of reasons.

First, it may be that print learners simply cannot conceive of how an oral medium can effectively and accurately transmit the scripture text. It is difficult for people from a print culture to believe people from an oral culture can learn and recall significant amounts of information with accuracy by just hearing it. This is one reason why literacy strategists believe reading is the only legitimate method for accessing scripture. Anything less would produce inconsistencies and inaccuracies because of memory lapses.

Literacy workers' concern about accuracy may be well-founded if they assume verbatim retelling of a written text. However, this does not mean oral cultures are incapable of recalling important themes and concepts by hearing and repetition. Karl Franklin illustrates this tension in saying, "There are, undoubtedly, many variations of what someone means by an "oral translation." For example, to some it means that the oral rendition must

follow in detail a prior, written translation. To others, it means that native speakers have heard the stories a number of times and can spontaneously and without notes retell them."[16]

Addressing a print learner's assumption about an oral learner's memory retention, Walter Ong explains, "Thought and expression in oral cultures is often highly organized but calls for organization of a sort unfamiliar to and often uncongenial to the literate mind."[17] This does not suggest a person from an oral culture can listen to the Book of Genesis on a digital player one time and then remember the entire text. It takes repeated listening, just like a print learner goes back to the printed text to recall information. Brown explains:

> A person from a print orientation might object, saying that the people need a book to look things up in, but…oral communicators don't look things up; they retrieve them from their memory. The print-oriented person is amazed that an oral communicator can happily listen to a tape repeatedly, day after day, and even more amazed at how quickly he or she memorizes it. In oral cultures people easily memorize large portions of Scripture.[18]

Repeated hearing and retelling is key in oral cultures. During the process of hearing, the oral learner recalls images from memory that help him or her to describe settings, situations, and actions important to the text. Apparently, print readers are not as good at making mental pictures of what they read. As Ong puts it, print readers are visually-oriented to the printed words, sounding them out in their mind as they read.[19]

Second, Western mission agencies engage with the printed scripture differently. Being able to do an inductive Bible study with colorful

highlighters can't be done with an oral text. Word studies cannot be conducted either, if there are no printed texts to cross-reference. And how does one build a concordance of the Bible from an oral text anyway? These methods all assume Bible study can only be done one way. Yet oral cultures have applied inductive learning methods in other ways. I can't comment on individual word studies, but studying the key concepts behind the key theological words does not seem to require a printed text.

If the goal of print-oriented literacy is primarily about seeing as many people as possible engaging with the translated scripture text, then oral communication—which comes in a variety of forms—holds the key. This does not mean literacy training for the purpose of reading should not be promoted at all. Rather, a variety of literacies that already exist within the oral culture apart from the Western pro-literate bias need to be included.[20]

ORAL SCRIPTURE DISTRIBUTION

Today, more people, including SIL academic leaders, recognize that people in primary oral societies more typically have a repertoire of languages and a range of literacies.[21] Many now recognize that things such as oral communication and cultural knowledge are forms of literacy. Each form carries a unique role in the community.

For example, reading and writing literacy could be in the national language, whereas religious literacy may be in the local language distributed through oral means. The question is, which literacy forms help a scripture text to become more localized (i.e., the community views it as their text)? Do they see the distinct marks of foreign importation and adaptation, commonly associated with print scripture?[22] Or do they view the text as having the look, feel, and sound of something naturally at home in their culture?

Anthony Pym writes, "The goal of localization is to get a maximum amount of information to a maximum amount of people." To achieve this, he states that constraints on the movement of texts need to be removed.[23] This thought suggests that communicating scripture through only one medium, such as print, impedes the movement of the text within its location. Sustained movement is the very thing that literacy training was meant to achieve, and as Pym says, it depends greatly on distribution,

hence literacy workers' desire to create more readers.

In this case, distribution does not mean scripture book sales. It means the scripture text is moving in and through the local culture and being assimilated in natural ways. In fact, Pym asserts that the notion of "localization" is replacing "translation" precisely in order to involve more language, cultural knowledge, and intuitive knowledge.

Who then, in primary oral cultures, are the scripture distributors, if they are not the sales people, readers, translators, or literacy workers? The answer is they are the oral Bible storytellers, the people who act out meaning through drama, and the poets. For the Meyah people of New Guinea, they are the songwriters who take their lyrics straight from the printed scriptures. The songs are naturally distributed by community members as they sing them in the gardens, at church gatherings, during celebrations, and in the dead of night when they are afraid. However, the Meyah people were doing this long before they had a printed Bible. The source text of their early scripture songs was missionary oral teaching. They were assimilating and distributing the gospel text this way one hundred years before they even had a way to write their language.

THE WEB AS A VEHICLE FOR LITERACY AND ORALITY

I mentioned earlier how some literacy workers wanted the oral learners they served to develop a cultural value of reading for learning, self-improvement, and even enjoyment. This goal can be quite challenging when oral learners don't see the practical value of reading in their own language. More typically, they realize the importance of literacy in the national language for economic reasons or due to nationalization pressures. Now the process of globalization is pressuring oral societies to read. But it is more likely also providing additional ways to utilize their oral learning and communication skills.

There are few regions the Internet has not penetrated. In 2010, the global Internet-connected population exceeded two billion people, and mobile phone accounts already number over five billion. Easy access to the web and social media tools is creating a new dynamic for multi-media learning and communicating.

New media professor Clay Shirky writes: "The social uses of our new media tools have been a big surprise, in part because the possibility of these uses wasn't implicit in the tools themselves." Perhaps a surprise to Bible translators, church planters, and literacy workers is how the web and new media tools are providing ways for primary oral cultures to utilize their repertoire of languages and literacies.

For example, a BBC journalist reported how Zambian farmers were delighting over their new writing system. Their Shanjo language had never been written, and now it was like a miracle because they could begin to read in their own language. The journalist also casually mentioned at the end of the article why some of the teenagers were now motivated to read in their own Shanjo language, rather than the regional language—they commented that reading in Shanjo could improve their oral skills for "cutting songs and videos in Shanjo."[24]

The Shanjo example above and the following sections are just some examples of how people in primary oral cultures are using Web and social media tools in a way that blends oral, visual, audio and print media in single communications.

DIGITAL TOOLS TO SAVE LANGUAGE

Another BBC report highlighted how "small languages are using social media, YouTube, text messaging and various technologies to expand their presence." With the help of a linguist, the speakers of these small languages have produced online "talking" dictionaries.

DESERT NOMADS SEEK CELL PHONE TOWERS

Another writer discussed how the web and social media has influenced where a group of nomads chose to set up camp. In the past, a source of water was the primary factor. Now,

it is where they can find mobile phone coverage. Besides staying connected with their nomad friends, they use their phones to show videos of their exploits as an enhancement to their storytelling. They also share audio and visual media with one another. Smart phone sales rose 47% between 2010-2011. The rapid proliferation of 4G towers and smart phone technology will create more robust multi-media interaction for cultures that are primary oral.[25]

INDIAN WEB-BASED ORAL AND WRITTEN TRANSLATION

In India, a remote community began experimenting with Bible translation as a web-based communal process. It seems literacy is a prerequisite for anyone doing translation this way. In the past, translation work was more exclusive, typically done by a small group of literate people.

With this community, both literate and non-literate people orally processed and, you could say, orally translated the text before converting it to typeface on the website. Community members working at another web hub read the web-based text out loud for the literate and non-literate people in their group to orally process. They improved the web-based text by applying the same process the first group used. Other community members worked directly with the written text over the web, offering improvements on spelling, choice of words, and sentence structure. This is a situation where the scripture text (i.e., meaning) was moving back and forth between oral and print media in apparently natural ways.

PRINT, AUDIO, AND VISUAL SCRIPTURE FOR EVERYONE

Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH) is known for their work in producing audio versions of the Bible in various languages. They are motivated by the fact that fifty percent of the world's population is non-literate. To date, they have provided audio scriptures to 2.7 million people in over 627 languages. FCBH offers free access to audio Bibles through streaming and podcasts, while the Bible.is app for iPhone, iPad, and Android devices now offers access to audio text in more than 650 languages.

Web-based social media tools are bringing the written and oral text together in ways not seen since the development of the Greek alphabet, when the written text co-existed with the oral text for a time.

FCBH realizes the significance of the times. This is the first time in history when nearly anyone can access the printed, oral, and visual scriptures through the touch of a web app icon. In partnership with Bible translation and film agencies, their goal is to see that every language has access to the Bible in all three mediums via Facebook, Smart TV, SMS, computer terminals, and smartphones. Access and interaction, however, is oral, visual, and print at the same time. This is another example of the blending of multiple communication mediums. Surely, the next step is people interacting with these media forms and with one another over the same sites that provide it all.[26]

CONCLUSION

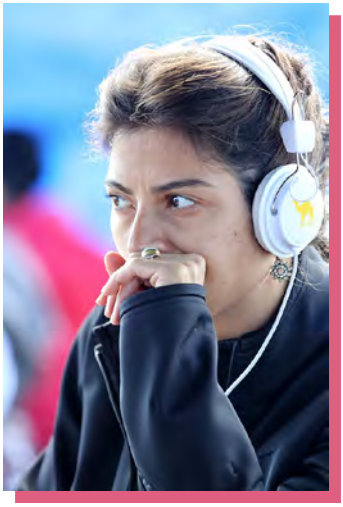
Web-based social media tools are bringing the written and oral text together in ways not seen since the development of the Greek alphabet, when the written text co-existed with the oral text for a time. How is the co-existence of oral and print media localizing the scripture text in natural ways?

During the past several decades, the primary goal of many literacy workers in Bible translation projects was to see as many people as possible engaging the printed scripture text in their mother tongue. Scripture access and distribution was of high importance in achieving the goal. Looking back, it seems apparent that focusing primarily on print distribution has not achieved that goal. Maybe this is simply because the people they served did not want

to give up their cultural preference for learning and communicating important things through oral means.

Now that oral Bible storytelling, audio recording, and film dubbing are becoming more acceptable ways to communicate the scripture text, distribution of the text is occurring more naturally. It is as if all of the cultural literacies are being tapped to achieve what the literacy workers have wanted from the beginning. Oral learners are finding new ways to communicate important things through media they value most. They don't need to give up those values in order to talk on another culture's values. Social media may be Western technology, but the word "social" is key. The tools enable people to connect with one another in new ways, and this is how texts are being localized.

Social media may be Western technology, but the word "social" is key.



Still, it's easy to imagine the web and social media tools generating greater interest among oral learners to develop reading and writing skills, considering how they now see the value of tapping all media methods for communicating and preserving important things. As Shirky says, "When you aggregate a lot of something, it behaves in new ways, and our new communications tools are aggregating our individual ability to create and share at unprecedented levels of more."[27] The web is providing people with a way to aggregate all sorts of cultural literacies in order to communicate the scripture text to all people, languages, nations, and media preferences.

1 Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*. Indiana University Press, 1983, 3.

2 See History of ION. oralbible.com/about/history.

3 See Gilles Gravelle, "What Happened to Oral Learning? Blame Plato." Accessed January 18, 2013 from conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/11891

4 See Strategy Formulation Tool. SIL International, Dallas.

5 Some might refer to this period as the "postmodern" period. Definitions depend on the academic field using terms. I'm only referring to the end of the Enlightenment period of the past roughly two hundred years.

6 Rick Brown, "Communicating God's Message in Oral Cultures." *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21:3 (2004): 26.

7 Ibid, 26.

8 David Bendor-Samuel, "A Review of SIL Literacy Policy." *Notes on Literacy 35, Summer Institute of Linguistics*, 1981,22-27.

9 John C. Cairns, "The Evaluation of Literacy Projects." *Notes on Literacy Special Issue 1, Summer Institute of Linguistics*, 1986, 3311.

10 John L. Duerksen, et. al., "The Development, Production, and Distribution of Reading Materials." *Notes on Literacy 59*. Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1989, 3-16.

11 Ibid.

12 Uwe Gustafsson, *"Can Literacy Lead to Development? A Case Study in Literacy, Adult Education, and Economic Development in India."* Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of Texas at Arlington, 1991.

13 Hazel Shore, "Passive Literacy." *Notes on Literacy 58*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1989, 41-42.

14 Anthony Pym, *The Moving Text: Localization, Translation, and Distribution*. John Benjamins, 2005,45.

15 Personal conversation with Ed Lauber, Wycliffe Global Alliance, Ghana.

16 Karl J. Franklin, *Why Oral Translations Are Better than Written Translations (For Some People)*. Unpublished manuscript, 2011.

17 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*. Metheun & Co., 1982. 124.

18 James B. Slack as quoted in Brown, 2004.

19 Ong, 1982, 119.

20 Musa Dube, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Botswana, confirms this notion of multiple literacies that exist in oral cultures. Personal conversation at The Nida School of Translation Studies. May 28, 2012. Misano Addriatico, Italy.

21 Personal conversation with Paul Lewis, SIL International Socio-linguistics Coordinator. SIL's Strategy Formulation Tool addresses this notion in language development.

22 For example, The Living Bible in Indonesian is a close mirror of its American English Language source version. Bible Society translations are often close adaptations of their dominant language version. Pym states that this resists localization.

[23] Pym, 1989,111-112.

[24] See www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15562729. Accessed January 18, 2013.

[25] Keith Williams and Leith Gray, "The Little Phone that Could: Mobile-Empowered Ministry." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27:3 (2010): 139.

[26] Personal conversation with Morgan Jackson, International Director of FCBH. Accessed January 18, 2013 from www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/word-god-627-languages-and-counting.

[27] Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus; Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*. The Penguin Press, 2007. Kindle Edition

Church Planting Movements among Oral Learners

Pam Arlund

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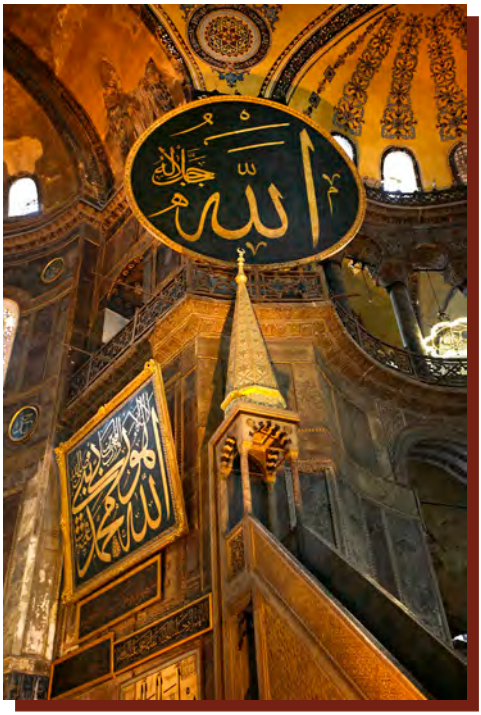
Church-planting movements are one of the major ways God is moving today. In fact, these movements are the only method of church reproduction that seem to move faster than population growth in our twenty-first-century world where everything is "mega"—mega cities, mega populations, mega economies. There appear to be perhaps as many as twenty-five church-planting movements in the Arabic-speaking world today alone.[1]



For such movements to take place, several vital elements seem necessary. Although it is true that these movements are ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit, that there are several ways church planters can either help or hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in how we go about our work of co-missioning with the Father.

One of the ways church-planting movements can be either helped or hindered is in how we approach oral learners. If church planters insist that those who are naturally oral learners become

print learners to be good followers of Jesus, then church-planting movements (and therefore the conviction of the Holy Spirit) will be inhibited. This article details how church-planting movements and orality work hand in hand.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ORAL LEARNERS

It has been estimated that two-thirds of the world are oral learners.[2] This does not mean that two-thirds of the world cannot read. Although it is true that some oral learners cannot read, the main way oral learners are identified is through preference—not through ability. For example, many people in the West are capable of reading, but do not prefer to learn through reading. Instead, they prefer to learn through oral formats, primarily through video and movie in the industrialized West.

Ask any group of Europeans or North Americans if they would rather read the book or watch the movie and their preference becomes obvious almost instantly. The vast majority of westerners are oral learners, but they are capable of reading. Therefore, principles of orality are not just things that apply "over there," but are extremely relevant to pastors and others promoting discipleship in developed contexts as well.

In fact, it could very well be that a realization of the needs and preferences of oral learners in Western contexts could be critical to a revival of the Western Church. The National Adult Literacy Survey conducted in the United States in 1992 determined that "90 million adults, almost all of whom can read, have difficulty using the written word to accomplish everyday tasks with consistency and accuracy."[3] Add to this those who are able to accomplish everyday literacy tasks but do not prefer to read and write and the number of oral learners in the United States could soar as high as 80%.[4]

This has profound implications for our traditional methods of discipleship in the West, which are based on reading. In fact, the first thing that usually happens when westerners become believers is that they are given one or more books to read.

On the other hand, in the Developing World, many oral learners are not able to read or may read at only very low levels. In the past, church planters coming primarily from the industrialized West and trained primarily through institutions of higher learning assumed that everyone in the world wanted to learn to read and write.

However, this assumption has not turned out to be true. Not everyone has the desire to read and write. Interestingly enough, this becomes almost irrelevant in the early stages of a church-planting movement because stopping to create a literacy program would certainly take too long and be too slow to help spark a church-planting movement. This is not to say that there is no place for churches to run literacy programs, but the early stages of a church-planting movement is not the ideal time for reasons that will be outlined below.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENTS

For churches to reproduce rapidly, certain key elements must be in place. This is not to say that planting churches is formulaic. Indeed, it may be possible to have all the right elements in place but not have the spark of the Holy Spirit and not see a church-planting movement. On the other hand, it is possible to have that Holy Spirit spark but to put inhibitors in place, thereby limiting through poor principles the rapid move of the Holy Spirit, or at least initially slowing that move of the Holy Spirit.

Researchers have identified a list of ten common characteristics of church-planting movements:

1. **Extraordinary prayer** by the missionaries, for the new believers, by the new believers
2. **Abundant evangelism** that includes over-sowing and a buzz in the air about Jesus
3. **Intentional planting of reproducing churches**
4. **The authority of God's word,** which demonstrates that the answer to almost every question is, "What does God's word say?"
5. **Local leadership**
6. **Lay leadership**
7. **House churches**
8. **Churches planting churches**
9. **Rapid reproduction**
10. **Healthy churches** that worship, love each other, love the lost, and love the word of God[5]

Several of these factors have direct implications for oral learners, orality, and storying.

First, abundant evangelism can only take place if young believers feel empowered to share Jesus immediately after beginning to follow him. If young believers are made to feel that they are inadequate to share Jesus for any reason whatsoever, they will hold

off and develop a fear of mistakenly sharing Jesus. Ultimately, even if they are told to wait for a short period of time to go through a small introductory Bible study before being allowed to share Jesus, this inhibits abundant evangelism. To tell young believers that they must first learn to read and write before being allowed to share Jesus would slow down that process so much that abundant evangelism would simply not be possible.

...it bears remembering that the written word of God was first the oral word of God.

Second, local leadership and lay leadership are critical to church-planting movements. If leadership is only turned over to those with high literacy levels or to those who are good at reading and writing at high levels, then it is likely that the group outsider will remain in leadership for too long. The young churches will begin to believe that reading is necessary to leadership and the entire movement will slow down.

Since lay leadership is also critical to a church-planting movement, many of these early leaders will work at other jobs. Very few pastors and elders will work full time for the church. This means they will have very little time to devote to a literacy program. It also means that if a highly-detailed discipleship and leadership training program is introduced, many of these young leaders will lose heart and give up. The requirements will be more than they can meet.

Third, none of this need for rapidity is in conflict with the absolute need for these church-planting movements to understand the written word of God. However, it bears remembering that the written word of God was first the oral word of God. Even people who cannot read the word can listen to it and can receive the stories of the Bible through oral formats.

Many languages have oral Bibles in recorded formats that are available. Where these are not available, someone can teach the Bible in ways that oral learners can remember and then pass on to others. Even people who could potentially read the written word of God may not prefer to receive it in that way. For the word of God to advance rapidly, we must cooperate with people's natural learning styles. This might mean using drama, stories, video, artwork, and songs even when the written word is available, but not preferred.

Fourth, church-planting movements are vulnerable in the early stages. One of the main reasons they are undermined is because the person sparking them uses a means or technology not available or easily accessible to the locals. For example, a westerner opens his or her laptop every time he or she studies the Bible. The locals quickly understand that if they do not have a laptop, then they cannot lead others to Jesus.

The same problem can come with literacy when print learners begin to spark church-planting movements. Oral learners will see a model of sharing and following Jesus that requires high levels of literacy. When they realize that they are not good readers, don't read much, or don't like to read, they recognize that they are not qualified to lead others to Jesus or to lead churches. When this signal is sent, two-thirds of the world becomes ineligible for leadership and church-planting movements become impossible to spark.

..."don't like to read"...when this is the signal sent, then two thirds of the world becomes ineligible for leadership and church planting movements become impossible to spark.

Last, the early stages of a church-planting movement are particularly vulnerable to anything slow. Even the simplest of literacy programs will take months or years to get off the ground. Likewise, complicated Bible classes or seminary classes will work contrary to this principle of rapid multiplication.

This does not mean that literacy programs, Bible colleges, or seminaries are off the table for church-planting movements, but it does mean that they will be contrary to what is needed at the initial stages. They are also likely to kill a movement if introduced too early.

TRANSMITTING THE WORD OF GOD ORALLY: CASE STUDIES

How can the word of God be transmitted quickly from oral learner to oral learner while still preserving the integrity of the word? How can pastors and other leaders become teachers without learning to read and write?

Case study #1: Central Asia

The first case study comes from a persecuted church area in Central Asia, so some of their details have been suppressed. The people are a

minority in the country in which they live. They speak a Persian language with no writing system and come from a folk Muslim worldview. When they first became actively engaged with the gospel nearly twenty years ago, there were no known believers among them.

The church planters in the area knew that they had to adopt an oral approach to sharing Jesus stories because there was no writing system for the language and many people could not read or write in any language. However, it soon became clear that even those who *could* read and write *did not prefer* to do so. All seemed to prefer to hear Jesus stories in their own mother tongue (as opposed to the trade or national language), which meant that the oral means of transmission was the only possible method.

This particular people group had almost no Bible translation at that time, so a small number of Bible stories were prepared in an oral format and distributed in extremely limited quantities. The church planters adopted a stance of telling Jesus stories whenever they could and encouraging the locals to do the same. Due to the location of this people group, access was difficult and only possible during certain times of the year due to extreme weather. Thus, transmission of the gospel had to be fast and accurate.

This particular people group had heard of Jesus in the context of Islam, so it was easy to have conversations about Jesus. Church planters simply said, "Tell me stories about Jesus or some of your other prophets." The idea behind this was to learn as much as the locals knew about their prophets and therefore where their hearts were. Most locals knew very few stories about any of the prophets. In fact, the stories locals often knew about Jesus were not biblical; however, the church planters simply listened, nodded, and thanked them for the stories.

The church planters were also interested in and collected local folk stories and proverbs. This was simply part of the process of discovering the local culture and values. The church planters wrote down and recorded the stories and soon gained reputations as people who loved stories. The process of recording local stories revealed many important aspects of the culture that were helpful in sharing the gospel.

For example, the local culture already had a concept of "blood brothers" and how exchanging blood can seal a relationship. This concept was used as a bridge to the gospel. The stories revealed a real and deep belief in witches and witchcraft and opened conversation to spiritual forces in the area. The stories revealed that there was going to be an "end of time," which meant that part of their worldview already coincided with the biblical worldview that time will end.

Proverbs were deeply held and highly regarded, so the church planters began to focus on translating the Book of Proverbs. This appealed to the culture and provided a way to talk about David, a prophet in whom the locals already believed. As the church planters collected stories, they eagerly began to share similar biblical stories. When stories were from the shared prophets, they stressed that these were real historical accounts, different from the other stories.

Sometimes, the church planters only met a person one time and knew that they were not likely to get another chance to meet the locals, so they immediately asked the locals to tell them stories about the prophets. They explained that the two cultures held these stories in common, since Muslims already hold the Gospels and prophets in high regard. Typically, the locals only took a minute or two tell their stories.

The church planters would then ask, "I know a lot of stories about Jesus. Would you like to hear some?" The locals always agreed; sometimes the church planters used pictures to illustrate the stories. The church planters occasionally read the stories from notes, but sometimes told them from memory.

After sharing a few stories, usually including the creation account, locals were invited to follow Jesus based on what they knew of him. Most agreed Jesus was worthy to be followed and prayed a brief prayer. This was not considered a prayer of

salvation, but rather a step toward Jesus. For many, it did end up being their prayer of salvation, but this was judged later based on the fruit of the spirit in their lives.

After the prayer, the church planters asked, "Which of the stories I told you today did you like the best?" The local would identify one of the stories and the church planters would acknowledge what a great story it was and tell it again. Often, at this point, they would ask some of the children to help act out the story as they told it. This was fun for both the kids and the adults.

The church planters would then ask if any of the locals thought they could tell the story. If no one could, the group would practice until everyone was able to tell the story. Finally, the church planters would ask, "Who do you know needs to hear this story? Jesus people tell Jesus stories. That's what Jesus people do." They would help the locals to identify several people who needed to hear the story about Jesus. They would then pray and ask God for opportunities to share the story.

Sometimes, the church planters never saw the person again. Often, however, there was lots of follow up. In every case where follow up occurred, people told Jesus stories to the rest of their villages. In this way, the gospel spread among this people group through a simple method of telling and practicing stories. To the best of our knowledge, there are now forty churches among this small people group, and the churches have reached multiple generations. There are several key principles to be noticed in this case study:

1. The church planters were interested in stories of all types and explained from the beginning that they wanted to hear all stories. They felt this opened people's hearts and established the right tone in the relationship from the beginning. It also helped them bond with the locals and learn their language.
2. Biblical stories were highlighted as being special and different from other stories.
3. Locals were invited to tell Jesus stories from the beginning and were not corrected when they told non-biblical Jesus stories.
4. People practiced telling the stories, and pictures and drama were used in story-telling.
5. When possible, stories were memorized rather than read to emphasize that it wasn't about reading, but about the story itself.

6. Locals practiced telling stories and were told that this was a normal part of the Jesus life.
7. Locals were released to tell Jesus stories immediately after beginning to follow Jesus.

There are several other points worth mentioning.

First, the church planters made use of gospel portions in the trade language. Those who could read would usually read the stories and then translate them "on the fly" into their own mother tongue. Usually, the very formal version of the Gospels was considered intimidating, but most people readily embraced the comic book version of the Bible.

Second, the church planters would translate the stories into the mother tongue for those who couldn't read the trade language, so literacy was used at some level in the movement. However, most people who were following Jesus were listening to the stories as a bridge person translated them from the trade language. Since there was a minimum literacy level and the Bible was available, this was deemed most expedient to allowing a rapid spread of the gospel. Waiting for a complete preparation of the Bible into their mother tongue would have violated the principle of speed and slowed down the movement. Sometimes in church-planting movements church planters cannot aim for "purity of philosophy," but must simply do the most expedient and practical thing possible.[6]

This "wedding" of literate and oral approaches worked well for this people. It allowed those who didn't read to be immediately empowered and it elevated the mother tongue. On the other hand, introducing the written Bible portions on the trade language meant people didn't have to rely on outsiders to gain access to new Bible stories. The group of outsiders who were the church planters knew that their

access would be limited and that providing new stories would not be practical.

Case study #2: Southeast Asia

The second case study also comes from a persecuted church area. These people come from a Buddhist background and number around three million people. Their church-planting movement was catalyzed by several cross-cultural church planters who decided to train the locals to plant churches rather than to plant churches themselves. Orality was a major part of their strategy. In the past nine years, 365 new churches have been planted among them.[7]

As a part of the church-planting training offered in this movement, local believers were taught Bible stories and asked to practice the stories until they were able to tell them well. They were given pictures to go with the stories since pictures are a normal part of the culture. The pictures were initially brought from another country and then adapted with the help of a local artist.

While testing the usefulness of the pictures, the church planters discovered that if Jesus had a beard, then the locals thought Jesus was a Muslim. This was because the only people in their context with beards were Muslims. So new pictures were drawn of a beardless Jesus and these have proven very popular. These pictures have been key to the Bible storying strategy.

When preparing the stories, the church planters were taught to use terms that were appropriate to the worldview of their Buddhist audience. This was accomplished as the foreign church-planting coaches encouraged the locals to indigenize local Buddhist worship forms to the worship of Jesus. This led to a

change in how some terms had traditionally been used. For example, older versions of Bible stories in the area had used the local word for "sky" to refer to "heaven". However, the local church planters felt that "sky" was not a place to which people wanted to go. Instead, they chose to use the term "Golden City of Nirvana," because this was a place of no more sin and suffering in the Buddhist worldview.

Orality and storying training were not taught separately, but were always an integral part of the training. Church-planting training also included instruction in obedience-based discipleship, instruction on how to carry out the nine basic commands of Jesus, and an introduction into how to share the story of Buddhism first before sharing the story of Jesus. These trainings were normally held in Buddhist monasteries.

This integration of church planting and storying can be seen in the basic structure of how the first churches multiplied.

When asked to describe her training process, $(TT)_{(1)}$ explained it this way: At 11 a.m. on Sunday we strike the gyizee three times as the lawyer showed me and pray to Abbot Jesus. My 9-year-old daughter tells a Bible story using the pictures and then I ask the questions to help seekers and new believers find the truths from the stories. Then, I tell the house church members and seekers to repeat this same story and pattern of worship in their homes. So at 2 p.m. that same day most of these members meet in their own homes. There are fourteen churches now.[8]

The 9-year-old Bible storyteller is the best preacher out of fifty house churches in that area. The gyizee is a bell struck in the Buddhist cultural context to initiate worship. In the case of the followers of Jesus, they struck the bell three times for each of the members of the Trinity. Buddhists not following Jesus also strike the bell three times, but for different reasons.

During the process of indigenization, the local church planters felt this method of worship was most appropriate for their local context. In addition, rabbis are foreign to their context, but an abbot is well understood, so Jesus is referred to as an "abbot". This is the local cultural equivalent of a rabbi, as abbots are religious teachers and leaders in the local context. The lawyer refers to the person who led her to Jesus and trained her in church planting.

In this context, the church planters felt it was important to not only tell the good news of Jesus, but to first tell the bad news of Buddhism. Young believers were taught to talk about how one achieves freedom according to Buddhism before telling stories about Jesus. This was because the locals were familiar with Buddhism, but didn't really understand the full implications of the path of salvation in Buddhism. When the story was told and pointed out that Buddhism demanded perfection, most people realized that they would never be able to achieve perfection.

Realizing their need for a better way, the church planters then told the story of Jesus. As in the earlier case study, church planters here also started with stories that were not Jesus stories but instead were familiar to the locals.

There are several key principles to be noticed in this case study:

1. The process of adapting the language of the Jesus stories to the local culture was led by locals. They decided what words needed to be changed or adapted.
2. Orality was simply a part of a church-planting strategy, not a separate component.
3. Local stories were studied, understood, and adapted to new purposes.
4. Storytellers began with stories the locals already knew and then moved to new stories.

5. Pictures were an important part of telling stories, but they had to be adapted to the local context. Pictures were also tested for intelligibility and cultural appropriateness.
6. During the church meeting, all believers practiced telling Jesus stories and had an expectation that they would share the stories with others. They immediately went and shared the stories that same afternoon.
7. Lay people, women, and children were included in the process and even empowered to become some of the best preachers in the area.

...orality was not a separate strategy or component but simply a part of an overall church planting strategy.

CONCLUSION

In each case study, orality was not a separate strategy; it was simply a part of an overall church-planting strategy which involved learning local stories, indigenizing the gospel, training locals to lead churches, and storying. Spreading the gospel orally was not a particular philosophy, but a pragmatic answer to a pragmatic question: *How can the most number of people hear about Jesus in the shortest amount of time?*

Church-planting movements are the fastest-growing expression

of Jesus on the planet today. They seem to give more people a greater chance to hear the gospel, respond to it, and get plugged into a fellowship than any other current vehicle. For these movements to continue to expand rapidly, they must be led by lay leaders who can create a general buzz in the air about Jesus.

Orality is simply a way for new disciples to effectively engage with Jesus and his stories and then to effectively engage others with Jesus and his stories.

They must also have a love for God's word. If the only way to know and love God's word is to learn to read and write well, then much of the world will not be able to effectively follow Jesus.

Orality is simply a way for new disciples to effectively engage with Jesus and his stories and then to effectively engage others with Jesus and his stories.

[1] David Garrison. Interview by author. Personal interview. December 2, 2011.

[2] Grant Lovejoy, ed., Making Disciples of Oral Learners. Lima, NY: International Orality Network, 2005.

[3] Joanne G. Shwartzberg, Jonathan B. VanGeest, and Claire C. Wang, "Literacy Demands in Health Care Settings." In Understanding Health Literacy, 69-84. Chicago: American Medical Association, 2005.

[4] Lynne Abney, Orality Assessment Tool. 2001.

[5] David Garrison, Church Planting Movements. Richmond, VA: Wigtake Resources, 2003.

[6] The particular language in question has neither significant oral bible nor written bible. There is no writing system for the language and the government has expressed active opposition to developing a writing system. The church planters involved knew that this lack of Bible development was likely to be the case for a long time to come. Indeed, roughly a decade have come and gone and no further missionaries have learned the local tribal language as well as the missionaries mentioned in this article. There is a possibility of a young linguist coming along soon, but it still hasn't happened. So, the original missionaries had a strong heart value of wanting the local tribe to be able to hear the gospel orally in their heart language. Yet, they also needed to be practical. Some of the local tribe could read and write in either the trade language or the national language. The trade language has 2/3 of a written Bible and the national language has a complete Bible. So, should they be purists and insist that they receive only an oral Bible and only in the heart language or should they introduce them to the idea that there were written Bibles in languages that some of them spoke fairly well, knowing that any development of any kind of Bible in the local tribal language was probably years and years away? So, they chose to model a hybrid system, hoping to pass on to the locals the idea that those who could read and write in one of the other languages could translate and make an oral Bible "on the fly" for their local kinsmen who did not have access to these other languages (because they didn't know the other languages). They felt it was less good than people having a fully developed oral Bible made just for them in their mother tongue, but they also felt that introducing them to Bibles in other trade and national languages that were accessible to some was the only practical way given social, political, and missionary realities.

[7] J. Pratt, How God Is Multiplying Networks of House Churches through the Buddhist Background Believers' Movement, 2011.

[8] Ibid, 14.

Using Rituals to Disciple Oral Learners: Part 1

W. Jay Moon

Jay Moon is Professor of Intercultural Studies and Director of the Wesley House of Study at Sioux Falls Seminary. From 1992-2001, he was an SIM missionary among the primarily oral Builsa people in Ghana, West Africa, and focused on church planting and water development. His two upcoming books discuss oral discipleship.

Great forward strides in mission have been made recently through the understanding of oral learners. Unfortunately, the focus on orality has almost exclusively focused on storytelling, implying that orality is synonymous with storytelling.

While storytelling is an important thread in oral cultures, there are other strands that need to be recognized in order to effectively make disciples of oral learners. In addition to stories, oral cultures create oral art through the weaving of symbols, rituals, proverbs, music, dance, and drama. This article will focus on the important strand of rituals. I will start by briefly describing cross-cultural discipleship in oral cultures, using examples from the Muslim ritual of the Hajj and the catechumenate process in the early Church. Then, I will describe how rituals play a key discipleship role in contemporary oral contexts. The article concludes with suggestions for constructing rituals for discipleship.

OVERCOMING A BAD NAME

For some, the term "ritual" stirs up images of something boring, repetitive, or a meaningless performance. For those who grow up in a non-liturgical church

tradition, they may be skeptical about the necessity of rituals since reliance upon the Bible is sufficient. These attitudes overlook the value of rituals in everyday life (e.g., handshakes, pledge to the flag) and in religious formation (e.g., communion, baptism, pilgrimages). Even worse, a disdain for rituals overlooks one of the most powerful methods of discipleship in oral cultures.

When observing religions around the world, we find that rituals are often at the heart of the disciple-making process. Rituals express commitment to God both for the sake of individual participants and the entire faith community. Matt Zahniser[1] notes, "Most people in the world assume symbols and ceremonies will be involved in discipling . . . Symbols and ceremonies represent a universal form of communication used by every major religion in discipling."

When observing religions around the world, we find that rituals are often at the heart of the disciple-making process. Rituals help to express commitment to God both for the sake of individual participants and the entire faith community.

Oral cultures in particular rely on rituals to deepen faith in ways that other genres simply cannot address. Even a short visit to the Rosebud Native American reservation, for example, reveals that rituals like the Sweat Lodge, Sun Dance, Vision Quest, etc. are at the heart of the religious experience for this largely oral culture.

DISCIPLESHIP IN ORAL CULTURES

Discipleship in oral cultures cannot rely on written materials to study, memorize, and write down. Cross-cultural disciplers must look for oral genre already within culture that can be used by God to form disciples. When print learners disciple oral learners, they often overlook the oral genre in favor of print discipleship methods. Instead of this mono-cultural discipleship approach, cross-cultural discipleship methods are needed.

Cross-cultural discipleship is "an ongoing process of worldview transformation whereby Jesus followers center their lives on the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)

and obey Christ's commands in culture (Matthew 28:19-20), utilizing culturally available genre."[2]

As disciples encounter daily issues within their culture, they respond in a manner that is both biblically faithful and culturally relevant in order to maintain a kingdom-centered life.[3] This lifelong process forms mature followers of Christ who overcome the extremes of syncretism (culture is not critiqued thereby blending two faith systems) and "split-level" Christianity[4], where Christianity merely responds to the ultimate life issues (e.g., salvation, problem of evil, etc.) but neglects intimate life issues (e.g., sickness, finding/keeping a spouse, etc.) that are then left to be addressed by other sources such as African Traditional Religion.

Rituals can be defined as a prescribed set of actions that employs symbols to reenact the deepest beliefs, feelings, and values of a people.

Rituals are a powerful genre already resident in oral cultures and can transform a disciple's worldview. Paul Hiebert[5] notes that creating living rituals is an important part of transforming worldview for discipleship since the rituals help to restructure and express the new worldview:

> We need to overcome our fear of rituals. The answer to dead traditions and idolatrous rituals is not to do away with rituals. It is to constantly consciously examine and re-create our rituals to keep them vibrant and to transform us through participation in them. Without living rituals, we have no appropriate ways to affirm our deepest beliefs, feelings, and morals, which lead to new lives in a new community and in the world.

Rituals can be defined[6] as a prescribed set of actions that employs symbols to reenact the deepest beliefs, feelings, and values of a people. Religious rituals have "reference to divine or transcendent beings"[7] by bringing the past into the present through sacred time and space. Ronald L. Grimes[8] emphasizes how rituals have the unique ability to drive meaning deeply to the bone. For disciplers in oral cultures, rituals provide important opportunities to address "excluded middle"[9] issues

for the growing disciple so that the ultimate God becomes deeply intimate and close in their personal and communal lives. [10]How does this process work?

THREE-STAGE RITUAL STRUCTURE

Arnold Van Gennep[11] studied rituals from around the world and observed a common structure in the ritual performance that included three distinct stages. While he was largely studying the rites of passage rituals during lifecycle events, this same ritual structure also appeared in other types of rituals such as festivals, pilgrimages, retreats, celebrations, and calendrical rituals. The three-stage structure is diagramed in Figure 1.

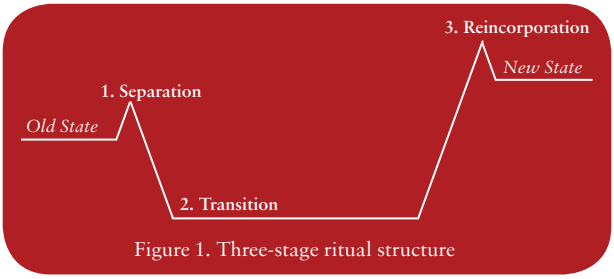


Figure 1. Three-stage ritual structure

ISLAMIC USE OF RITUAL

To describe this ritual structure and how it relates to cross-cultural discipleship, I will use the example of the most powerful oral discipleship tool in Islam—the Hajj. Every devout Muslim is exhorted to take this pilgrimage to Mecca once in his or her lifetime. Those who return from the Hajj are often more committed to their faith. How does the ritual process work to drive meaning in the discipleship of oral learners?

Separation: The first stage removes participants from the daily chores and patterns of life. This requires a physical separation so that there is a clean break from these normal activities and responsibilities. Muslims leave their home far behind as they travel to Mecca. This sharp break from the routine of life prepares the pilgrims for the next stage. There may be a going away party that further heightens the expectations and blessings of those who have sent the pilgrims on their way.

Transition: This important stage is marked by uncertainty, confusion, and chaos. Victor Turner[12] describes this period as "anti-structure" since it is markedly different than the normal routines of life. Participants do not know what is about to occur. As a result, they are always "off balance" and

unsure what is waiting just around the bend. Turner also uses the term "liminality" to describe this feeling of being "betwixt and between." Liminality is derived from the Latin term "limen", which means "threshold". Participants are not in or out; rather, they are in a middle transition state that is uncomfortable, as portrayed by the following pilgrim:

> *As Michael[13] arrives at the Mosque, he promptly removes his Khaki pants, brown button down shirt, and fancy leather shoes. Replacing these "normal clothes" with only two white cotton unstitched pieces of cloth and a pair of sandals, he admits to feeling naked and frail. The simple attire strips away his sense of identity as an American, and his work as a journalist. Instead of his normal confident stride, he walks slowly and gently amidst the unknown surrounding. Walking to the water fountain, he stoops to wash his face, hands, and feet. Leaving the building, he joins the throng of other white-robed pilgrims.*

Turner[14] describes this liminal feeling or state of "anti-structure" by comparing it with the normal structure of everyday life as follows:

LIMINALITY	STRUCTURE
Equality	Inequality
No property/wealth	Property/wealth
Humility	Pride of position
Transition	State of stability
No status, rank	Social status/rank important
Foolishness	Seriousness
Simplicity	Complexity
Accept pain/suffering	Avoid pain/suffering
Communal	Individual
All look same	Distinct clothing

Table 1. Characteristics of Liminality vs. Structure

This transition phase produces liminality, thereby stripping away Michael's individuality and uniqueness to be replaced by a communal identity. He now feels like a brother and is proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with others in the throng. Turner[15] identifies this unique bond that occurs during the transition phase with the term *communitas*. The unique conditions of liminality during the transition period of the ritual process are ripe for the fruit of deep bonding to other people.

In addition to the bonding of fellow pilgrims to each other, this condition is also ripe for

participants to bond to their faith in a unique way. As a result, this is a powerful oral discipleship approach that religions around the world use.

> *During the five-day journey where Michael walks several miles under the hot sun to sacred sites, he will reenact the mythology*[16] *of Islam. E.g., he walks up and down a long hallway, culminating in a drink from a well to reenact Hagar's wandering in the desert in search of water as she fled from her mistress Sarah. This drives home deeper what it means to be a follower of this faith system.*

Reincorporation: Upon completing the Hajj, Michael returns home to be reincorporated back into society. Now, however, he reenters at a higher level of spiritual maturity as he is even given a new name, Al Haji. This marks him as a Muslim disciple that has gone on the Hajj. The reincorporation is important for the faith community (they now recognize his commitment) and also for the individual (he may have new responsibilities). The reincorporation may be celebrated with others, including a meal. Ultimately, this ritual serves as a powerful oral discipleship tool for bonding disciples to their faith and other disciples.

EARLY CHURCH USE OF RITUAL

The early Church was also heavily shaped by orality. It is not surprising that they relied on the ritual process to deepen the bonding of the faith community to each other and their faith. Amidst persecution and the threat of martyrdom, Christianity grew from a small sect to the dominant religion in a few hundred years. The ritual process had a significant hand in the discipleship of the early believers. Drawing from the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus around 200 A.D., Thomas Finn[17] notes, "Christians survived in Rome to a large extent because they developed a dynamic ritual process for the making of Christians, technically called the 'catechumenate'."

The ritual process that the early Church developed in the first few hundred years follows the ritual structure in Figure 1 as well.

Separation: Sponsors accompanied those wanting to be part of the community of faith to a formal inquiry. They were asked personal questions concerning their

motivations, occupations, status, etc. The main function of this inquiry was to "gauge candidates' willingness to distance themselves from the reach of society."[18]

Transition: Following separation, the candidates moved into the transition stage by receiving oral instruction, prayer, and the laying on of hands. This transition period often lasted three years, culminating in a period of exorcism. Following the period of exorcism and subsequent fasting/prayer, the candidates were anointed with oil and prepared for baptism.

During the transition time, however, the candidates were not allowed to participate in communion. In addition, they did not receive the customary kiss of peace and embrace, nor did they mingle with the church members. It was considered a capital offense to be identified as a Christian at this time, so there was the constant threat of people being "discovered". Since the candidates were not fully a part of the church body and not fully a part of Roman society, they were in a state of "betwixt and between," or liminality. This liminal condition provided a fertile environment for deep bonding with fellow candidates and their faith.

Reincorporation: The candidates were now considered "the elect" and ready for baptism. They were led to the water, where they were immersed three times. Emerging from the water, they were anointed with the oil of Thanksgiving, dried, and dressed for entry into the church assembly. The newly baptized received communion for the first time, along with the kiss of peace and embrace. The church members now recognized the new status of the newly baptized and treated them as part of the family of faith.

The catechumenate ritual process worked. Inquirers were moved from one level of faith to another as an integral part of their discipleship. Not only did they bond more deeply to their faith, they also bonded deeply to other Christians. Finn[19] notes, "The impact of this ritual homecoming is difficult to overestimate. The newly baptized were initiated into a practical kinship network of telling effect." He[20] concludes his study of the early Church: "The inescapable conclusion is that the survival of Christianity before Constantine depended heavily on the development of an effective catechumenate, a powerful ritual process."

USE OF RITUALS FOR CONTEMPORARY DISCIPLESHIP

Could the ritual process be used to transform the worldview of contemporary oral learners, similar to the way that it so effectively served to disciple early Church members? Can the Church recover what has been forgotten and apply rituals for discipleship in our present times?

Applying our understanding of the ritual structure, two discipleship opportunities present themselves to contemporary disciplers of oral learners:

1. **Where No Ritual Exists:** Identify a contemporary "excluded middle" need in culture that is not being addressed. Construct a ritual that addresses the root issues with a faith community. The end result is to help oral learners address intimate issues that prevent them from centering their lives on Christ. The remainder of this article will address this.
2. **Where Ritual Does Exist:** Identify an existing ritual in culture. Uncover the function that this ritual plays in culture, and use the critical contextualization process to communicate Christian meaning. Again, the end goal is to help growing disciples experience the ultimate God in cultural forms that keep them centered on Christ. This will be addressed in part two of this article (in a future issue of this journal).

WHERE NO RITUAL EXISTS

"Excluded middle" issues are those intimate areas of life where the spirit world affects the material world. These intimate issues are often overlooked in the Church; hence, people are forced to go to other sources for help. Rituals can address these important discipleship issues, as described by a simple example with an oral learner below:

> *A cloud of burning sage smoke settles in the room as he gently brushes the smoke across his body with his fingers, gathered together like a feather. He closes his eyes. The distinct sweet aroma opens his senses to a host of memories and emotions. In his First Nations' culture, sage symbolizes the cleansing of sacred spaces. Like every other morning and evening, today this growing disciple of Jesus "bathes" himself with sage smoke in order to help him overcome his addiction to*

pornography. He has tried other self-help methods before, but he has found that God gives him strength through this simple ritual using the sage symbol.

While intimate issues like this may sound trivial to some, these may be the very concerns that people need to address in order to progress in their discipleship. In the centered set[21] approach to discipleship, discipleship must address whatever issues may push the growing disciple away from remaining focused on Christ. These important discipleship issues vary from person to person and vary throughout a person's lifetime.

Rituals are used to maintain continuity amidst the transitions of life.

RITUALS MAINTAIN CONTINUITY AMIDST TRANSITION

Particularly during various times of crisis or transition, disciples need to be reminded that the ultimate God cares about their intimate needs. During these times, they feel frail and vulnerable. They want to experience God's presence amidst their own confusion or doubts. Rituals are used to maintain continuity amidst the transitions of life.[22]

Rituals help people to clarify their experiences and allows space for them to talk about their feelings and learn coping strategies. They also come to appreciate anew the community of faith, which bonds them more deeply to the rituals. At the same time, they are ready to bond afresh to their faith that will sustain them. These are important discipleship opportunities that are often overlooked in print-based discipleship programs. Yet these intimate issues are crucial for discipleship, as the following illustrates for a teenage oral learner:

With tears streaming down his cheeks, the 17-year-old boy patiently awaits his turn in line. Normally, a self-composed and even keel type of guy, this "football player"-type is not prone to public displays of emotion. Now, he is openly expressing his emotions amidst sixty other teenagers. As he approaches the camp leaders, they anoint his forehead with oil, lay hands on him, and pray over him. The oil drips down his forehead and onto his nose, eventually finding a resting place near his lips, drawing out his sense of touch, smell,

and taste along the way. "As I was anointed a cross on my forehead, I felt God's presence very strongly upon me," he explains.

This anointing ritual, during a week-long Christian camp, becomes an important discipleship experience to move youth from one level of faith to another. Over two months later, Josh candidly recalls the experience: "Coming into the camp, my spiritual walk with Christ was good but I felt I still lacked what I needed to have to become a stronger Christian and a leader figure for the campers who attended. I had been used to cutting people down to gain favor in other peoples' eyes when I really needed favor in only God's eyes. There at camp, I learned how to stick up for younger kids who I knew weren't too popular in other kids' eyes . . . All week we were talking about how the Holy Spirit works and how powerful it is . . . Through this Lake Poinsett camp, it gave me another look of what the Holy Spirit is capable of doing . . . To wrap it all up, I would say my spiritual walk with Christ has elevated during this last summer and I'm more eager than ever to walk in my Lord God's footsteps to help me make good choices that will glorify him."

The week-long camp with ensuing ritual that Josh experienced followed the three-stage ritual process structure. This resulted in a powerful discipleship experience. While Josh will still have other barriers to overcome along the way, the ritual process elevates his spiritual walk during the teenage transitional years.

ANTICIPATING NEED FOR RITUALS

It is not hard to anticipate some of the major transitions in the human life cycle. Tapping into an oral discipleship approach, Kingsland Baptist Church[23] in Katy, Texas, recently identified seven life stages they call "milestones". During each stage, they identify the specific teaching that is needed to help parents in the discipleship of their children. Each of the milestones culminates in a ritual at the church or home, including a mixture of symbols, vows, and actions.

The goal of this approach is for the church to equip parents in the discipleship of their children from birth to adulthood. These preventative rituals in children are meant to ward off future problems

in adulthood. The seven milestones they identified are:

1. Birth of a baby
2. Faith commitment
3. Preparing for adolescence
4. Commitment to purity
5. Passage to adulthood
6. High school graduation
7. Life in Christ

The ritual process is ideally suited for these times of transition. When society does not provide ritual for these transitions, rituals can be created to help the growing disciple maintain his or her focus on Christ. Oral cultures often focus on the passage to adulthood. Young boys/girls want to know when they have become young men/women. If society does not provide this ritual passage, then youth tend to make their own markers. Unfortunately, these markers are often destructive, involving a vehicle, substance, or sexual encounter.

The church and family can recognize this as a discipleship opportunity. Creating a ritual that is uniquely suited to the young boy/girl, the ritual process will include the stages of separation, transition, and reincorporation. Symbols are used to speak during and after the ritual so that the youth and community recognize that the

young boy/girl has now become a young man/women.[24]

RITUALS FOR UNEXPECTED TRANSITIONS

Other transitions are also important discipleship opportunities. Rituals can be developed for events such as becoming pregnant, moving to a new home/job, or going to the hospital. Any issue that attempts to move the growing disciple from keeping a Christ-centered life is an important discipleship opportunity. If the issue is not addressed, then the person's discipleship can get stunted, as the following story describes:

Rebecca, a seminary student, had a rough week. She was

selected for jury duty. The case that she had to try dealt with a tragic death of a baby. For hours that turned to days, she had to sit through the grueling details of this horrendous case. By the end of the trial, she was depressed and confused. Her faith was challenged with questions like, "How can God let a young baby die so cruelly? What if the decision of our jury was wrong? Why do I feel so weighed down?"

Noticing that she was not her usual sparky self, her friends gathered around her. As she described her feelings, the other seminary students quickly noticed that this intimate issue was not usually addressed in the church or seminary classes. Yet these were nitty-gritty concerns that might dull her faith and calling by God, if not addressed. Times of tension or transition are the fertile soil for rituals. Here is the ritual they constructed.

Rebecca and her friends went down to the river with a backpack. As Rebecca spoke aloud her questions and feelings, she was asked to put a rock in the backpack for each one. Fun at first, this quickly turned into a heavy load. Increasingly, she could feel the pain on her back as each rock was piled into the backpack. Eventually, she ran out of questions and concerns, symbolized by the rocks filling the backpack. After giving encouraging words and scripture, her friends asked her to go on top of the bridge and visualize the backpack full of her concerns, feelings, and questions. Then, when she was ready, she should throw the pack over the railing into the roaring river below.

WHOOOOSH! The backpack plummeted twenty feet, suddenly splashing into the water with water spraying in all directions. Quickly, the waters surrounded it, as the pack disappeared below the surface . . . never to be seen again.

Standing on the bridge, her friends prayed over her and accompanied her back to the dorm. Later that night, Rebecca felt released from the emotional toll. With the aid of her faith community, using a simple symbol in a simple ritual, she felt reassured of God's presence. Once again, she was focused on God's call for her life.

During a two-week intensive class that I have taught over the last seven years, I have observed students develop Christian rituals for the following important discipleship events. (Note the intimate nature of many of these events, yet they rarely get discussed or addressed in any print-based discipleship program.)

1. A teenager preparing to obtain a driver's license
2. Transitioning youth to college
3. Leaving a promiscuous lifestyle
4. Unwed mothers entering a church
5. Children of divorce as they create a blended family
6. Adults transitioning through a divorce
7. Adults working through childhood sexual abuse
8. Women leaving the sex trade
9. A family adopting a child
10. Dealing with the death of a child
11. Reunification and reintegration of military spouses who return home
12. Third culture kids (e.g., missionary children) returning "home"
13. Welcoming international students to a U.S. seminary
14. Welcoming a refugee family to a church and community

During each ritual, symbols were carefully selected with a ritual specialist to guide the participants through the three-stage ritual process. Sacred space and sacred time was created as they drew upon the biblical stories to address their intimate issues. At the end of the two-week course, participants enacted the rituals. Several students communicated with me later that they followed up on these rituals with dramatic results. The end result was that the disciples experienced the presence of the ultimate God once again such that they maintain a Christ-centered life amidst the intimate transitions of life.

GETTING STUCK

When people do not successfully move through the transitions of life, they can get stuck in a rut. Their spirituality can become weak and in need of revitalization. The Walk to Emmaus[25] and Chrysallis weekend events utilize the ritual process to help disciples renew their faith.

Participants are taken away from their home area for a retreat to mark the separation stage of the ritual process. Liminality is heightened during the transition stage by the removal of clocks/schedules, and the addition of "surprises" along the way. The weekend ends with

a reincorporation event. When they return home, however, this ritual process has renewed the participants to a higher level of faith commitment. Comments from participants[26] included,

- "I discovered . . . I had my priorities out of order and I became a deeply committed Christian by the time the weekend was over."
- "It really refreshed my spirituality. I felt I was recharged, refreshed, and revitalized."
- [I made] "a recommitment to not be a passive Christian but to be an active Christian in my church and in my community."

The ritual process helped each disciple gain a Christ-centered focus for his or her life. When no rituals exist, rituals are constructed to engage intimate issues in culture with the Bible amidst the faith community. In the U.S., rituals may need to be constructed since "contemporary society is typified by a poverty of vibrant rituals—ceremonies that are connected to the deeper realms of human existence, the realms traditionally touched by mythology," resulting in a "bankruptcy of meaningful ritual in American homes."[27] Disciplers of oral learners draw upon the experience of the early Church and other cultures to create meaningful rituals that help disciples experience Christianity in culture.

CONSTRUCTING RITUALS

To construct meaningful rituals for discipleship of oral learners, consider the following steps.

First, identify an "excluded middle" issue that the disciple needs to address. This implies that there is a trusting relationship between the disciple and discipler. It also means that the discipler must listen to the disciples' heart issues. When the disciple is not able to clearly articulate his or her need, it may help to ask, "Can you give me a metaphor that describes how you feel?" The person may respond, "I feel like the house is on fire and no one is doing anything," or "I feel like a hamster on a wheel. I am running hard but not making any progress."

Metaphors can open up discussion and help the person identify the discipleship issues. In addition, these same metaphors are useful as the discipler later thinks through what symbols to use for the ritual.

As the disciple describes the need, try to *identify the possible root causes of the concern*. This may take time, but it is important to address the underlying issues. Femi,

a Nigerian, shared this story[28] with me that helps explain the importance of identifying the root issues.

> *"There was a lady in Nigeria who was sick," he starts. "She went from hospital to hospital but they could not heal her. Finally, she came to our church. We laid hands on her and started to pray." I am getting excited now. The Nigerian church is dealing with excluded middle issues like this one. I expect this story to end with an instantaneous miracle—the ending that he shares surprises me.*
>
> *Femi continues, "When we laid hands on her to pray, God spoke to the church leader, 'Ask if she wants to be healed.' She responded, 'No.' Upon further questioning, the sick lady explained, 'When I am well, my husband does not pay any attention to me. When I am sick, he comes to me and has time with me. That is why I do not want to be healed.'"*
>
> *Femi concludes, "God being so good, we counseled with the husband and he promised to take good care of his wife if she got healed. God then healed her and she is now fine. It is true; we need to take time to consider the roots."*

It is important to *consider what function you want the ritual to serve*. Is this a status elevation ritual, such as the adolescent rite of passage? Is this an intensification ritual, such as a summer camp? It helps to identify what you would like to happen in the life of the disciple as a result of the ritual.

T.F. Driver[29] reminds us, "A ritual is a 'transformance'— a performance designed to change a situation." Focus on the power of the ritual to be used by God to weaken the grip of oppressive powers/habits, empower the disciple with new strength/hope, and this will transform individuals and communities.

Second, identify primary roots to address. Out of all of the root issues you identified, try to identify the main one that needs to be addressed by this ritual. The discipler is sorting out truth from perception at this stage. Relevant biblical themes and stories serve as a plumb line to guide the truth-revealing process. Resist the tendency to drift toward two extremes: uncritically accepting everything as truth or critically rejecting everything that is said.

Third, evaluate individual roots. Scripture, not individual preference, evaluates each of the root issues. Consider:

- *Does scripture affirm the underlying issue?* The ritual will then be created to intensify their faith.
- *Does scripture modify the underlying issue?* The ritual will be created to alter or modify their behavior or thinking.
- *Does scripture reject the underlying issue?* The ritual will be created to denounce or break from sinful habits that are preventing the disciple from living a Christ-centered life.
- *Who else is affected by this root issue and how?* In constructing the ritual, you may include these stakeholders.
- *What will happen if we ignore this need?* This may promote a sense of urgency, giving the disciple needed energy and desire for the change.
- *What functional substitutes could be used?* If something is to be removed during the ritual, what could replace this?

Fourth, carefully choose symbols that speak uniquely to the person and the context. Taking the effort to consider which symbols work most effectively for a particular person dignifies that person. Zahniser[30] called this the "dignity of effort." Participants in a ritual feel valued and important by the effort you exert to choose the best symbols for a well-constructed ritual. Start by considering:

- *What meaning and feeling do you want to communicate?* How can the ritual be constructed so that the desire is stirred to reinforce the spiritual significance that you want to convey? What symbols will aid in connecting both the senses and ideology? The more you know the participants in the ritual, the more carefully the symbols can be selected to connect deep emotions and commitment to the ideology being expressed.
- *What familiar symbols in the culture communicate various meanings?* Since symbols are multi-vocal, carefully-selected symbols can speak to participants based on their varying concerns and needs. Cultural outsiders cannot select these symbols alone; rather, it requires collaboration with local insiders to hear the insiders' perspective.
- *Try to use more than one symbol in the ritual*. An abundance of symbols that all speak the same meaning drives home the

central message in an impactful and memorable way. Memory is key in oral cultures since learning is directly connected to memory.[31] Unifying various symbols through a common thread of meaning makes the ritual a more memorable learning experience.

- *A special gift may be offered*. This gift is something that is carefully selected to help the disciple as they re-enter society (e.g., For the adolescent rite of passage, I gave my sons a Swiss army knife. I explained, "This knife can be used for great harm or great good. I now trust you to use this knife for good. You are also getting stronger and your body can be used for great harm or great good. I am trusting you to use your body to help others, and make sure that girls never feel threatened by your presence."). Following the ritual, the gift becomes a steady reminder to trigger their memories and commitments made during the ritual.

Fifth, select the biblical themes and stories that you want to emphasize in the ritual. These will help to reshape the "operating system" to transform the disciples' worldview.

Sixth, carefully select the ritual specialist. This is someone trusted and respected by the individual and the group. While the liminal stage appears chaotic and out of control to the disciple, the ritual specialist is calmly in control, guiding the process smoothly.

Seventh, create sacred space and sacred time. This means taking the effort to prepare a special location to conduct the ritual. An ideal place is one that is removed from the everyday flow of life. There should be no rush for time. The ritual will only finish when the intended result is achieved; therefore, the clock will not be used to determine the ending point.

FINALLY, INCORPORATE THE THREE STAGES OF THE RITUAL PROCESS

- **Separation:** Physically remove the disciple from his or her daily responsibilities. A definite "break" can also be symbolic by using special clothing, shaving the head, having a formal send off party, etc.
- **Transition:** Enhance liminality so that the person does not know what is occurring next. You can increase liminality by removing watches, cell phones, schedules, and ordinary conveniences. Some struggle, challenge, or confusion is helpful. The ritual specialist is careful to make

sure that no one gets hurt. T.F. Driver[32] provides the following advice for this stage:

- "Active participants should outnumber passive ones."
- "Art is play done workfully, but ritual is work done playfully." Be creative and integrate playfulness with solemnity.
- "Christian ritual is liminal and authentic when the people of God receive the spirit of God into their midst." Whereas magic attempts to manipulate the spirit powers to do what they would not do otherwise, faith invites God to do what He already wants to do. The inviting of God's presence may be symbolically communicated (e.g., lighting a candle).
- "To be boring is to bear false witness . . . The ritual becomes less like a scripted drama and more like a well-hosted party."
- "Ritual loves not paper." Discard written bulletins and speeches in favor of participatory events, symbols, and creative playfulness using generous amounts of oral literature.
- "In ritual, words shift from being mainly descriptive or informative to become, in one degree or another, carriers of transforming power." Choose carefully the few words that are spoken. These words are meant to be gifts to help the disciple as they re-enter society. While an overabundance of words "wearies the audience and diffuses its attention,"[33] the few carefully chosen words or phrases can last a lifetime.

- **Reincorporation:** The disciple needs to re-enter society again, but at a different level. This is important both for the individual and the larger faith community and family. Often, the reincorporation is marked by a special meal with family and friends.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrated the use of rituals for discipleship in oral cultures. While often overlooked by mono-cultural disciplers from print cultures, cross-cultural disciplers recognize the value of rituals to transform worldviews. Learning from other religions and from the practice of the early Church, the three-stage ritual process structure can also be applied to contemporary discipleship of oral learners. When no cultural ritual exists, disciplers can create new rituals to help disciples maintain

continuity through life's transitions. Both anticipated and unexpected "excluded middle" can be addressed by well-designed rituals so that disciples do not get "stuck" in their faith.

When no cultural ritual exists, disciplers can create new rituals to help disciples maintain continuity through life's transitions.

In a future of this journal I will continue this discussion by addressing cases where existing rituals may exist in oral cultures but have not originated from a Christian worldview. Instead of simply rejection or acceptance, several indigenous rituals will be explored to demonstrate the contextualization of existing rituals for the discipleship of oral learners.

[1] A.H.M. Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples across Cultures*. Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1997, 2.

[2] This definition is from an upcoming book by the author entitled, *Discipleship: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Orality is a prominent part of the approach advocated in this book.

[3] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994.

[4] Paul Hiebert, R.D. Shaw, and T. Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.

[5] Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

[6] This definition employs elements from the following two sources: Charles Kimball, *Comparative Religion: Course Guidebook*. The Great Courses. Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2008; Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

[7] Fiona Bowie and Christopher Partridge, ed. "Ritual and Performance." *In Introduction to World Religions,* 32-33. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.

[8] Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

[9] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994. Here Paul talks about the lower level—seen and touchable, middle level—unseen but there are forces including demons, and the upper level—that which transcends, God.

[10] Zahniser, 33.

[11] Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

[12] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995.

[13] The description provided is from Michael Wolfe's journey described in: Ted Koppel, *Nightline - The Hajj: One American's Pilgrimage to Mecca*. ABC News, 2004.

[14] This is a condensed summary from Victor Turner, 1995, 106-107.

[15] Ibid, 96.

[16] I am using the term "mythology" to describe the sacred stories of a religion, according to: M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998.

[17] Thomas M. Finn. "Ritual Process and the Survival of Early Christianity: A Study of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 3, no. 1 (n.d.): 69-85.

[18] Ibid, 72.

[19] Ibid, 78.

[20] Ibid, 80.

[21] Paul Hiebert, "The Category Christian in the Mission Task." In Anthropological Reflections on *Missiological Issues*, edited by P.G. Hiebert, 107-136. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994.

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[23] Haynes, Brian. Shift: *What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today*. Loveland, CO: Group, 2009.

[24] Examples for applying the ritual process for American youth are provided by: Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood*; Pam Farrel and Doreen Hanna, *Raising a Modern-Day Princess*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009.

[25] See upperroom.org/emmaus/default.asp. Accessed January 19, 2013.

[26] Video interviews of participants are available at upperroom.org/emmaus/default.asp. Accessed January 19, 2013.

[27] D. Feinstein and P.E. Mayo. *How We Can Turn Loss and the Fear of Death into an Affirmation of Life*. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1990.

[28] This story was first published and described further in: W. J. Moon, *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture: A Narrative Portrayal of Builsa Proverbs Contextualizing Christianity in Culture*. Vol. 5. American Society of Missiology Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009.

[29] T.F. Driver, T*he Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives & Our Communities*. NY: Harper Collins, 1991, 212–215.

[30] A.H.M. Zahniser, "MB 780 Cross-Cultural Discipling." Class notes, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2004.

[31] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*. London, UK: Routledge, 1982.

[32] T. F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives & Our Communities*, 212–215.

[33] Jim Clarke, *Creating Rituals: A New Way of Healing for Everday Life*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011, 28.

Contextualizing the Gospel in a Visual World

Clyde Taber

Clyde Taber leads the Visual Story Network, a coalition launched to expand a global movement of visual story for the Kingdom of God From 2000-2006 he led the development of innovative media initiatives for the JESUS Film Project, including "Magdalena: Released from Shame," the Damah Film Festival, and "JESUS: Fact or Fiction?" Prior to this, he directed the campus ministry in Paris and coordinated the campus work of Campus Crusade for Christ throughout North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Clyde's wife, Shirin, is a writer (Muslims Next Door, Wanting All the Right Things), speaker, and mother.

The dust settled and most of the crowd now dispersed. The weathered man leaned in asking the pastor with sadness in his voice, "Does your God love widows?"

"Yes, he loves widows," replied the pastor.

"Does your God love orphans?" he asked.

"Yes, he loves orphans as well."

The man shifted his weight to his cane, keeping his eyes fixed on the pastor.

"Among our many gods, we do not have one like this; I must know this God of yours."

This man in India had just watched the "Widow and the Oil," a ten-minute dramatic recreation of Elisha and the widow from the book of 2 Kings. Although this visual story, produced and used by Crown Financial Ministries, was intended to teach Christians about God's provision, it opened this man's heart to the God of the Bible. In an effort to more effectively teach biblical stewardship to oral-speaking peoples in developing countries, Crown created a six-part series of biblical short films

called "God Provides." Crown stepped boldly into the new wave of communication—the wave of visual story.

AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CHURCH

We live in a transitional time in the history of the Church when a great opportunity exists to preach, print, and portray. For 1,500 years, preaching was the primary means by which the Church communicated its message. For the last five hundred years, print media has accelerated the spread of the gospel. We are now able to visually portray Christ and his kingdom. This is the third wave of communicating with the world around us.

As the world grows more media-saturated and sophisticated, young people and adults are becoming more visually oriented.

As the world grows more media-saturated and sophisticated, young people and adults are becoming more visually oriented. The heart language of a growing number of people worldwide is visual story. Every day, four out of five people on this planet are molded by visual story. The orality movement is addressing the need to contextualize the gospel among those who are illiterate or functionally illiterate. A new movement to contextualize the gospel among the world's population that is "visually literate" (able to interpret meaning from an image) is expanding.

One of the greatest gaps in the global outreach of the Church is the lack of culturally-relevant visual media. Through film, television, computers, and mobile devices, stories are being told on large and small screens. This deluge of stories is captivating the hearts of men, women, youth, and children, and raises the question, *Who will shape the stories that shape the hearts of people around the world?* The destiny of a generation depends on the answer.

It is critical that God's people connect and communicate with the lost through "kingdom" visual stories.

It is critical that God's people connect and communicate with the lost through "kingdom" visual stories. A "kingdom" visual story combines narrative and visual

media to communicate the message of Jesus and his kingdom. They may be as direct as the *JESUS* film, or stories that stimulate thought and reflection. The truth of creation, fall, and redemption revealed in scripture and expressed in everyday life is the missing message in the stories shaping the lives of billions of people.

The Church is beginning to awake to the possibilities of communicating in visual story. The *JESUS* film has been viewed by billions of people and churches in America and Africa are developing films that speak to real-life issues from a biblical perspective. Christian television networks are beginning to broadcast content beyond preaching alone. Much more, however, remains to be done. The Global Church must address urgently the following concerns.

1. **Local churches must learn to create visual stories.** Culturally-specific, locally-produced visual media should be available in every language of the world as technology and distribution become more affordable. It should become common for leaders in churches and parachurch organizations to consider a visual component to sermons, outreach programs, and discipleship material. Increasingly, this media must be story-driven, and not limited to "talking heads."
2. **New models of evangelism and discipleship using visual media must be developed.** As more visual story content becomes available, the Church must find ways to use the content to effectively reach and teach.
3. **The gap between creative and missional Christians must be bridged.** Historically, the Protestant Church has not embraced the artist in its midst. The Body of Christ must identify, encourage, and equip emerging visual storytellers. As a result, faith-based storytelling will be innovative rather than merely copying the example of the host culture.
4. **We must understand that the big screen is the small screen.** In October 2011, the world's

population surpassed seven billion people. By late 2012, mobile phone subscriptions worldwide were projected to reach seven billion.[1] Video accounted for more than half (52%) of all mobile web traffic in 2011 and will increase to 70% in the next five years.[2] "Feature phones" account for most of the world's subscription base, but "smart phone" subscriptions have surpassed one billion and are gaining market share in developed nations. We live in the age when media and technology saturation is globally approaching 100% through mobile devices. The opportunities to use the mobile platform are expanding and must be leveraged for the Great Commission. The Mobile Ministry Forum is a new coalition of mission practitioners helping the mission community learn to appropriately integrate mobile device technology into their outreach and church-planting strategies.

CONCLUSION

It will be impossible to fulfill the Great Commission if we do not learn to speak the language of visual story. When my wife and I arrived in France as young missionaries, we understood the success of our ministry would depend greatly upon our ability to learn French. In many countries, church services are televised, but this is essentially a model of "preaching to the choir."

We must learn the art of story and new forms of visual communication that speak to the teenager surfing the web, as well as the Bedouin tribesman whose most prized possession is his cell phone.

If God's people invest time, energy, and resources into contextualizing the gospel in a visual world, the Church's ability to communicate visually should be equal to or better than that of the local culture. Messages of the kingdom will not be limited to a subculture, but permeate and leaven the host culture. Believers will be prepared to give a visual answer to everyone who asks about the reason for their hope. Within a generation, it will be possible for every person on earth to have the opportunity to encounter the truth of Jesus and his kingdom every day.

[1] See www.cellular-news.com/story/51223.php. Accessed January 18, 2013.

[2] See techcrunch.com/2012/02/14/the-number-of-mobile-devices-will-exceed-worlds-population-by-2012-other-shocking-figures/. Accessed January 18, 2013.

Inside-out Stories

Marlene LeFever

Marlene LeFever is Vice President of Educational Development for David C. Cook Global Mission. She developed the orality unit mentioned in this article. For a free copy and to receive updates on this initiative, email her at marlene.lefever@davidccook.org.

What I like best about learning to tell Bible stories directly from the Bible is that they work on children (and adults) from the inside-out. A few months ago over one thousand orphans in Christian club programs in India studied the story of redemption. Each of the twelve story segments was a part of God's amazing, big, Bible story. Children heard the story, told the story to each other, discussed the story, and then told it to someone who didn't know the story.

Club leaders let the stories speak for themselves, never telling children, "This is what you ought to learn from this story. This is what you need to do." Through the work of the Holy Spirit, children heard for themselves what God was saying to them.

Club leaders let the stories speak for themselves, never telling children, "This is what you ought to learn from this story. This is what you need to do." Through the work of the Holy Spirit, children heard for themselves what God was saying to them. They changed from the inside-out. We knew the unit would be powerful. We had no idea how powerful.

In the last issue of this journal, I shared what happened during this orality unit. More and more stories keep arriving, so this is a story update.

Inside-out! It's the amazing result of learning God's story and allowing the story to become personal, living truth.

SHIRISHA: AN INSIDE-OUT STORY

Experience taught Shirisha that when she copied from someone else's paper during a school test, her grades improved. She was only 8 and already a skilled cheater. When she inevitably got caught, she was embarrassed; however,

her response never wavered: "It's not wrong. It's not my fault. How do you know he wasn't copying from me? It's his fault. I didn't do anything wrong."

However, in club Shirisha heard the part of God's story titled "Bad Use of Free Will." It was the story of Cain and the choices he made. She realized that, like Cain, she was making terrible choices. "I cheated," she confessed to her club leader. "God doesn't want me to be a Cain. I promise God I won't cheat again."

A few weeks later her club leader checked with Shirisha about her resolve. Shirisha responded, "I wanted to cheat. I could have. I almost did. But I didn't. I got my own grade. It's not a good grade, but I'm proud of it. God is, too."

RAJENDRA REDDY: AN INSIDE-OUT STORY

"She hates me," Rajendra Reddy shared with his club leader. His mother had put him in an orphanage after his father left and married another woman. "She loves my brother. Why couldn't she love me a little bit, too? Nobody loves me."

In club, Rajendra Reddy learned and told the stories of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection. As he shared God's loving plan for redemption, something inside him changed.

"I think I believe it," he told his club leader. "My father, my mother, my brothers, my relatives—not one of them loves me. But Jesus does. He loves me enough to make up for everyone else."

Recently this 14-year-old boy found out his mother was very sick, likely dying. Instead of gloating and thinking she deserved her illness, Rajendra Reddy began visiting her and doing his best to show love to her. "It's not my love," he said. "It's really Jesus' love."

ARAVIND: AN INSIDE-OUT STORY

Aravind's mother was forced to marry her maternal uncle even though neither felt any love for the other. In an attempt to get rid of her, her husband threw her into a well. Amazingly, this Hindu woman was rescued; however, she was paralyzed from the waist down. Aravind's father disappeared. A local pastor brought Aravind's mother to Jesus and also got Aravind into a Christian orphanage. There, the boy learned the story of a Father who loved him enough to make a plan for them to always be together. Like his mother, he found the story so compelling he had to accept it.

"My relatives worship many gods," Aravind says. "My job is to learn everything I can about the true God who will never desert me. Then, I'll go home and share with them."

Mind the Gap: If This Is Your Land, then Where Are Your Stories?

Steve Evans

Since 1982, Steve Evans has been a communications specialist and cultural researcher. He studied at Howard Payne University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and East Tennessee State University. He is the 2008 recipient of the prestigious Brimstone Award for Applied Storytelling and has published extensively on the topic of orality. Steve lives in London.

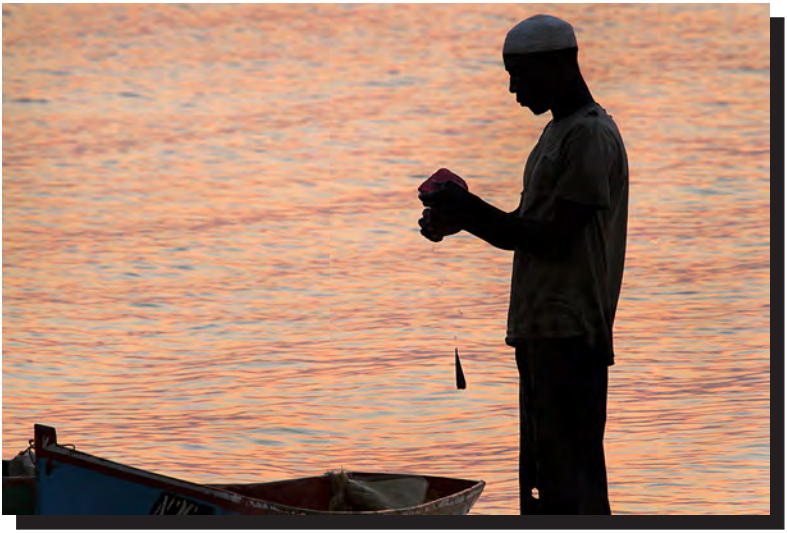
"Mind the gap" is an expression in Great Britain to warn passengers of the dangerous gap between the railway or metro platform and the train stopped on the tracks. A mis-step could wreak havoc! So it is in the world of orality. There are many gaps in our understanding of this world and a mis-step could wreak havoc if we are trying to effectively reach this world for Christ.

Edward Chamberlin, Canadian professor of English and comparative literature, shares an incident from which he derived the title of his book on stories and national-cultural identification: *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* He writes:

> It happened at a meeting between a [native America] Indian community in northwest British Columbia and some government officials. The officials claimed the land for the government. The natives were astonished by the claim. They couldn't understand what these relative newcomers were talking about. Finally one of the elders put what was bothering them in the form of a question. "If this is your land," he asked, "where are your stories?"
>
> He spoke in English, but then moved into Gitksan, the Tsimshian language of his people—and told a story. All of a sudden everyone understood… even though the government foresters didn't know a word of Gitksan, and neither did some of his Gitksan companions. But what they understood was more important: how stories give meaning and value to the places we call home; how they bring us close to the world we live in by taking us into a world of words; how they hold us together and at the same time keep us apart.

"If this is your land, where are your stories?" This question carries with it the importance of a people's story and its contribution to their sense of identity and community. It is interesting here how identity is tied to land—possession of it—and to history and culture. What's more interesting is that story is the glue that holds it all together. The original inhabitants in this factual tale told by Chamberlin seem to be saying: "Our land, our language, our stories, our history, our heritage, our identity—our very being of who we are—are all tied up together, are all integrated." To challenge any one of these, they imply, is to challenge all the others.

We would do well to reflect on the implications this may have for us as followers of Christ and our identities in the locations where we are. What and where are our stories that help us claim the land?



Are we too shy to claim our heritage and tell our stories? We must be mindful of the ever-widening gap between our national or cultural heritage and our Christian heritage, often resulting in sharp polarization.

Let us rely upon the power of the story to help identify who we are and our place in the land.

Ten Mistakes of a New Bible Storyteller

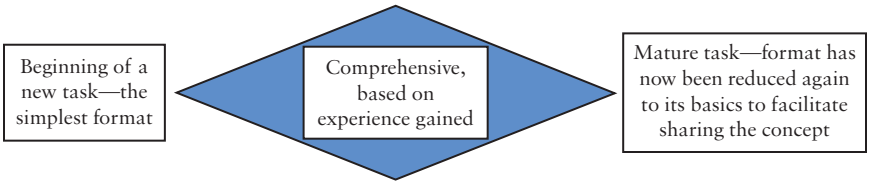
J.O. Terry

J.O. Terry has taught hundreds of Bible storying sessions and taught Bible storying methodology in Asian, African, and Latin American countries. Currently, Terry publishes a Bible storying newsletter and has written several books on the methodology.

One of the advantages of being older and wiser is the ability to look back on one's earlier years and evaluate them in the light of experience. There are many important lessons to learn. One is that we must begin with what we know and can do. This may lead to mistakes, but none are severe or irreparable.

Another lesson is that we must be constantly on the alert, learning from those with whom we are working—letting the *instructed* be the ones to *instruct the instructor!* Along the way, changes will be needed, so the Bible storyteller (whom I will refer to as "we" throughout this article) must be alert to see the changes and to make them.

An interesting progress diagram is helpful to keep in mind. It is diamond-shaped, beginning at some point, expanding to a certain size, and reducing back to a point. For example, we must begin a task like telling Bible stories with only the simplest thoughts in mind.



We likely have no idea of all that will be encountered along the way. As new issues arise, however, we learn and take these into account as part of the process. Finally, the process grows until some maximum expansion is reached when most, if not all, of the issues have been encountered and taken into consideration.

At this point, we will reach the most complicated point in the task and process. Any training done at this point is likely to overwhelm the new storyteller. Several things then begin to occur. If the long range

objective is to teach and train as many new Bible storytellers as possible, the circumstances will dictate simplifying the teaching. This means realizing that not everyone will encounter the same issues in their Bible story teaching, so the focus again tends toward the basics.

There should also be a growing realization that if the primary oral learners are to be trained and empowered to tell Bible stories to their own people, then we must learn to tell and teach just as the primary oral learners will be able to do when telling the stories to others. So modeling dictates simplifying the teaching to a very basic level.

In time, the teaching process reduces back to the very basics, much as it was in the beginning. This is likely its most reproducible form for sharing with oral learners and oral-preference learners. What was once included in the more comprehensive teaching process may now result in a number of simplified teaching models rather than one complicated, comprehensive process.

MY OWN JOURNEY

I had a sketchy background of teaching oral learners from reading a small booklet by Hans Ruedi Weber called *Communicating the Gospel to Illiterates*.[1] I had occasional conversation with Jim Slack, who was still a missionary in the Philippines, living in Mindanao and having early Bible storying experience with New Tribes Mission personnel. The process of learning really began when I was invited to speak at

two mission prayer retreats in Indonesia in early 1988. I knew of a missionary colleague in the Philippines who was teaching chronological Bible stories among a tribal group where I had previously visited, so I invited him to join me in telling about this new Bible teaching method while I shared about using various recorded and graphic media in teaching.

My colleague discussed only the most basic experiences he was having and could not answer the questions posed by the retreat group. Many were concerned about the length of time for teaching before an invitation was given. Others wanted to know why we wouldn't just share a typical evangelism presentation and pray the Sinner's Prayer.

Not long after this less-than-successful sharing of the new Bible teaching methodology, I was asked to go to a neighboring South Asian country to help local missionaries and pastors understand how to use a set of Bible story lessons being used in the Philippines. I knew about the story lessons called *God and Man*[2] as an English back translation. Armed with no experience and very little knowledge, I made a presentation to the gathering of pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. There was little interest except for two evangelists and one missionary who worked among tribal peoples. It was an embarrassing moment and a bit of a setback for me.

As a result, I visited the island of Mindanao, Philippines, to sit at the feet of Filipino Bible story trainer Johani Gauran, who taught at an agricultural training camp for out-of-school youths. It was humbling to learn from Gauran, who was having successful results with those he was training to use Bible stories

in their ministries. I was amazed at the number of Bible stories the young people were learning, and how they were tested daily for competency in telling the stories accurately.

While they were learning the basics, I read some of the teaching notes prepared by Trevor McIlwain of New Tribes Mission, who had popularized Chronological Bible Teaching after his own rediscovery of its value in evangelizing a people group he worked with on Palawan Island. Later, I bought and read several of his books from the series *Building on Firm Foundations*[3] that was based on his earlier teaching notes.

I now had some understanding of the basics of Chronological Bible Teaching and had two sets of Bible story lessons in hand—*God and Man* with its thirty-five lessons and *Chronological Bible Storytelling*[4] with it fifty-four Bible story lessons. The copy of *God and Man* lessons that I first saw were a very poor photocopy of the English back translation. I had a new computer I was itching to begin using, so I retyped and printed out the text of *God and Man* and had one hundred copies printed. One of these reformatted copies was picked up and republished by Church Strengthening Ministry in Manila. Later, twenty-five sets of *God and Man* and chronological teaching pictures (Telling the Story…)[5] were sent to a South Asian country which prompted my being asked to help local workers in that area use the lessons.

It was not long before I was invited to return to that country to demonstrate this new teaching method. While the normal strategy was to teach one lesson a week, I

was asked to teach all the stories in one day. My first assignment was a tribal village along a river.

I had arrived at the village with my interpreter early in the morning. The teaching venue was a mud church building with thatch roof and no windows, only a door at the far end which I stood facing. It was dark inside. I could not see the faces of the men seated before me. We began at 8 a.m. and were to go all day, or until I finished with the story of Jesus. I held my Bible in one hand and a copy of *God and Man* in the other hand. I could not see the print on either one due to lack of light. I had eight or more hours to teach—and I did not know the Bible stories that well.

However, God is gracious, and I made it until tea time around 10 a.m. I rushed outside to look ahead at the stories. Somehow I made it until noon, had lunch outside, and again taught until mid-afternoon tea time. I finished with the resurrection and ascension stories. I was exhausted. I had it to do again the following day in a different village.

This time, the teaching was on the veranda of a church. Again, I held my Bible and a copy of *God and Man*. Wonder of wonders, I did not need to refer to either, except for a few times! The main lesson I learned from these two experiences is that I needed to learn the stories well enough to tell them fluently and accurately, and to look ahead and judge the time so that I could finish at the conclusion of the story of Jesus' death, resurrection, and return to heaven.

Each succeeding time of teaching built on these two early experiences and the many things I learned from both my interpreters and those I was teaching. That was in 1988. It would be another three or four years before I felt I had learned the stories so that it was natural, effective, and increasingly reproducible among the listeners.

At the same time I had entered another phase as a trainer of missionaries, and I had greatly expanded the methodology. Perhaps in my eagerness to excel, I had added much to complicate the Bible storying methodology.

10 MISTAKES I MADE

Let me confess ten mistakes I made when I was first introduced to Chronological Bible Teaching.

First, I was familiar with the Bible stories but I did not really know

them. We can read a story many times, but until we tell the story several times, we do not really *know* the story. While it is very easy to learn the simpler and shorter stories, some of the Old Testament stories are longer and have many details and names. I had to learn the Bible stories well enough so I could express them clearly for my interpreters. In several cases, the listeners had no Bibles in their spoken language.

In later training sessions, I recommended reading a story a minimum of ten times aloud to hear and feel the story and then to practice telling the story several times until the storyteller was comfortable envisioning the story. My most stressful times were when telling a panorama of the redemption story in training sessions with pastors and evangelists and later in all-day public Bible storying events. Telling and teaching one story a week was less stressful except that I soon learned I needed to keep all the stories fresh in my memory for review and for answering questions.

Second, I had heard from others, and initially believed myself, that once a non-literate person heard a story, he or she could remember it and accurately retell it. Much of my early disappointment and trial of my patience resulted from the need to keep repeating stories because many listeners could not reproduce a story well. Young people among the listeners were generally better at grasping a story after one hearing. I was frustrated when listeners contaminated the stories with cultural details, left out key portions of the story, or altered the story for some reason—often to bring the story into line with their culture.

Third, it took several months of attempting to tell and teach the stories to listeners of different worldviews that finally I realized needed to take the listeners' worldviews into account. The two story sets I was using came from the Philippines. *God and Man* was related to worldview issues among the Ilongot peoples of northern Luzon. *The Chronological Bible Storytelling* was originally prepared in a local language and loosely addressed some of the Christo-pagan beliefs common on Mindanao.

I was working among peoples who had many different worldviews: those of basically a superstitious, animistic worldview; Buddhists; Muslims of at least four different sects with variations in worldview;

and Hindus. I found that Buddhists needed more training on the creation account to deal with the issue of accountability to the Christian God. Muslims had several issues related to sin and its consequences and a belief in Allah's merciful overlooking attitude toward sin, the relationship of Christ to God, and a religion of works and obedience to rules. Hindus also had a problem with sin because of a lack of understanding related to a righteous and just God, and the uniqueness of Christ alone as the acceptable sacrifice for sin.

I slowly became aware of the differences between the worldview of women and men listeners.

I slowly became aware of the differences between the worldview of women and men listeners. I addressed these by adding new stories and in how I told stories and taught from the stories. I respect those who prefer to assume a generic, sinful, humankind worldview and teach accordingly; however, Jesus knew the worldview of his listeners as did Peter and Paul as their preaching and teaching illustrated. The overall worldview includes both spiritual as well as cultural issues that I later learned to differentiate as barriers to the gospel, bridges to the gospel, and gaps in spiritual knowledge.

Occasionally, there were mistakes related to cultural issues where relationships or situations in the stories needed to be handled differently. One such incident happened when the story as I initially told it had Jesus alone with the Samaritan woman. This was a bad social situation in that culture. I had to learn that in some cultures it was okay for Abraham and Sarah to be half-brother and sister since this kept family property in the family. Others only married outside their clan or village. To marry a close relative was taboo. Other mistakes had to do with the use of Bible teaching pictures that were not appropriate in certain cultures.

Fourth, I assumed that all I needed to do was to tell and teach the Bible stories to listeners and they would readily respond to the invitation to believe in Jesus as their Savior. I had understood that the lengthy process of telling many Old Testament and gospel stories would prepare listeners to make that decision when the time came. It was frustrating to realize that after investing so much time in telling and teaching the Bible

stories, responses did not always occur immediately.

There were three options. One was to tell the stories again to see if a second hearing would bring people to a point of decision. Another was to wait and see if people needed time to process the stories and decide how to respond to them. A third was simply to go to the next group and begin again. The diary testimony of LaNette Thompson[6] and her husband's experience telling the *God and Man* stories among a people in Burkina Faso was helpful to learn patience in waiting for the Holy Spirit to finish his work in the hearts of listeners.

Fifth, I had been told and saw in the story sets that one must always begin with creation and teach chronologically through the Old Testament and then the story of Jesus. In the *God and Man* story set, twenty-three of the thirty-five story lessons were on the Old Testament. Teaching one story a week meant putting off the story of Jesus for twenty-three weeks before even mentioning his name.

I learned from colleagues in Latin America that they were *beginning* with the story of Jesus. In one of the South Asian countries where I was working, I heard that many people knew the Jesus of healing and the Jesus of release from spirit oppression, but did not know Jesus as Savior. In West Africa, I was hearing that Muslim youths were asking what the *Injil* taught. There was evidence that at times it was good to begin with the story of Jesus directly.

Later, one could go back to use the Old Testament stories to give a foundation to the Gospel stories. Still later, I heard that various Bible storytellers were telling topical or thematically chosen stories, as well

as biographical sets of stories. All were having success in leading people to faith in Christ as the listeners related well to the story sets without having to first begin with Genesis.

For many, however, there is a need to begin with creation since it establishes the relationship with Creator God and deals with the beginning of sin, judgment and consequences, and how sin was atoned for or covered until the Promised Sacrifice was provided.

Sixth, I was not initially aware of the characteristics of oral learners. I had been introduced to Walter Ong's book *Orality and Literacy*[7] and later to Herbert Klem's *Oral Communication of the Scripture*[8] and completed my initial reading of Weber's *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates*, but reading about orality and nonliteracy is one thing; experiencing it is quite another.

After I recovered from the initial shock of having to learn the Bible stories myself, I had to be patient to learn from oral learners how they *preferred* to learn, and for many the only way they *could* learn. It was frustrating having to repeat Bible stories over and over. It was helpful to read John D. Wilson's "What It Takes to Reach People in Oral Cultures."[9]

I came to realize that oral learners needed to be free to learn without my just teaching what I thought they should learn. The Bible storying session had to be a learning experience conducive for listeners. I found the listeners enjoyed learning in a community setting, but also that if too many listeners were present, the dynamics changed. I learned that we needed to think like the listeners were thinking—to get down on their level of understanding, and to make the learning relational to their lives. I also had to make it simple but applicable, and model for them in a manner they could replicate among their own people.

Seventh, I had assumed that oral learners were like dry sponges that could endlessly absorb new truths. People who lived in oral cultures where new information was rare were not accustomed to digesting large amounts of stories. Teaching had to be limited to what a mind unaccustomed to taking in a large volume of new information could receive without tiring.

I recall the words of Felix to Paul

in Acts 24 when he said, "That's enough for now." Among the Kekchi in Guatemala, I learned that when they had heard enough they would stand; what they were saying, in essence, "That's enough for now."

I also realized that oral learners were very practical listeners. The term "relational" now had much more meaning as these folks were very practical in listening for what they could see immediate use. This was true not only for those listening to Bible stories, but also for teaching agriculture and other development lessons. Things that were not seen as practical were soon pushed aside.

Eighth, I learned that the people were greatly helped by an overview of the redemption story, especially when training their leaders. In the early training of pastors and evangelists, I had launched right into the creation stories and continued through the Bible story by story. I soon realized that many were hearing these as just individual stories, not necessarily as part of a larger story.

I hated to give up individual story teaching time, but found that by providing this panoramic overview, the trainees saw the connectedness of the stories and how the prophecy and promises in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the New Testament. Later, these redemption story overviews were done as a proclamation called *Fast-Tracking*[10] in public events, as well as probing for potential responsiveness before beginning a story-by-story strategy.

Ninth, when missionaries began asking me for copies of the Bible stories I was using and about the

methodology, I initially responded with too much "methodology". In my desire to help the new Bible storytellers to know all I had learned, I shared too much information. I later refined this to answer the basic questions of which Bible stories to tell, how many Bible stories to tell, and what to talk about after telling the stories.

I am still torn between attempting to provide a suitable story set already prepared and involving new storytellers in a training process that equips them with an understanding of the methodology so they could develop their own story sets. I realize that I must give more time to teaching and encouraging trainees to actually tell the stories during the training so that they are already over the hesitancy hurdle to do something new and initially uncomfortable for them. The methodology detail makes more sense when one already knows the stories well enough to tell them.

Finally, once I was past simply trying to use the *God and Man* story lessons, I began using relatively long story sets in an effort to cover as much teaching as I thought was needed to adequately prepare listeners for the invitation. I used as many as sixty stories, sometimes teaching more than one story at a time to shorten the strategy time. I soon realized that the leaders I was training used fewer stories. I used a teaching picture set with 103 pictures and two maps. I noticed that the trainees often used forty or fewer stories and accompanying pictures. Still later as other Bible story sets circulated, I saw that twenty stories had become the new norm.

Over the years, I have received many requests for sets of seven to twelve stories that church mission teams could use. I struggled with this as I felt that a certain number of Old Testament stories were really needed to give a perspective for the story of Jesus.

When the story sets were lengthy, the ratio of Old to New Testament stories was usually half and half. But as the story sets get shorter, fewer and fewer Old Testament stories were being used. The main focus was on the stories of Jesus. Worldview became critical in determining which of the Old Testament stories would be kept in the series.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Some of my team members who accompanied me while telling and

teaching Bible stories told me that "I had no face!" What they meant was that I did not shame easily when I failed. I pressed on and learned from the experience. One team member explained that this was difficult for him because in his culture, when you failed or made mistakes, you became ashamed and could not face the same people again.

I assured him that the greater shame would be our failure to finish the task Jesus gave his disciples. We will make mistakes. We must learn from our mistakes. On several occasions, I had team members and interpreters correct me. They were fearful of causing anger or shame and a loss of relationship. What really puzzled them was when I thanked them and encouraged them to continue correcting me.

As an older and wiser Bible storyteller, I have worked my way through these early mistakes. While I may still make mistakes, I better understand how to avoid continuing to make them and hopefully how to fix the ones I did make. Paul advised Timothy to be a "workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

[1] Hans Ruedi Weber, *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates*, Christian Literature Society, 1960.

[2] Dell and Rachel Sue Schultze, "God and Man," New Tribes Mission, 2001.

[3] Trevor McIlwain, *Building on Firm Foundations*, New Tribes Mission Bookroom, 1989.

[4] Bryan and Diane Thomas, *Chronological Bible Storytelling*, undated.

[5] Caloy Gabuco, "Telling the Story…," Church Strengthening Ministry & New Tribes Mission, undated.

[6] LaNette Thompson, "The Diaradugu Diary," undated.

[7] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, 1982.

[8] Herbert V. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture*, William Carey Library, 1981.

[9] John D. Wilson, "What It Takes to Reach People in Oral Cultures," 1999. http://www.papuaweb.org/dlib/s123/wilson/mth.pdf. Last accessed January 21st, 2013

[10] J.O. Terry, "Fast-Tracking Bible Stories," Accessed January 18, 2013 from www.churchstarting.net/biblestorying/fasttrack.htm.

Story Proof: The Science behind the Startling Power of Story

Reviewed by Tara Rye

Reviewed by Tara Rye, who is currently researching biblical storying while working on her Doctorate of Educational Ministry at Southwestern Theological Seminary. She is passionate about communicating the word of God in a way people will understand. She is a published author, an active speaker, and has served on short-term missions in five countries.

Haven, Kendall. Story Proof: The Science behind the Startling Power of Story. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2012, pp. 164. $23.61. Kindle Edition. ISBN-10: 1591585465.

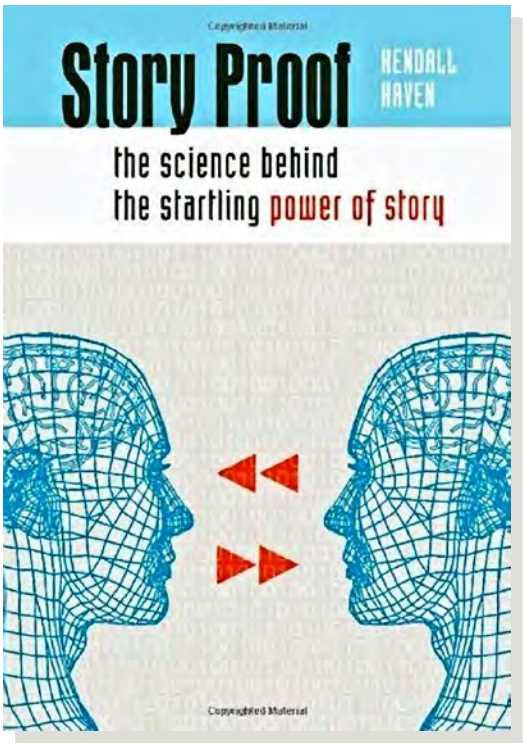
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Writer and storyteller Kendall Haven seeks to inspire, teach, and lead with the power of story structure. With over thirty years of storytelling experience, he has spoken to audiences around the world. He has published thirty books and numerous articles.[1]

Prolific writer and expert storyteller, Kendall Haven intermingles science and story in such a way that the two become one. Haven seeks to inspire, motivate, teach, and lead with the power of story structure.

Haven recognizes the power of story and sets out to prove its effectiveness through rigorous tests of science. Haven began the process of analyzing data from sixteen fields of scientific research: neural biology, developmental psychology, neural linguistics, clinical psychology, cognitive sciences, information theory, neural net modeling, education theory, knowledge management theory, anthropology, organization theory, narratology, medical science, narrative therapy, and, of course, storytelling, and writing.[2] According to Haven, our brains are hardwired to "automatically think, understand, and remember through stories."[3] He says that "applying the science of story is the key to the art of effective communication for anyone who needs to inform, inspire, or educate."

BOOK SUMMARY



In Story Proof: The Science behind the Startling Power of Story, Haven seeks to (1) define story since it can be such a nebulous concept and (2) prove the value of story to benefit anyone wanting to effectively communicate, motivate, or create a sense of belonging in a community (p. viii).

Haven writes that the human mind relies upon story structure as the "primary roadmap for understanding, making sense of remembering, and planning our lives" (p. vii); thus, his goal is to prove that stories are the "bedrock of management, leadership, education, outreach, and general communication efforts" (p. viii). The book is about "story", not about aspects of story. The reader waits expectantly through research data, anecdotes, scientific definitions, explanations of brain mapping, evolutionary processes, and nearly eighty pages before Haven finally provides his definition for story as, "A detailed, character-based narration of a character's struggles to overcome obstacles and reach an important goal" (p. 79). He emphasizes that dictionaries use a plot-driven definition, while story is a character-driven narrative.

Story Proof is an inclusive look at the role of story in effective communication. It includes both the oral and print aspects of communication. Utilizing five elements that provide story structure (character, intent, actions, struggles, and details), Haven proves that story structure is not hard to learn and if the reader applies these principles, communication will become more effective (p. 75-76). He utilizes quantitative and qualitative research, along with anecdotal examples, to demonstrate the power of story.

Haven confesses that he is not an unbiased researcher, but challenges the reader to examine the scientific proof that substantiates the power of story.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, Story Smarts, examines arguments for the power of story, as well as how to define story and know the mechanics behind the brain's development of story. Haven states, "Stories are our universal storehouse of knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, passions, dreams, imaginations, and vision" (p. 13). The universality of these qualities is what enables a person to draw into the redemptive value of story (p. 80).

The second part, *Story Proof*, utilizes anecdotes that provide evidence for the value of story. Here, Haven draws the reader into the drama of story. Some of the stories include a high school music teacher, a corporate lecturer on knowledge management, a corporate staff developer, and a primary grade storytelling program leader.

Ultimately, each person described finds success because the power of story proves to be a connector to the content and people. "A well-chosen story creates relevance and context" for each person differently, with the end result of people working together in community (p. 84).

Essentially, Haven's research demonstrates that using stories improves comprehension, logical thinking, meaning, enthusiasm, literacy, language mastery, memory retention, and more.

CRITICAL REVIEW

For anyone seeking to communicate as an educator, minister, pastor, leader, manager, or friend, Story Proof provides insight into the research and value of story. The reader will quickly recognize that story is a method proven to benefit both the teller and hearer alike.

The section debunking the myths of story strengthens any storyteller. According to Haven, people often view information presented in story format with suspicion (p. 15). Yet any good storyteller will show you that a story can influence the hearer at the deepest level without ever pointing a finger since "we remember stories best" (p. 123). Story structure is quite effective in communicating principles and precepts related to a given subject and provides a flexible framework to communicate truth or fiction (p. 123).

A word of warning: although Haven remains unbiased as he examines story through the sixteen venues of science, his scientific lens compels him to communicate through the vocabulary and mindset of his expertise. The biblical worldview reader must remember that Haven seeks to provide a scientific framework for story and that his usage of phrases such as the "evolution of story" and "mind mapping as a part of the Darwinian development of the evolution of the mind" do not deter from the facts imparted about the effectiveness of story (18%, p. 24). The reader might consider mentally inserting the word "creation" and "Creator" in place of words suggesting evolution or the evolutionary process.

The scientific evidence supporting the value of mind-mapping through story is also supported from a biblical worldview. Consider Dr. George Hunter's statement:

> When someone uses storying, he or she is on solid and useful ground. The Bible, after all, is not a series of theological abstractions or even a treasure of texts to be memorized. Its framework is the Grand Narrative of God's redemptive involvement with the human race, and most of the episodes in that Narrative are micro-narratives—from the story of Abraham to the parables of Jesus. When we learn and tell the Story and the stories, we more vividly recall the texts, truth-claims, and teachings.[4]

According to Haven, "Story is the way of structuring content in order to engage, enhance memory and meaning" (p. 15). This process of mental-mapping provides a useful tool. What better context than through the word of God? Because storying allows the hearer to experience the Story personally, the hearer

will remember and reproduce the story of the gospel from his or her own "heart language."[5]

Because "the brain converts raw experience into story form and then considers, ponders, remembers, and acts on the self-created story and not the actual input experience" (p. 24), biblical teachers need to incorporate aspects of storying into the presentation of God's word; this creates an atmosphere for spiritual transformation in the individual and the community. Moreover, Haven reminds the reader that story structure builds community, which also prepares the hearer for life change. There are, in fact, authors who write from a biblical worldview who support the effectiveness of story as well.

Christine Dillon's *Telling the Gospel through Story: Evangelism that Keeps Hearers Wanting More* provides insight into the conversation of story. She illustrates how story makes it easy to open the door for conversations on spiritual matters and deals with the myth that stories are only for children.

Max Lucado's *God's Story, Your Story: When His Becomes Yours* demonstrates how personal stories mesh with God's redemptive story, emphasizing the healing side of God's story.

Doug Pagitt's *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* prepares the ministry leader to communicate in a method which gathers the community into dialogue that is both real and relevant.

John Walsh's *The Art of Storytelling: Easy Steps to Presenting an Unforgettable Story* provides best practices for story presentation and structure, supporting Haven's theory that the use of structure will increase comprehension and meaning.

Jerry Wiles shares in *No Greater Joy: Sharing Your Faith through Stories and Questions* that stories bridge the barriers to the gospel message.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, Haven provides the reader with an essential tool to understand the science behind story. He also provides the structure with which to craft a great story and challenges the reader to develop the art of story in his or her own unique way. Truly, all communicators need to rethink their perception of story, for the science behind story proves powerful (p. 16).

[1] Kendall Haven, My Story: Bio and Awards, sec. 3-4. Accessed November 28, 2012 from www.kendallhaven.com/bio.htm.

[2] Kendall Haven, Applying the Science of Story to the Art of Communication, sec. 2. Accessed November 28, 2012 from www.kendallhaven.com/bio.htm.

[3] Ibid.

[4] George Hunter, Email dialogue. January 11, 2010.

[5] Avery Willis, *Following Jesus Series*. Internet Media Overview download. Accessed January 1, 2010 fromwww.fjseries.org/low/storying.html.

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