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Orality Journal

... came Fresh

**Delivery of
Training
in a
Digiphrenic
World**

**Wu • Macalinao • Overstreet • Handley • LeFever
Petersen • Terry • Trinh**



The Seven Disciplines of Orality



Courtesy of Dr. Chuck Madinger who leads Global Impact Mission and serves on the International Orality Network's Leadership Team facilitating the Research Task Force.

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

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Cover Photo

This lone shepherd was near Bethlehem with his lone sheep. He was distracted by his phone, the tourists and the little sheep, which was still trying to get away. Shepherding as a way of life has witnessed the pre-printing era, the printing age, and now is mentally engaged in the digital world. We introduce a word made popular by Douglas Rushkoff: digiphrenic, a compound of “digital + phrenic” resulting in digiphrenic.

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you,
my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psalm 63:1

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have
no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without
money and without cost.

Isaiah 55:1

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a
loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living
water will flow from within him.”

John 7:37--38

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as
crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the
middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the
tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 22:1—2

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

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Editor's Note

Samuel E. Chiang

Digiphrenia and Our Worldview

The kids sat there with undivided attention and full participation to the proceedings of graduation ceremony within the church setting. We worshipped; but it was the children and early teens who led us. We prayed; but it was all led by young teens that prayed and cried out to God from their hearts. God's Spirit was there in the midst of the service.

I sat there fully bewildered and appreciative to see children and early teens that are spiritually mature beyond their physical age. This scene was repeated from place to place. This is a slice of an image of the Church in Liberia that shall remain with me; yet I am struggling with dissonances within me. How is it that the children and youths in other cultures can become so distracted, so high maintenance, and so unappreciative of the Word of God? How can non-formal and formal training be delivered so as to have impact?

Time

In a fascinating and not so easy to read book (due to longish chapters), Douglas Rushkoff's *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*,ⁱ he curates the culture of the West that is accelerated through technology, reexamines our cultural assumptions (including the function of time), and derives new words to fit the new century.

Rushkoff explains that because of the proliferation of multiple screens that is tethered to the digitally mediated social networks, we are divided in our attention. We are living in the tension of a real present narrative (one that is bound by your location and time), and a false present of digital information (which is happening elsewhere). This struggle is a "Present Shock" (thus, one of the theories supporting the name of the book). Hence, a new condition exits in the mind and body, digiphrenia: a disoriented condition of mental activity.ⁱⁱ

digital + Phrenia = digiphrenia

The author goes on to explain that "time in the digital era is no longer linear but disembodied and associative. The past is not something behind us

on the timeline but dispersed through the sea of information.”ⁱⁱⁱ There are many examples in life of the author’s assertion, but something happened recently that made me reflect deeply about time, disembodiment, and associative. During FIFA World Cup soccer, I was in Chicago and having my watch fixed. The lady serving me was from Syria and she had her internet radio on at the same time. I inquired about the content and why the announcer was so excited speaking in Arabic; she told me that she was listening to a station in Jordan on the internet that was describing her favorite team, Brazil, who was playing at that moment.

There are time zone differences between North and South America, and there are time zone differences between Brazil and Jordan. At that very moment she was fixing my chronographic watch that is axial driven, and at the same time she was listening to digital reporting from eight time zones away about a game that is played that is only two time zones away. Time: disembodied, but associative! Digiphrenia at work!

Could it be that the technologically driven West is operating much more on divided attention even to the present task at hand that we are creating habits which embrace the habits of digiphrenia, and inviting consistent interruptions?

Is it possible that our modeling in the work place, meals with families, friends and colleagues, and in group activities, we are so accustomed to time, disembodied, but associative through digitally mediated social networks, that we are practicing digiphrenia? And we have extended this into the Church!

Screens

But let us take this one step further. The existing condition of digiphrenia is further accelerated by multiple screens and this has consequences on our worldview. When we are working with one “screen” for decades, and that primarily of the television, it was simply a toleration of an addition to the family. However, when the traditional understanding of “family” started to change, that singular screen became a welcome addition to the family as it was able to baby-sit latch key kids. Fast forward into the 21st century, and with multiple screens in our midst from smartphones, to digital devices including computers, to the iPads,

TV screens within a screen, we have digital screens everywhere. We are surrounded by multiple digital screens.

Those screens are able to mediate social networks digitally. Each social network platforms have different values, voices and opinions of peers, friends, acquaintances, and the general public, all straddling huge age differences. The family units (blended, traditional, and any other combinations thereof) cannot escape this, and in fact, welcomes it. This has a large impact on our worldview!

Previously our worldview was determined by our parents, with a sense of guilt-innocence (rule-centric), which flowed from the authority of the Word of God, and is reinforced by the social network that was formed in activities with the local parish.

Now our worldview is determined by our various family units, with different worldviews that is digitally mediated through social networks; we are driven less by a sense of guilt-innocence, but more so by a worldview of shame-honor.^{iv} Where previously we were raised by two parents, now we are raised by a community (digital and those who are “present”). Our code of conduct is different.

Two different pictures: children in Liberia, devoid of technology, and able to lead their own worship services with spiritual maturity beyond their physical years; children in the West, drenched in technologies, would probably be challenged to lead their own worship service.

Two different communities: children in Liberia raised by a community as is the tradition in Africa; children in the West becoming raised by a community of those who are physically present and digitally mediated and fast becoming the new norm in society.

Two different training systems: children in Liberia received non-formal theological education in a much lesser “formal structured” textual transmission are able to “theologize” it through music, songs, skits, drawings, and dramas; children in the West receiving non-formal theological education in a slightly more “formal structured” textual transmission might have challenges to do the same.



Two Different Training Systems



Similar worldviews? Shame and Honor, of which this Journal will visit more often into the future, is a worldview that has been well served in the anthropological realm, but massively underserved in the biblical and theological research and writing domain. Yet, the Bible was written and given to a culture that lived in the shame-honor codes. Might it be that the “syncing” of the worldviews of the West and of the Majority Church will finally cause us to revisit shame-honor worldview of the Bible?

In this issue, we explore both formal and non-formal delivery of theological education. We will note together that because the non-formal training piece is by far the largest in the delivery and distribution of theological education, we have primarily focused on that larger slice of the theological education pie.

We also recognize that in the delivery of non-formal and formal theological education, we must encounter worldviews. Jackson Wu looks at the delivery of theological education in light of the shame-honor worldview, and Romer Macalinao explores one institution in the Philippines is encountering elements of non-formal training in a formal setting. In contrast, Mark Overstreet’s article looks at leaders development in highly oral contexts and in non-formal setting. In a further contrast, Joe Handley’s Leaders Development “lab” invites Kathay Oyama to describe leaders training in an extremely high literate context in the country of Japan. Marlene LeFever looks at the delivery of training amongst the 4-14 year-old age group. Michelle Petersen’s article looks at how to turn training into high impact engagement with scripture; full of hints and steps, she shows how high impact can take place through solid consideration of worldviews and orality principles. We are grateful to J.O. Terry who thoughtfully responds to some frequently asked questions by new storytellers. Finally, we are happy to introduce Paul Trinh, whose extensive experiences will allow us to see the application of storytelling in everyday life. He will also be providing a regular blog at orality.net.

On the journey together,

Samuel E. Chiang
From Monrovia, Liberia

ⁱDouglas Rushkoff, “*Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*”. New York, Penguin Group, 2013.

ⁱⁱIbid, p. 75.

ⁱⁱⁱIbid, p. 85.

^{iv}The discussion of each worldview can range from a day’s seminar, to a course, to a program, and to doctoral studies. My purpose is to simply provide some level of exposure. For initial solid in-depth discussion please see Hannes Wiher’s paper here: WIHER, Hannes, *Shame and Guilt: A Key to Cross-Cultural Ministry*, Bonn, Culture and Science Publications, 2003, 521 p., downloadable at the following link: www.wearesources.org/publications.aspx



Theological Education in Honor-Shame Cultures: Why Worldview Matters for Oral Learners?

Jackson Wu

Jackson Wu, Ph.D, teaches theology and missiology in a seminary for Chinese church leaders. Previously, he also worked as a church planter. In addition to his published works, he maintains a blog at jacksonwu.org

I. Contextualization Answers “Why?”

In recent years, evangelicals have gained greater appreciation for the needs of oral learners. In particular, people increasingly realize the importance of storying in theological instruction. This contrasts traditional, reading intensive methods. In effect, evangelical ministries, such as the International Orality Network (ION), shift our focus from the “what” question to the “how” question. ¹Rather than debating the content of our message (“what”), we now consider the way (“how”) we convey the truth.

Although communication and application are critical, they are not most fundamental to contextualization.² As I have argued elsewhere, contextualization begins at the level of interpretation, which is dependent on worldview. How often do we overlook the cultural lens through which we

reach our theological conclusions? We desperately need humility to acknowledge how denominational and organizational subcultures can mislead us into “theological syncretism,” whereby we confuse the gospel with our theological tradition.

We address worldviews by asking “why” questions. Worldview questions involve our rationale (Why do we believe this?) and heart (Why is this important?). We need to consider a number of more basic issues before asking, “What stories should we tell?” (information) or “How do we tell them?” (technique).

“Why” concerns understanding; thus, it determines and shapes application (i.e. what? how?).

Oral cultures tend to share certain characteristics. For instance, many oral learners have an “honor-shame” worldview. By contrast, western missionaries are likely to emphasize themes like law and guilt. Even if the

**Oral cultures
tend to share
certain
characteristics.**

latter have good doctrine (“what” should we believe?) and strong communication skills (“how” to tell a story), a more basic problem remains. They do not speak the same “worldview language.” Therefore, missionaries may not answer the key “why” questions that matter most to oral learners. Worse still is that the missionaries potentially convey the notion that the Bible mainly speaks about Western concerns.

In this paper, I will briefly answer two important “why” questions. First, why do oral learners think the way they do? Second, why are honor and shame important for gospel ministry? I will conclude by suggesting a few applications for theological education.

II. Why Oral Learners Want Face

Western evangelicals tend to have a negative or superficial understanding of honor and shame.³ Some think “honor” is nothing more than a medieval idea. Others only associate it with honor killings. For many missionaries in China, the concept of “face” is essentially synonymous with pride. Many who study anthropology have the idea that honor and shame

are “Eastern” ideas. Conversely, Western cultures emphasize law and guilt. Some would assert that this is due to the influence of Christianity in Western history. In contemporary society, modern psychology has led people to regard shame as a purely negative idea that should be eliminated.

Beyond a Superficial Understanding of Honor and Shame

There are significant problems with these pessimistic but typical perspectives. At some level, there is a seed of truth to each of the above impressions. Nevertheless,

Honor and shame, whether we realize it or not, drive nearly every social sphere.

people ignore a few plain facts. First, honor and shame are human categories. Westerners simply use different symbols and language to express their own view of honor and shame. People use social media, particularly Facebook, as tools to compete for and save “face.” Honor and shame, whether we realize it or not, drive nearly every social sphere. This is why we use respectful titles (e.g. “doctor” or “professor”), name drop, wear the clothing of our favorite sports team, seek other people’s approval, tell white lies, and take certain jobs.

Second, honor and shame are essential themes in the grand biblical narrative.⁴ God’s plan for creation centers on his glory (Ps 8:4–6; 19:1; Isa 43:7; Hab 2:14; Eph 1:12, 14; Phil 2:11). Conversely, the fundamental problem with the world is defined in terms of God’s honor and human shame.

Even in Romans, *prima facie* a law-oriented book, unrighteousness and sin are explicitly explained in terms of honor and shame (cf. Rom 1:21–27; 2:23–24, 29; 3:23).⁵ Salvation consists in the Father imputing Christ’s glory to us (John 17:22; cf. Rom 8:17, 28–30). According to Jesus, we only have true faith when we seek face more from God than from others (John 5:44). Everything from ethics (Matt 15:4–6; Rom 12:10; 1 Cor 10:31; Pet 1:7, 17) to eschatology (John 12:26; Rom 2:7; 10:11; Rev 21:26) concerns honor and shame.

In the face of these observations, people have typically prioritized the law motif. No doubt this is due partially to the many lawyers-turned-theologians in church history (e.g. Tertullian, Calvin, etc.). People forget that “law” is every bit as “anthropological” as honor-shame. Although Christians

might not teach “wrong” doctrine, the Church’s silence on key themes (like honor-shame) *de facto* results in the piecemeal deconstruction of biblical theology. Inevitably, people generally conform to collective opinion, fearful of being excluded if they publically disagreed with the traditions of their theological ancestors. Our exegetical muscles atrophy, having too long depended on the support of (western) systematic theology. Consequently, we compromise the gospel when we settle for truth.⁶

it is not surprising that Scripture consistently uses honor-shame related themes, which pervade all world cultures.

In the Bible, God reveals himself to all nations. Therefore, it is not surprising that Scripture consistently uses honor-shame related themes, which pervade all world cultures. In order to be fully “biblical”—and indeed “human,” we will need a more holistic view of Scripture, one that uses an honor-shame worldview lens.⁷

If missionaries want to reach oral learners, they must be willing to lose face within the evangelical subculture. They will resist the relativistic tendency to tell the biblical story and objectify theology only from within their own cultural view. One’s worldview has implicit assumptions that shape his or her

“implicit gospel.” An “implicit gospel” is the message people hear as a result of the way a speaker, consciously or unconsciously, frames a gospel presentation.

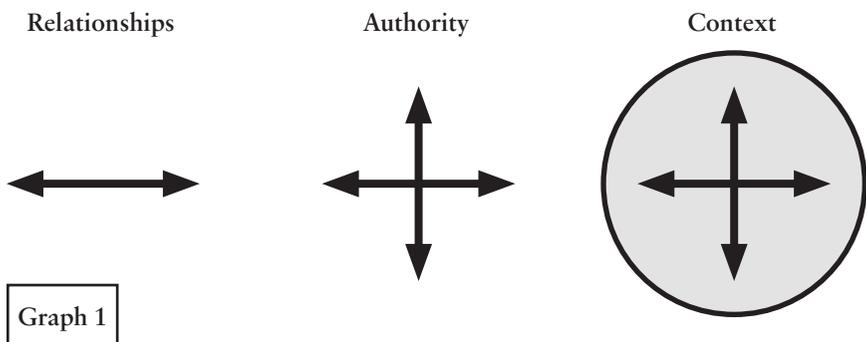
When working among oral learners, we face a latent danger when choosing the stories, themes, and method of our presentations (whether in evangelism or theological education). Due to selectivity and silence, we could inadvertently “judaize” our listeners, even while speaking the truth. This happens when we present the biblical message in ways that compel others to give priority unnecessarily to a foreign cultural lens in order to be regarded as a faithful Christian.

Three Characteristics of Honor-Shame Cultures

First of all, honor-shame cultures place a high value on relationships, represented by the horizontal arrow in graph 1 below. Identity is determined based on one’s similarity to others

(e.g. shared ancestors, traditions, land, language, etc.). Westerners more frequently emphasize differences or uniqueness. One gets “face” (i.e. honor, praise) by conforming to the group. Put plainly, a person’s “face” refers to the way others regard him or her. Having face is a vital means of protecting relationships and ensuring one’s own security (cf. Gen 11:4).

“Face” is important both in determining one’s sense of belonging and maintaining harmony. It is an inherently public concept. Because people from face-cultures tend to prioritize the collective over the individual, it is important to distinguish insiders from outsiders. Loyalty to one’s in-group thus is a critical virtue. Ethical behavior arises from a sense of shame and concern for relationships. Moral decisions are grounded on more than the fear of punishment consequent of breaking impersonal laws issued by those whom one does not even know.



Second, oral cultures have a high respect for authority (represented by the vertical arrow in graph 1 above). Formal and informal hierarchies exist within any society. Social status confers on a person certain roles and responsibilities that must be maintained for the sake of personal face and group harmony. Children, for example, are obligated to show filial piety to their parents and ancestors. The head of the group is responsible for protecting the honor of those whom he represents.

Finally, oral learners are highly sensitive to context (noted by the circle in graph 1). After all, face is always ascribed and achieved within a relational context. They humbly recognize that one's understanding of truth depends on his or her perspective. Thus, it is generally wise to follow tradition. In this way, stories, rituals, and symbols enable people to learn from various historical contexts. They convey value systems that are pragmatic without being individualistic. Oral learners are not inclined towards abstract religions and moral theories that separate individuals from particular relationships and concrete situations.

III. Why the Gospel Is Framed By Honor And Shame⁸

Western theology does not typically reflect an honor-shame worldview. As a rule, evangelistic presentations focus on the individual, not the community. They accentuate guilt and law-metaphors (e.g. God as judge), sometimes to the point that certain concepts hardly

carry their original sense as found in the Scripture.⁹ Naturally, this approach leads people to use narrower selections of biblical texts, such as Romans and Galatians. Appeals are often made to time. Thus, one hears this type

Western theology does not typically reflect an honor-shame worldview. As a rule, evangelistic presentations focus on the individual, not the community.

of question "If you died tonight, would you have eternal life?" In this environment, honor and shame is regularly "downplayed as mere anthropology or psychology, secondary to the 'real' problem of law and guilt."¹⁰

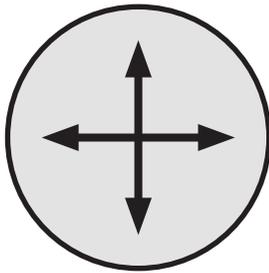
The gospel announces an entirely new worldview, one that both transcends and includes elements from every human culture. Not surprisingly, gospel presentations in the Bible appeal to a distinct overarching narrative that spans the entire canon.¹¹ In Christ, the one true Creator God establishes his

kingdom and restores the human family in keeping with his covenant promises.

Without exception, the biblical writers consistently use three themes to frame the gospel.¹² They are kingdom, creation, and covenant. Respectively, these themes highlight God's sovereignty, the scope of his kingdom, and his solution to the world's problem. They also correspond to the three characteristics of honor-shame

fallen human cultures? It is not mere anthropological categories, like shame, guilt, fear, etc. The gospel overturns the world's view of honor and shame. With respect to authority, Christians esteem God as Father and Christ as king. With respect to context, they have a renewed perspective on the world and the meaning of history. With respect to relationships, they identify even with "outsiders" because God's family consists of all nations.

Fallen Worldview



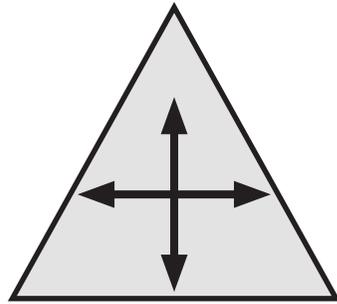
Graph 2

cultures discussed above. God reigns (authority). The entire world is his realm (context). Through covenant (relationship), the one true King brings reconciliation to the world.

A Gospel Worldview of Authority, Context, and Relationships

What distinguishes a gospel worldview from those found within

Gospel Worldview



A Christian worldview is reoriented and thus resized. This is depicted by graph 2 above. Believers envision the entire world as a temple in which God will dwell with his people (cf. Rev 21:1–3).¹³ Their scope of concern is not restricted merely to their own social group according to the flesh, whether money, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. Christians seek face based on a different view of the world.

Honor and shame help us make better sense of the world and thus the gospel. Oral learners are more likely to seek ascribed honor (based on position, title, relationship, birth, etc.). They value similarity and conformity to the collective.

Faith in the Bible essentially concerns one's specific sense of "face," one's reason for boasting (Rom 2:17, 23; 1 Cor 1:29, 31; 2 Cor 11:30–12:9). Jesus asks his opponents, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44; cf. Rom 2:29). Christ changes our answer to the question, "Whom do you want to please?" Now, we seek above all the acceptance of God and his people (cf. Rom 14:18; 15:31).

The world's problem and solution are depicted in terms of relationships. The nations fell when those at Babel sought to "make a name for themselves" (Gen 11:4). In contrast, the LORD "preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'" (Gal 3:8; citing Gen 12:3). In Acts 17:22–31, why does Paul use creation to frame his gospel presentation? He challenges Greek pride by exposing

their "ignorance." Because God is the "Lord of heaven and earth," all nations should repent, reconsider social boundaries, and recognize God as the Father of the human family. The gospel fundamentally transforms one's group identification because it re-categorizes "insiders" and "outsiders."¹⁴ In this way, believers can resist the allure of what C. S. Lewis called the "Inner Ring."¹⁵ In short, a different perspective of honor-shame redefines relationships.

Honor and shame help us make better sense of the world and thus the gospel. Oral learners are more likely to seek ascribed honor (based on position, title, relationship, birth, etc.). They value similarity and conformity to the collective. On the other hand, Westerners are more concerned with achieved honor. They emphasize difference and individuality. For example, Christians traditionally focus their teaching to resist "works-righteousness," the idea that people can somehow "earn" salvation. This is simply one expression of "achieved honor." What if an oral learner is not seeking achieved honor? Instead, what if we addressed more basic worldview problems related to authority, face, and relationships?

IV. Theological Education For Oral Learners

How do we contextualize theological education for oral learners? Contextualization requires a transformation of perspective (i.e. worldview). It is more than a methodology to translate cultural ideas. We get ahead of ourselves when we focus on good doctrine (“what?”) and storying (“how?”) yet neglect to consider how worldview influences the story we tell.

Accordingly, this essay suggests we rethink how we understand the relationship between worldview, theology, and story. If we don’t read the biblical Story through an honor-shame lens, one’s theology might be true but seemingly irrelevant to listeners. We need to understand why oral learners see the world the way they do. To do so, we too must be changed. Only then can we tell the biblical story from within the worldview of oral learners.

Recommended Applications

First, theological education among oral learners needs to prioritize biblical theology before systematic theology. Methodologically, this is intuitive since interpretation precedes the synthesis of ideas. However, this will not be easy to

implement. From my experience, most missionaries cannot clearly distinguish between biblical theology and systematic theology. A few years ago, I spoke with two people charged with developing the curriculum for a seminary in Asia. One had a PhD in missions; the other a PhD in evangelism. Yet, they thought that biblical theology was simply theology that is “biblical.”¹⁶

There are systemic problems to be considered. Western seminaries (and those they influence) have largely de-emphasized exegesis, as evidenced by the trend against requiring biblical languages for graduation. A person’s systematic theology thus becomes the lens through which he or she interprets Scripture. Prioritizing systematic theology is like someone assuming the answer before hearing the question. In contrast, in doing biblical theology, we attempt to develop a worldview, not simply take up the worldview of our denominational subculture.

Starting with systematic theology subtly undermines contextualization. This is because systematic theology begins with the reader’s questions (What is the church? What is salvation, etc.). These concerns arise from

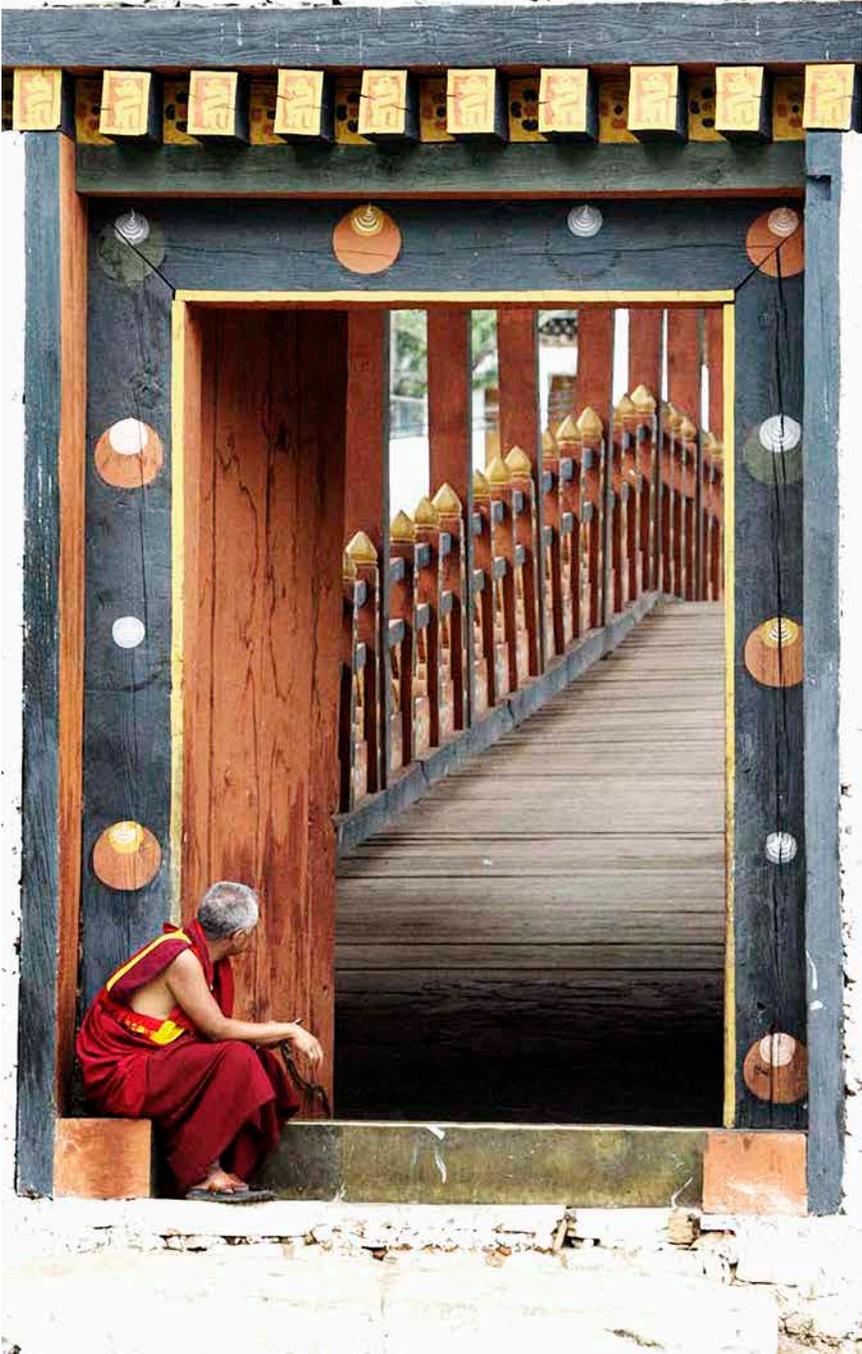
particular historical and cultural contexts rather than the biblical text itself. Consequently, instead of telling the grand biblical Story on its own terms, we reframe and explain the Bible in ways implicitly oriented towards our worldview. Systematic theology not only can become a quick substitute for exegesis, it also creates unnecessary complexity. The complexity of the biblical story is preferable to that of a systematic theology.

To illustrate the point, consider the meaning of God's righteousness. Systematic theology texts typically contrast God's love with his righteousness, which connotes his wrath or judgment against sin. Now imagine someone hears Ps 143:1–2, 11, "Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you . . . For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!" If listeners begin with the assumption that God's righteousness mainly concerns wrath or judgment, they will be unable to make sense of these verses. Thus, they will either ignore the passage or create a theological system to compensate for their assumptions.

Second, we need to evaluate the relationship between teaching methods, student response, and authority. Due to their reverence for authority and ancestors, many oral learner cultures are prone to accept uncritically whatever a teacher says or whatever is considered "traditional." For instance, if students don't know how to interpret the Bible, they have little choice but to accept the conclusions of the older or more educated teacher. Additionally, if teachers string lessons and stories together according to an implicit systematic framework, they infuse unnatural complexity into the material. This leaves students confused and overly dependent on the teacher's authority.

Tradition can likewise usurp biblical authority. Given Christianity's prominence in Western history, this practically means that students might baptize doctrinal emphases and methods as "Christian" when in fact they are merely "western." Sadly, missionaries may then confuse the fact that locals adopt their ideas or practices with genuine contextualization.

It follows that teachers should also distinguish normal and normative, particularly when using narrative.



Hence, students need to know that wisdom literature and historical books cannot be interpreted and applied in the same way as epistles. Likewise, when interpreting and applying the four Gospels, we should note two distinct contexts. At one level, there is the immediate story (concerning Jesus and his disciples). However, we must not forget that the biblical writers have also crafted their Gospels to suit their audience. Therefore, we need to consider what a writer prescribes whenever the text describes a command from Jesus to his disciples or other Jews.

Third, we need to rethink strategies that reflect an ethos of pragmatism. There is an unmistakable emphasis on speed within missionary subculture, which stresses “rapid reproduction”, reproducibility, and 3-minute evangelistic presentations. This sort of ethos is counter to worldview change. Theological education, on the other hand, is concerned with DNA. Such training requires long-term vision. It defines success over a period of years, not a few lessons. Discipleship that is truly “obedience based” involves head, heart, and hands; it cannot be reduced to learning set doctrines or counting how many times a person shares the gospel in a week.

There is a more subtle danger with “theological pragmatism.” Theological pragmatism presents students with a worldview that distorts a biblical perspective. According to one version of this thinking, people only need to learn theology inasmuch as it helps them do evangelism. If it doesn’t help people “get saved,” it is dismissed as “abstract” theology. This reaction frequently comes from more conservative circles of the church. Seminaries and organizations need to ask themselves, “Does our theological curriculum favor one aspect of Christian ministry and theology? Does it actually balance the range of priorities found in Scripture?”

Nothing is more practical than worldview. How we see the world affects everything else we do. Worldviews resist systematization because they are full of ambiguity. Evangelicals have much to learn from oral peoples, who are far more comfortable with nuance than typical western intellectuals.

Thinking is a part of Christian worship.¹⁷ Jesus said that the greatest commandment is “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). I have heard people insist

that non-Western Christians are not able to do rigorous analysis. I fear this attitude can easily lead teachers to patronize students. In fact, logic and critical thinking are not “Western” inventions; they belong to humanity.

Theological education among oral learners must not settle for methods that only utilize memorization. We cannot forsake analytical thinking just as western seminaries should not forsake memorization in their curriculum. Among oral learners, part of the solution might come in the ways we convey logic within our stories. Perhaps, we could emphasize a few more key words like “therefore,” “because,” etc. (logical conjunctions) as a way to help learners clearly connect ideas. We want to help people “think the Bible’s thoughts after it.”

Fourth, how might honor and shame influence the way we do storytelling? To begin, we need to recognize that emphasis is an aspect of meaning. In other words, we should not be content merely to find out whether an idea is right or wrong. Instead, we want to pay more attention to discerning and communicating the major and minor points of a biblical text. (“Major” and “minor” do not mean “important” and “unimportant.”)

Not only is this important for biblical fidelity, it also helps oral learners, who are quick to pick up on subtle implications.

The way we *frame* a story conveys some kind of worldview.¹⁸ Story selection is only one aspect of the process. One’s terms and metaphors derive their meaning from their context. The first principle of biblical interpretation is “Context is king.” No one is more equipped to apply this principle than oral learners. Countless assumptions are built into the context of a story. If we are not intentional about framing our presentation, we will inevitably piecemeal our teaching in accordance with our own agenda, theological tradition, or systematic theology. Biblically speaking, even the gospel is consistently framed by three key themes (discussed above); other doctrines and motifs are subject to this framework.

Consider how the biblical authors present their message. In an Ancient Near Eastern context, Genesis 1, as a whole, paints a picture of a Temple over which God reigns.¹⁹ Both John’s Gospel and Colossians 1 depict Christ as bringing about a “new creation.” Romans 5–8 uses Israel’s exodus narrative to frame a theology of redemption.²⁰

In addition to framework, how one begins a story has disproportionate influence over what follows. Many modern evangelistic tools, such as Creation-to-Christ (C2C), begin with the Fall of Adam and of demons, despite the fact that no gospel presentation in the Bible starts in this fashion. Even though demonology is a highly speculative part of theology, its placement gives it a degree of prominence not found in Scripture.

It will be much easier to do theological education when concepts belong to a structure that is coherent, concrete, and reflective of the biblical narrative. Thus, instead of saying that God is “omniscient” and “omnipotent,” why not consider how the Bible describes him? Rather than using abstractions, writers typically speak of the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” “the LORD who brought [Israel] out of Egypt.” These descriptors highlight his works in historical and relational terms.

Fifth, one asks, “How do we think about this in a classroom setting?” We need to think both in terms of

the students’ worldview and unity of Scripture. In my experience, I find it helpful to design course lessons in ways that integrate various themes yet clearly demonstrates an overarching coherency. Michael Bird, a biblical theologian, has recently attempted to do this when writing a systematic theology textbook.²¹ This year, I am using biblical theology to develop an ethics class oriented towards an honor-shame worldview, which emphasizes face and relationship (*guanxi*). In the process, a more direct relationship between the gospel and ethics arises than I find in typical approaches. I hope to provide students with a lens through which to make ethical decisions, not simply abstract principles and difficult-to-apply rules. By properly framing our lessons, we enable listeners to more easily retain and relate vast amounts of information.

How do we help students see this framework? When I first began teaching, I presented the material like a syllogism, establishing each point until I finally arrived at a conclusion. At that point, students could see the “big picture” of the lesson or course. However, with

It will be much easier to do theological education when concepts belong to a structure that is coherent, concrete, and reflective of the biblical narrative.

this approach, students get lost in the details because they lack a clear context or framework to organize the information. I did not want to forsake critical thinking and simply assert conclusions to be memorized for the test. Therefore, I have made the following adjustment. From the very first class, I give students the “big picture” of the course. In this way, they can see how all the material will eventually fit together. Throughout the course, I constantly remind students of this framework that brings coherence to all they are learning.

A number of visual tools nicely supplement this sort of teaching. Many people have listed things like liturgy, dance, and music. Additionally, teachers should consider drawing pictures and graphs that link various strands of thought.²² Although analogies can be helpful if used thoughtfully, they still present oversimplified worldviews. People are especially prone to lose sight of their function.

How might an honor-shame culture influence the way we manage a classroom? Many students, fearful of losing face, are hesitant to ask questions and suggest answers. When teachers ask a question to

the entire class, they often meet a long initial period of silence. Sometimes teachers will simply need to endure the long silence until someone speaks; other times they may need to rephrase the question. In order to get students talking, I have students break up into small groups for very brief intervals, perhaps 3–5 minutes. They are more willing to talk with each other. Also, I warn them that I might ask 1 or 2 groups to give their answers; therefore, they need to choose a spokesman. This warning helps them mentally prepare to speak publically. It also motivates them to think of better answers.

I suggest a few ideas regarding assessment. Since oral learners are good at memorization, they tend merely to regurgitate what teachers say but without having a deep understanding of their answer. Therefore, I have adjusted the way I assess learning. I now make sure I ask integrated questions that cannot be memorized but rather presuppose memorized information. Furthermore, teachers can give group grades to selected projects. Group projects mirror real life situations. Students learn to self-manage, communicate with others, and work together to solve problems.

Sixth, how do we train missionaries who work among oral peoples? To begin, we need to reconsider how missiology and theology relate to one another. Missiology should be understood primarily as a sub-discipline of theology, not anthropology. In too many seminaries, there is a vast difference between the theology school and the missions school. Why is this? Theologians should learn about the world's cultures.²³ As I have already mentioned, missionaries desperately need biblical theology and exegesis. Both groups should become more familiar with cross-cultural theology.

In order to improve contextualization, we also need to train more generalists who are comfortable working across multiple disciplines. In Christian academia, hyper-specialization has become the norm. However, this does contribute to holistic worldview thinking. It atomizes the world into abstraction, ignoring ambiguity of the concrete. Ministry in honor-shame cultures requires more integrative thinkers.

Finally, we need a more comprehensive view of the gospel. Theological education starts with evangelism. One's understanding of the gospel establishes his or

her categories of thinking. It prioritizes theological topics and types of application. In short, the gospel frames one's view of the Bible. It reorients one's worldview. The gospel defines what Christians regard as honorable and shameful.

Teaching for the sake of worldview is more than swapping out terminology. Though a good beginning, it is not enough merely to say that Christ takes away shame (as opposed to sin). Our entire language of discourse will change as we simultaneously do two things: (1) shift our attention to the biblical metanarrative; (2) learn to empathize with the concerns of our listeners, having grasped the inner coherency of their worldview.

Do we have a superficial understanding of theological education among honor-shame cultures? This paper challenges us to take a new perspective on oral learners and ourselves. Our task is about more than "what" we should teach (content) or "how" to do it (technique). Teachers need a deeper level of understanding about the Bible, honor-shame cultures, and perhaps even themselves. Only then will oral learners receive training that is theologically faithful and educationally meaningful.

¹Cf. Samuel Chiang and Grant Lovejoy, eds., *Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, Hong Kong: Condeo Press, 2013.

²What follows is explained in Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*, Pasadena, Calif.: WCIUP, 2013, 10–68.

³*Ibid.*, 148–92.

⁴See chapters 4–5 of *Ibid.*, 148–292.

⁵Ironically, people have often settled for a superficial reading of “law,” overlooking its unmistakable implications for ethnicity, an important theme in many face-oriented cultures. *Ibid.*, 240, 281–92.

⁶Jackson Wu, “We Compromise the Gospel When We Settle for Truth: How ‘Right’ Interpretations Lead to ‘Wrong’ Contextualization,” *Global Missiology* 2, no. 10 (2013), n.p. Online: www.globalmissiology.org.

⁷This statement’s affirmation is not an implicit rejection of “legal” motifs.

⁸This claim is further developed in Jackson Wu, “Rewriting the Gospel for Oral Cultures: Why Honor and Shame are Essential to the Gospel Story.” Paper presented at the International Orality Network consultation. 8–9 July 2014. Houston Baptist University. Houston, Texas. This paper will be a chapter in the forthcoming *Beyond Literate Western Contexts: Honor & Shame and the Assessment of Orality Preference*, ION and Capstone Enterprises, Hong Kong.

⁹For discussion, see Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 224–29.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹For example, in Acts, gospel presentations consistently appeal to Israel’s story via the themes of creation, the Abrahamic promises, and the Davidic covenant.

¹²I fully develop this line of thought in a forthcoming book to be published by William Carey Library.

¹³See Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, Leicester, England: Apollos, 2004; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009.

¹⁴The point of Matt 25:31–46 is sometimes missed: how we treat Christ’s people is how we treat Christ. The passage is about more than helping the poor. I often hear people omit the phrase “my brothers” from v. 40, which says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

¹⁵For a summary and application of Lewis’ idea, see Andrew Cameron, “C. S. Lewis: Inner Circles and True Inclusion,” in *The Trials of Theology: Becoming a “Proven Worker” in a Dangerous Business*, ed. Andrew Cameron and Brian S. Rosner; Scotland: *Christian Focus*, 2009, 75–93.

¹⁶For a few introductions to the topic of “biblical theology,” see James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns*, Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2014; Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*, Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010.

¹⁷John Piper, *Think*, Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2011.

¹⁸Cf. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Atlanta, Ga.: Augsburg Fortress, 1992, 38–44. This important book illustrates the point from the perspective of New Testament studies.

¹⁹Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*; Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*.

²⁰Cf. N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002, 508–14.

²¹See Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2013. All doctrines are discussed with reference to the gospel.

²²For one example, see my model for teaching biblical theology, which can be downloaded at www.jacksonwu.org.

²³Wu, “*We Compromise the Gospel When We Settle for Truth.*”

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The Case Of Asia Graduate School Of Theology

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Challenges Facing Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST)

AGST faces a number of challenges in an attempt to place the Language and Culture Institute, an orality-focused program, in a degree-granting Formal Educational Institution (FEI) and in the context of Theological Education (TE).

Challenge 1: The culture of education and literacy in the Philippines. When the Spaniards first arrived in the Philippines, they were surprised to find out that the Filipinos had a higher literacy rate compared to Madrid (Spain). But that did not stop both Spaniards and Americans from bringing to the islands their educational system, which further reinforced the culture of education. Filipinos pride themselves in earning a diploma or a degree toward a profession. Thus, TE, in this regard, is one of those professions that in order to achieve, one must be enrolled in an FEI that is fully compliant with the requirements of the Department of Education.

At the end of the educational program, the person earns a degree and qualifies for certain job or profession. Graduates in TE from any FEI belong to a very small population, which can be described as being made up of ministers, missionaries, or sometimes like square pegs in round holes. The last situation is true with other degree holders. It is important in a culture of education to show proof of having completed a degree. Although TE graduates belong to a small population, the nature and purpose of social participation is extremely significant; just think of assuming the responsibility for spiritual transformation and the perpetuation of Christian life and witness.

Challenge 2: The organizational and denominational mandate of FEI in TE. Educational programs among FEI in TE cater to a certain branding, which makes programs specialized, limited, inflexible, and protective of that branding. Programs are specialized because

they cater to the intentions of the organizations and denominations that undergird the FEI in TE.

Where organizations and denominations require an educational pathway for entering the professional ministry workforce, student recruitment for FEI in TE is assured. However, the student population is limited in number and institutions may compete with each other for more students. Keeping programs running, sufficiently funded, and with qualified students enrolled requires great balance. A success rate of an FEI in TE also reinforces inflexibility in making program changes, which in turn is also a protection of the school's branding. Self-evident in every FEI in TE is that branding. Regardless of any FEI in TE and their branding, orality is not in their programming radar. However, there is a way to address this, which leads to the next challenge.

Challenge 3: How to qualify the inclusion of reaching oral cultures in the mission mandate as a rallying point for FEI in TE. While it is widely held that the Church exists for missions and FEI in TE institutionally equips the people of God, there is a specific need to highlight the mechanism

in reaching oral cultures. To bring everyone to this level of understanding and agreement is the first line of thought in advocating for the inclusion of orality with FEI in TE. From here, images of unreached people groups can be showcased and the question of how to win them to the gospel naturally qualifies orality as one of the best ways to achieve global evangelization.

Of the many programs being offered, orality could naturally find its place in areas of intercultural studies and other mission programs. If organizations and denominations are committed in some way to missions, advocates of orality will have to define missions to include reaching oral cultures and from there make a commitment to include orality in their programs. A recent article in *The Evangelicals Today* has expressed this sentiment as well as in support of the Cape Town Commitment. The history of missions is replete with models of winning unreached people groups. The time has come for FEI in TE to seriously acknowledge orality as a frontier strategy in missions, affirming oral cultures and hastening cultural revitalization and spiritual transformation.

Challenge 4: Reframing an orality focused program in the context of

a global interest in the preservation of languages and cultures, which is being showcased by the United Nations and more recently by Google's the Endangered Languages Project. It is not easy for FEI in TE to immediately jump into this scene. They would have to deal with institutional legacy issues with their stakeholders and test their markets. If all went well, FEI in TE would enter this open door where graduates could win unreached people groups of the world. As a result, there would be the creation of a new career path, a new profession, and the development of a new resource pool of expert practitioners in language and culture. This would become a mission platform that would have acceptability even in restricted access countries.

Challenge 5: The value of the GloCal (global and local) recognition of the institution: the program and the graduates that will provide recognition, acceptability, and employability. While legal compliance may not be a problem at the local level, the standards could be challenging at the global level. To avoid the stigmatization of seminary graduates entering the secular world, some FEI in TE have traded the name of their schools to more neutral-sounding names. The

intentions are quite self-evident. However, it still lacks a global branding that provides recognition, acceptability, and employability. There are international accreditation and recognition organizations that could provide the Language and Culture Institute (LCI) and its graduates the recognition, acceptability, and employability among oral cultures in the unreached people groups of the world.

Assessment of Oral Preference Learners

The assessment of oral preference learners takes place on three facets: the program, the practicum, and the final product. This assessment is informed by the objectives of the LCI, namely: (1) evangelization of Bibleless UPG, (2) diffusion of translated oral Bible story sets, (3) development of local leaders, (4) commencement of written Bible translations, and (5) spawning of church-planting movements for the spiritual transformation and cultural revitalization of ethnolinguistic communities.

The LCI program goes through a four-day systems approach workshop on curriculum planning, design, and development in which experts and practitioners in the multi-faceted work of missions

among unreached people groups participate. This process includes a paradigmatic image of a target society, the ideal graduate, and the educational process that connects the graduate to the society in meaningful and fruitful engagement.

With a clear image of an oral culture and the ideal graduate for such a society, the question to work on concerns the training design. This last part deals with the description of content to be taught, the learning environment, the assessment of taught content, faculty line up, duration of the program, and practicum.

The uniqueness of the LCI training design is the village-life setting of the learning environment. It offers an extended simulation of life among the unreached people groups by living in huts, without modern comforts of electricity, water or kitchen. Learning does not take place in the sterile environs of the classroom, where application of knowledge is reserved for the future. The faculty line up is comprised of expert practitioners in the field of language and culture learning, anthropology,

missiology, theology, medicine, survival skills, community development and organizing, church planting, linguistics, Bible translation, ethnoarts, popular vernacular media and documentation, spiritual warfare, evangelism and discipleship, and storytelling.

The LCI assessment of oral preference learners also takes

place at the practicum level. Student missionaries are assigned to an ethnolinguistic community for the duration of the program. They serve this language community every weekend and apply their learning in language and culture acquisition. The rest of the content is taught in the LCI program.

Within six months, the student missionary will be able to speak the language, learn the culture of the assigned language community, and be able to fully apply orality in evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and oral Bible translation of story sets. A positive assessment of oral preference learners takes place when the assigned language community actually achieves the

Within six months, the student missionary will be able to speak the language, learn the culture of the assigned language community, and be able to fully apply orality in evangelism, discipleship, church planting

work that the student missionary was sent out to serve. There will be indications of sustainability and generativity by way of local ownership, local leadership, community engagement, church-planting movements, and the instilling of a Revelation 7:9-10 mindset and conviction among the oral preference learners.

The end product is the LCI final assessment of oral preference learners. We deal with the training design that achieved the institutional objectives. We have faculty that critically observes the objectives and assessments of taught content in the lives and ministry of the student missionaries. We produce an ideal graduate who successfully completes the LCI program and performs his or her practicum well. We have a language community that begins to appreciate their language and culture as oral strategies are applied in documenting, preserving, and perpetuating their language and culture. We see oral Bible story sets being translated and used by the language community in the work of evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. We see the diffusion of the multi-faceted elements of orality pervade the language community. We see spiritual transformation taking place in the language

community under local leadership that was spiritually nurtured by the student missionary. We see the beginning of a written Bible translation taking place.

Future Plans of the LCI

The LCI has a front end and a back end. On the front end, the work of language and culture documentation and preservation is the secular face of the LCI, employing anthropology, community development and organizing, and linguistics. On the back end, the LCI is propelled primarily by the work of Bible translation and the spiritual transformation of unreached people groups, using orality as the major strategy of accomplishing institutional objectives. With these in mind, what is the vision of the LCI into the future?

Driven by missions, the LCI will formulate partnership standards, engagement standards, network coordination, and cloud data management. LCI graduates will be deployed as language and culture workers among would-be partners overseas, thus the necessity of partnership standards that will govern the bilateral relationship. In addition to this, the LCI will also define the engagement standards with different publics

in mind. Engagement could take place among religious and secular, government and non-government organizations, and people's organizations. It will spell out the parameters of engagement in line with these audiences. Eventually, a web of connections will emerge, and coordination of the network will be a necessity. All these intersections will produce information, hence the necessity to set up cloud data management at the onset.

We see the reframing of the LCI to comply with global platforms. While we comply with local requirements for recognition and accreditation and seek collegial association with FEI in TE, we will also pursue global recognition and accreditation so that LCI graduates can be deployable, acceptable, and employable among ethnolinguistic communities where their language and culture are being endangered. In order to achieve this, the LCI program will follow the values of flexibility of the design, adaptability in diverse contexts, and sustainability in administration and finance.

The LCI program will adhere to its core themes and make adjustments on the basis of global recognition

requirements (front end) and ethnolinguistic sensitivity (back end). On the basis of its vision, goals, and objectives, the LCI will invite potential partners who will cooperate, contribute, and collaborate in the various areas of the work, such as administration, finance, education, and deployment to name a few. The LCI will facilitate the emergence of servant consultants that are GloCally recognized and sought after. A community of practice will also be institutionalized in which best practices, career pathways, service opportunities, continuing education, and professional care are also addressed.

Questions and Challenges

- 1) How has the FEI in TE in your own country responded to orality in TE?
- 2) How do you address the challenges of FEI with orality in TE?
- 3) What do you think of establishing a region-wide community of practice in orality?
- 4) How would you like orality in TE to look and be recognized in the region?
- 5) What do you think we need to do to see orality in TE contributing greatly to a vision of Revelation 7:9-10?



Fruitful Labor: Leadership Development And Global Implications For Theological Education In Oral Contexts

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Below I explore contemporary challenges facing evangelical ministry in the world of theological education for oral learners. The scope here includes leadership development programs developed for oral preference leaders in Africa and Asia. First, I define the challenge of training leaders in

current trends in the development of programs and assessment models for oral learners. Finally, some questions will be proposed.

Defining the Challenge

The mission of God has spread to more people than any other time in history. With innumerable



oral preference contexts. Second, I describe our current leadership program, as well as our assessment model for leaders in oral preference programs. Third, I briefly consider

resources, strategies, and technological development, the expanse of the message of Christ has nearly limitless scope. Yet to date there are 7,105 living languages spoken in the world, and

nearly 2,000 language groups have no resources for scripture translation. Of these language groups, only 518 have access to the entire Bible in their language.

Missionaries and theological educators use the method they have learned, practiced, and mastered. But communication preferences for the Majority World remain oral and distant from the well-developed methods of the highly literate heralds.

From the early days of the Gutenberg Press, the printed page changed the ways and means of education, preparation, and communication for those impacted by its advance. Paul Heibert explained, “Literacy has molded our thinking, producing patterns of thought that seems perfectly natural to us, but which are strange to those in non-literate societies” (Heibert, 134).

Missionaries and theological educators use the method they have learned, practiced, and mastered. But communication preferences for the Majority World remain oral and distant from the well-developed methods of the highly literate heralds. While training for mission may include highly literate forms of knowledge acquisition for some, understanding the preferences orality places on the listener may change the way one delivers the message. This communication model necessarily involves the receptor-oriented act of discipling through worldview-sensitive means that avoid creating or requiring dependency on the instructor and his or her methods.

Listeners with oral preferences learn through concrete thought patterns that correspond to situational and experiential models. Oral listeners prefer the use of speech tools that serve to make discourse more memorable. Organizational methods differ among oral and highly literate peoples. The worldview of oral peoples is inherently non-analytical. Examples of these experiential, non-analytical models include the use of folktale, folk art, poetry, myth, dirge, historiography, legend, proverb, riddle, praise song, and drama.

The epistemic basis for oral peoples is biased toward the events of this world and their experience in it. Rather than communicating logic within the abstract concepts of syllogism and other constructs, the oral learner communicates knowledge through related experience and historical models of truth acquisition. Orals are not illogical or pre-logical, but rather root their logic in experience, history, and other material forms that may be transmitted as experience.

Orality Leadership Development Program

From this receptor-culture reality, I want to present the model of leader development among oral cultures I currently implement around the world in non-formal, oral contexts. I hope to address the challenges of our work with oral cultures, moving the dialogue forward for the concrete benefit of oral learners and any potential role one may fill in the future of serving the Majority World Church. Shaped by an understanding of God's accommodation in revelation, it is my hope that global leaders and scholars would strive to build programs shaped by local socio-political, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic preferences.

Program Scope: Our current oral culture pastor-training program begins as a three-cycle (approximately 3.5 years) program that seeks to develop and train oral leaders in each language group. From that genesis, we pray for the program to facilitate daily evangelism, weekly discipleship, and new church plants over the 3.5-year time frame.

The program starts with an indigenous leadership team (ILT) of experienced leaders who will be responsible for initiating the

training program. The ILT will identify the initial existing pastors (ExPs) to begin the program.

Content Development: Through oral culture programs, we serve communities in local partnerships that provide indigenous pastors and leaders with an orality-based platform for existing church leadership development. In each cycle of our program, we ask our indigenous leaders to consider the biblical, theological, and ministry needs of the pastors who emerge through their listening groups.

In each of the three cycles of the program, the leadership team seeks to follow the flow of the biblical canon, while addressing the major areas identified in local, regional, national, and Western theological educational curricula. In addition to the biblical content that will train pastors, make disciples, and share the gospel, humanitarian issues in the community will be identified and addressed with community content (see below).

In Cycle 1, the program begins with the Pentateuch and Gospels. After weeks of discussing local worldview, orality, and cultural learning preferences, local leaders walk from Creation through the major moves of God's word in the



Torah. They learn of Creation, sin, curse, and covenant from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Local pastors are introduced to the Old Testament, and through their early journey in scripture, local pastors discuss theology from the word of God.

As the pastors transition from the Torah to the Gospels, they create content from select Gospel stories as they focus on the life and ministry of Jesus as Son of God and fulfiller of God's covenant to all creation. Through their time, they learn of the New Testament and the compilation of God's word to the people of God, the Church. They connect the content of God's creation and covenant with the One Man who fulfills all of the promises made in God's word.

In Cycle 1, they receive immediate application of their studies through weekly listening groups where they hear and discuss content from the word of God. Each pastor applies that knowledge through daily sharing the word of God (evangelism) within the village or local community. Also, every pastor is called to walk with a group of engaged listeners (discipleship) who may be identified as emerging pastors. Finally, each pastor practices the oral culture methods in the

program within existing churches (proclamation) and in his family life (family ministry).

In Cycle 2, the program moves through the Prophets and the Pauline epistles. In the Prophets, the pastors learn of the fulfillment of God's promise to give Israel the land of covenant. Pastors learn of the moral and spiritual decline of Israel's leaders, the storyline of God's faithfulness, repentance, and the rise of the remnant who follow the mission of God.

After the Prophets, the pastors hear of the history of the early Church from Luke's account of the apostles, as God raises up a new body: the Church. Here, pastors continue to integrate their faith with the accounts learned from the prophets and handed to them from the apostles in the word of God (Deut. 6; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Tim. 2). They hear a summary overview of each of the epistles, including some of the local context that demanded the need for Paul's communication with the Church.

In Cycle 3, the pastors continue to build content from the word of God through the Writings and the through learning and singing from God's Songs, the wisdom of God

from the Proverbs, and the story of Job as they hear how God tests and delivers his follower through suffering. They learn of God's plan through love and covenant, and they hear the story of how he delivers his followers through difficult times. Pastors listen and learn how God delivers from division, the fall, and sin, into unity, restoration, and forgiveness. In the remaining books of the New Testament, the pastors continue to learn about God's work through his people.

From Moses all the way through Revelation, the history of God's salvation and redemption is communicated to oral culture pastors who learn the structure, people, and themes from the whole counsel of scripture. Throughout the program, we focus on theology and doctrine through the word of God because oral cultures have little or no access to the Bible.

From this biblical content, pastors learn from their leaders and mentors the practice of proper interpretation and application. Additionally, through the structure of the program, they hold one another accountable through their network. They challenge one another to personal spiritual disciplines and faithful ministry. As they walk, they address pastoral

and church challenges from scripture through one another.

Community Development

The work of the gospel is holistic, transformative work. In every program, we recognize the spiritual and humanitarian needs in each local community. From the earliest discussions, the leaders of the pastor-training program engage in dialog to discover and address these challenges at the local level. Since the fall, God has worked to redeem and rescue (whole gospel) every broken area of creation (whole earth) through the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Toward this end, the ILT develops and distributes progressive content useful for the receptor community. As a result, the pastors learn and model an incarnational missiology, making disciples who may be seen as resources of truth and light in the community. As an oral strategies ministry, we listen to local expressions of need in receptor communities. From clean water, sanitation, health challenges, disease prevention, herdsmanhip, animal husbandry, or another community need, we seek local partnerships that may generate real change through emerging pastors/church planters in every phase of our program.

Assessment through Third-party Evaluation

Informed by biblical stewardship, we seek the wise use of resources that have been invested by all partners for pastor training programs. Consistent with kingdom values, this discipline provides outside assessment and review of each of our oral learner programs.

Third-party evaluations serve the partnership, measuring impact in three domains: knowledge, attitude, and behavior. Every program seeks life-changing transformation. Third-party evaluations provide the data each partner seeks to confirm areas of progress and correct areas where more attention may be needed. Each written third-party evaluation measures a program's impact in areas of ministry and humanitarian content.

Requiring third-party evaluation means someone from the outside analyzes each project executed. Before continuing the next phases of partnership, the third-party evaluator analyzes local data from indigenous interviews conducted with the oral learners and the communities in which they work and minister. Like no other tool, the third-party evaluation consistently serves as one of the most effective

learning tools for ministry and work among oral cultures.

As we work among oral cultures, we continue to reform and refine our methods of evaluation. From earlier empirical models delivered from Western evaluators, we are journeying into new domains of oral methods of evaluation. Our evaluation methods have learned from the following evaluation resources: Participatory Narrative Inquiry, Anecdote Circles, Contribution Analysis, Performance Story Reporting, Grounded Theory, Outcome Mapping, Collaborative Outcomes Reporting, Participatory Outcome Research, Rapid Rural Appraisal, and Most Significant Change.

Third-party evaluation helps us improve ministry to oral learners. Like an external audit, third-party evaluation lends objectivity to partnership and its development. In this way, the partners implement mutual transparency and accountability. Third-party evaluations provide structure to program execution, offering recommended course corrections for ongoing program improvement.

Conclusion

As we serve our local partners, may we raise up humble shepherds

who serve the brokenness of the unreached, unengaged cultures through oral methods. It is our prayer that every program contributes to the redemption of the whole community through the power of Christ and his care for all of creation.

Through the power of God's gospel in his word, may our service in theological education be conformed to his image, as he is the one who appeared as Chief Servant and Shepherd, who laid down his life for the world—every tribe, language, people, and nation.

Questions and Challenges

1. Can one measure learner fulfillment and enjoyment in oral culture programs?
2. Can one confine group engagement with oral learners to typical teacher-pupil relations in participatory, inclusive models of oral culture ministry?

3. How does one measure and ensure the accuracy of oral culture content within a particular oral context?

4. Who defines the terms of authentic instructional contexts?

5. How may one measure motivation and enthusiasm among oral learners?

6. In leadership development, what methods of formative feedback result in optimal local leader life change?

7. What role does instructor ethos play in leadership development?

8. What input should local partners have at the strategic and tactical level to be consistent with outcome-based approaches they are responsible for executing?

9. What constitutes an acceptable level of measurable accuracy for an oral culture?

10. In what ways are you currently evaluating the following program data?

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Orality in Japan

Joseph Handley

Joe Handley graduated Azusa Pacific University and then began working at the University's Office of World Missions. After working on his masters, the Lord called he and his wife to Rolling Hills Covenant Church in 1998, where Joe served as the Global Outreach Pastor. In June of 2008, Joe answered the call of God to become the new president of Asian Access. JHandley@asianaccess.org

As I travel across the world to develop leaders who “unite the Church, multiply leaders and congregations, and extend the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” I frequently run into those doing leader development through means of orality. One such leader who inspired me was Kathy Oyama who co-pastors Biblical Church of Tokyo with her husband Seiji. Among many other ministries, they also are leaders for Purpose Driven - Japan, which caught my attention because so many Japanese leaders enjoy their training. This article, written by Kathy, highlights how oral principles are operating in one of the most literate countries in the world – yet, the majority of leaders still prefer oral forms of communication and learning.

Forty pastors and church leaders gathered together for another segment of a two-year, six-session training program coordinated by the Purpose Driven Fellowship

of Japan. A sense of joy and expectation pulsed throughout the room as people greeted each other and shared stories of how they have been applying what they have learned.

From the outset of this venture, stories have played a central role. The main trainer, Dave Holden, the Director of International Training from Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA, began this endeavor by sharing his own journey as a pastor in a small, mountaintop town with a population of 8,000 and a church membership of 70, the equivalent of less than 1%. His experience built rapport with the Japanese pastors, who are ministering in a country where the Christian population is also less than 1%. Dave shared about the many Japanese people who did homestays with his family, the love that grew in his heart as a result of those relationships, and the passion that he has for the church in Japan. These stories built a bridge from his heart to the

hearts of his audience, and opened the way for his message to take root there on a deeper level than cognitive understanding.

Dave started out by telling about a man in his congregation who habitually arrives early. He sits in his seat, praying for the worship team, the pastor, the participants and the town before the service begins. As the music starts, the man stands, with his arms raised high, lifting his voice in exuberant worship. This is his time to wholeheartedly express adoration to God; he is not ashamed to let his emotions show. When the pastor comes out to preach, this man opens his well-used Bible and follows along, underlining meaningful passages and giving voice to his agreement with what the pastor shares. His respect for his leader radiates from his demeanor. When the offering basket comes by, he pulls out his envelope, filled with a full 10% of his daily receipts as a taxi cab driver. Every night when he comes home, he sets aside the first portion in that envelope as a tangible way to express his gratitude to and trust in God. After the last song, he intentionally greets newcomers, welcoming them to the church, before he makes sure to interact with his friends. As

Dave started out by telling about a man in his congregation who habitually arrives early.

they head home, his family begins to talk about how they will apply the lessons they learned. In the afternoon, as he and his wife walk through their neighborhood, they stop to greet their friends and invite them to join them at church the following Sunday. The next week, the man arrives early again, with several of those neighbors with him, ready to worship the Lord.

At the end of this story, Dave asked how many of the pastors would like such a person to come to their church. They all raised their hands, smiling sheepishly, but hopefully. Perhaps the next lecture would show them the way to attract such people to their congregations. But the next words out of Dave's mouth put such thoughts out of their minds, as he told them, such people would not be arriving in their churches, because they were a special type of person, called a "disciple." Disciples must be trained up in the church, with intentionality and planning. Laughing, the pastors agreed that this was certainly true, and their hearts were open to receive instruction as to how to develop disciples like the taxi driver.

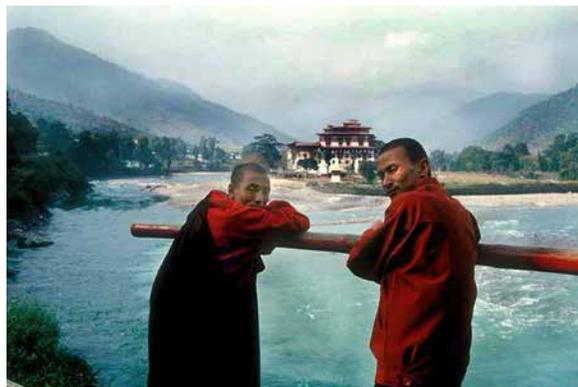
This story has come to be a favorite, and we have heard about

how our participants have shared it with their leadership teams to build consensus and enthusiasm for implementing new ways of doing discipleship training. More than a series of bullet points defining what a disciple is, this story captures the heart and the imagination, and sets the stage for the next level of training, which describes an intentional plan for discipling. Having the steps for the process is essential for these pastors, and so is having an effective way of getting buy-in from their church boards and leadership teams. Our training goal is to provide not only the tools the pastors need to lead, but also to give them assistance in effectively implementing them. Using stories helps us bypass the intellectual barriers that may exist and capture the hearts of both our direct audience and the people with whom they work when they return home.

As we have taught all of the concepts involved in our training, a consistent pattern has come into focus for us. More than explanations, our attenders respond

More than explanations, our attenders respond to stories that illustrate how those concepts are worked out in church life.

to stories that illustrate how those concepts are worked out in church life. For example, when we teach about the foundational nature of doing good works in our communities, we refer to passages such as Matthew 5:16, which commands, “Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (World English Bible) But it is when we begin to share stories about how actual churches have implemented this teaching in their communities, and the results of those activities that the pastors become animated. They have requested more time for the sharing of their experiences with each other, even to the point of pre-empting more training time. And they are just as interested in hearing about failures as they are about successes.



All of these participants are highly literate people, many of them holding advanced degrees. As a group, they tend to seek out and value educational opportunities. That being said, the fact is that they

are most engaged and enthusiastic when the content is conveyed in story form. Months later, that is what they remember most and are most motivated to apply in their own ministries.

To learn more about Orality in Japan, feel free to contact Kathy Oyama or Joseph Handley.

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The Brain Makes the Difference: Women and Men Storytellers

Marlene LeFever

*Marlene LeFever leads David C Cook's development of a holistic program for children-at-risk that is currently reaching 7 million. She authored the orality course, *The Big, Amazing Story of the Whole Bible*, and two seminary texts, *Creative Teaching Methods and Learning Styles*. In spring 2013, she led leadership training in Mexico, Senegal, and Columbia.*

Have you heard the quip that if you laid all the people who fell asleep reading research end to end . . . they would be a lot more comfortable? The following information has been pulled from dozens of sources over the last 15 years. Much of the original research was distilled into articles published in popular magazines, journals, and books aimed at classroom teachers. These are listed at the end of this report.

Storytelling: Leadership Equalizer

The orality movement attracts both men and women practitioners, but not surprisingly based on research on how God made male and female brains, orality's storytelling method is one at which women excel. In cultures where male leadership dominates the Christian church, the orality movement brings to the forefront women who may not be trained or fully literate, but are

nonetheless fully storytellers. They can teach the stories and skillfully guide inductive discussion. They can direct the discipleship of new believers. The church needs strong leaders—both women and men. Storytelling provides them. Storytelling is the leadership equalizer.

**orality's
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The Chinese proverb that women hold up half the sky may understate the role of women in the orality movement. Because of the way God made their brains, when it comes to storytelling, women hold up 80 to 90 percent of the sky. Here I look first at how female and male brains develop, then at how boys' and girls' early learning skills are honored, and finally at how both sexes can use their innate skills to become even more effective at telling God's story.

Generalities Never Tell Truth

A caution! This research is based on generalities. And,

as you know, generalizations can always be proof-texted wrong. Almost every sentence here could contain qualifiers—often, usually, frequently. This becomes cumbersome. However, I affirm that God was not such an uncreative Creative that he put everyone into an identical mold.

As you read, reject proof texting. Don't respond: "Why just look at Philip! Everything she said about women is true of him. Obviously, the research is wrong." Maybe. But probably not. Research continues to grow, and ideas change. But if you look across broad spectrums of people, male and female brains and the way they respond to information are different.

She Plays to Her Audience

Storytelling, communicating events with expression and detail, is a method that honors the way God made female brains. Watch young children play. Girls are more verbal than boys and often demonstrate amazingly versatile vocabulary and expression.

Training to be expert storytellers may actually start at birth. A healthy baby girl is born with

perfect hearing. Her parents coo and smile and she responds back, fascinated by their faces and their expressions. She is learning to read expressions—and play to her audience. Her parents are her favorite toy. Throughout life, females will be better able to discriminate between tones of voice and what those tones mean.

Girls are more verbal than boys and often demonstrate amazingly versatile vocabulary and expression.

Baby boys are slower to develop perfect hearing (and incidentally, men often lose their hearing at a younger age than women). Baby boys are more fascinated by mobiles above their cribs than they are by their parents' faces beaming down at them. They are drawn to things and structures and objects they can manipulate.

Girls' brains are about 11 percent smaller than boys, but are more finely developed. They have a stronger pathway between the two halves of the brain. Their frontal lobe is more developed. These developmental factors make movement of information between the right side and the left side of the brain more natural and easier. The result: females have superior language skills and most enjoy talking and storying about events

in their lives. Through the years, this has led to a preponderance of jokes about females and their joy of talking. There's the one about the girl who told her friend that her father hadn't spoken to her for three weeks. The friend was appalled. The girl realized what the friend thought and corrected her. "Oh, no! No! He's not mad at me. He just doesn't want to interrupt."

By the time a girl is 20 months old, she'll know about 50 words. Firstborns may know many more because mothers tend to talk to them more than to the second or third-born children. The more words boys and girls hear by age two, the larger their vocabularies will be for the rest of their lives.

Girls' Brains in Motion

Women are better at listening skills, and ironically, they can even listen when their minds aren't totally on task. Their brains are in constant motion. As children, they will hear and remember a story even if they aren't particularly interested in it. When the leader finishes telling it, most girls can retell it.

Boys' Brains at Rest

Males are very different. If they aren't interested in the story, they completely tune out. Wave your hand in front of their faces. It's like

they just aren't there. Their brains rest. During that "rest state," male brains renew and recharge, but they don't learn the story.

Boys develop mentally more slowly than girls. They can be about six months behind girls in the classroom. But the slightly slower pace is normal, built in by God.

In teaching settings with young children, girl's brains are often honored over boys. Teachers use questions and answers, discussion, and storytelling, all methods that girls enjoy. In addition, girls are better at activities that require small bone movement, like writing.

Most teachers of young children are women. If they teach the way they enjoyed learning at that age, they will be teaching to girls. Teachers can be taught to include boys in the learning process. For example, teachers can equalize the difference between boys and girls by asking a question and then waiting three full seconds before calling on anyone to answer. Girls' hands usually shoot up first up, and if a teacher calls on the first person who responds, then some boys will never participate. The three-second rule gives boys' brains an opportunity to process the question, register an answer, and wave their hands to respond.

Males Catch Up

About the time they are 14-16, boys catch up to girls mentally and physically, and boys are processing information at the same rate as girls.

However—and this is often the sad truth—if teachers taught in ways that were best for girls during the children's growing up years, most 18-year-old boys have already decided church isn't for them. They are gone. Many never return. This is not a God problem. It's a teaching problem that began for many young boys during their first year in Sunday school.

Move on to higher education. Boys often have the advantage over girls. In many cultures where higher education is the norm, high education honors the way men learn—through symbols, diagrams, pictures, mapping, abstract thinking. In engineering and architecture, any field that relies on abstract principles, women do not excel as often as men.

Males have more connections from one brain cell to the next. Information moves quickly through those cells—one reason why men

learn faster if there is movement involved in the process.

About the time they are 14-16, boys catch up to girls mentally and physically, and boys are processing information at the same rate as girls.

Women Storytellers

Men and women prefer telling different types of stories. Women storytellers enjoy telling stories containing a range of emotions and lots of conversation. They find it easy to match their voices and facial expression to the characters in their stories.

They use eye contact to draw their listeners into the story, and can even use eye contact to control misbehavior without breaking the rhythm of their story.

Men Storytellers

Encourage men not to sit as they tell a story. The pressure on their spinal column and lower back nerves are 30 percent more when they are sitting than when they are standing. That's a lot of strain. (Remember this when you are teaching young boys. Some boys will spend so much energy trying to sit quietly in a chair to hear the story of Jesus that they get no real spiritual benefit from what you are teaching.)

Encourage men not just to stand, but to move as they tell the story. Moving while talking will



feel natural to them. They will enjoy telling the story more. An added benefit: their listeners' eye movements as they follow the storyteller's actions will increase their attention spans.

Movement and actively watching movement increase short-term memory, reaction time, and even creativity. Caution storytellers not to use motions to put action into the story that is not true to the Bible.

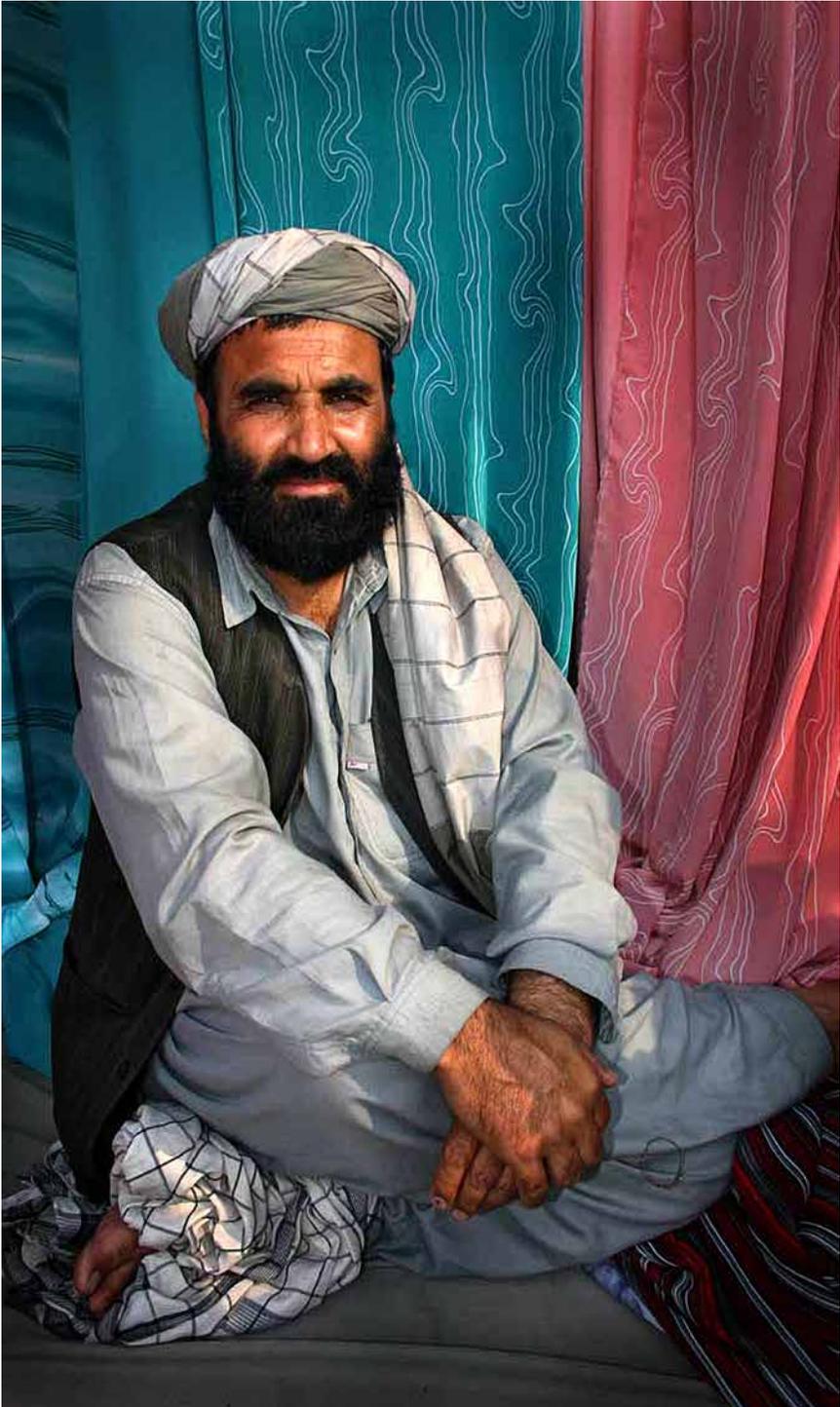
Men tell better stories when there is lots of space for the "stage." They are able to spread out and take command of their space.

Men enjoy telling certain types of stories more than others.

They prefer stories that include competition and action, rather than stories that center on emotions. Epic stories, the ones that take place over long periods of time and in different places, appeal to men.

The Storyteller's Environment

Men and women prefer different environments for telling a story, although in many places around the world, environments can't be controlled. If possible, pick a cool spot for men to do storytelling. Men enjoy a room that is 20°C (68°F) while women prefer that the room be 25°C (77°F). If you can control the lighting, use light bulbs that emit a cool white light, usually men's preference. Women are better adapters.



Celebrate Every Storyteller

We need every storyteller we can train. Women in storytelling cultures can become leaders and teachers. When trained as storytellers, their lack of reading skills will not hinder their effectiveness. The happy result is that the leadership pool doubles.

Men in storytelling cultures discover that storytelling is not a frivolous skill. When they excel at it, God's story told through them changes the lives of those who truly hear.

Questions and Challenges

Here I have suggested that teaching methods, storytelling included, may play a part in why males leave the church. Review the children's teaching setting with which you are familiar. How strongly do you agree with the conclusion in this paper?

Older men and women in older cultures often become living history books. Of what value, if any, would it be to separate the stories in the Bible into those best told by men and those best told by women?

Resources

Many popular sources have distilled the resources on how males and females learn, making the information easy to read and apply.

Articles

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Scripture Relevance Dramas¹

Michelle Petersen

Michelle Petersen is an International Arts Consultant with Wycliffe Bible Translators. She holds an MA in Language Development with a specialization in Scripture Use.

In one rural West African community, 276 people prayed asking Jesus to be their Lord after watching open-air Scripture drama in their local language, and a church began. In another language group, a radio station began airing *Scripture Relevance Dramas* (plays that relate Scripture to local life). This station told us that those plays are their most popular program, and that people from other language groups were calling the station asking if radio theater programs could be created in their languages as well. That series spread to 57 radio stations in three countries.

I have been blessed to work with drama groups in several cultures and languages, including the two just mentioned, creating live or recorded Scripture Relevance Dramas together. Rather than translating foreign scripts that were created with a different culture in mind, we create dramas addressing local questions, worldview, interests and background knowledge. We either develop locally-authored scripts, or we agree on a story line to follow

and improvise from a *scenario* (an oral or written outline of scenes, helpful for low literacy situations.) Scripture Relevance Dramas increase people's engagement with Scripture by bringing God near to people's everyday lives.

Why Show the Relevance of Scripture to Life?

In *The Bible Translation Strategy*, Wayne Dye identified factors which influence how people respond to Scripture. He studied how well Scripture was received by 15 language communities, and concluded that one factor was more important to Scripture's reception than any other: "People respond to the Gospel in proportion to their conviction that God and His Word are relevant to the concerns of daily life."² Dye writes that we can help bring this conviction to someone by applying the Good News in everyday encounters to maximize personal relevance.³ Scripture Relevance Dramas apply this principle by relating Scripture to local cultures with the aim of increasing people's perception of the usefulness of Scripture.

Types of Scripture Relevance Dramas

Scripture Relevance dramas show a parallel between local life and Scripture. Some common kinds of Scripture relevance stories may include:

- **Jesus' *parables* (teaching stories)** lend themselves easily to dramatization, either shown in today's cultural context, or portrayed in their historical context with a parallel drawn to a life situation today. Jesus often taught a parable in response to a question. Actors in Burkina Faso set the Parable of the Good Samaritan in its context by dramatizing Jesus answering the questions in Luke 10:25-29. They introduced their parable drama of Luke 10:30-35 by Jesus saying, "Let me tell you a parable." The actors all wore costumes that were local representations of their character types. They closed their parable drama with the dialogue in Luke 10:36-37.
- **Some historical events from Scripture** may be contextualized when introduced with a clear explanation. In Burkina Faso, local actors portrayed the story of Tabitha from Acts 9:36-43. Their Tabitha interacted with the audience. She showed audience members her generosity in

typical local ways, acting like some audience members were needy and giving them local clothes. When Tabitha died, her friends mourned in the local way. During rehearsal, a neighbor came running to ask who had died, because the way actors were grieving sounded authentic. When Peter prayed for Tabitha and she came back to life, the actors playing her friends rejoiced with a local song and dance. At this point in the performance, the church erupted into cheers and jubilation.

- **Local stories, folk tales, cultural parables or proverbs** may show biblical parallels. Not all local stories emphasize biblical points, but many serve as memorable illustrations of Scripture. One acting group in Senegal dramatized a man being invited to one marriage and subsequently being invited to a second marriage to be held at exactly the same time in a different town. The man wonders to himself how he can attend both weddings. On the appointed day, he walks one leg down one road and the other leg down the other road until he falls over to great audience applause and laughter. A narrator adds, "In the same way,

Jesus says, no one can serve two masters, because he will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You can not serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

- **Problem stories** from life today show a family or friends in the midst of a difficulty. A character empathetically shares a Bible story to help others work through the difficulty, saying something like, “You aren’t the first person to experience this. Something similar happened to me. God’s Word helped me. May I tell you a story from God’s Word about someone who had a similar experience to yours?” Or, “May I tell you a true story that helped me?” Alternatively, the character with the problem may remember a verse of Scripture that helps him or her work through the difficulty. In the Scripture Relevance Drama program airing in West Africa, for example, actors paralleled the problems of a family with sibling rivalry to the story of Joseph from Genesis.

Three Essentials to Creating a Meaningful Play

To create live or recorded drama, the work you bring to life needs to combine three important aspects:

1. **Showing Ideas.** People often come to a play not only to enjoy themselves, but also to learn through vicarious experiences. Direct your audience’s attention to your main point through characters’ words and actions. People’s comedies often make fun of behavior that is opposite to behavior they value. Their dramas often show the results of following or not following a value they care about. In some cultures, people prefer to infer the meaning of the story. In other cultures, people prefer to have a narrator or emcee state the moral of each play overtly at its end, or at the beginning of each play when introducing it. Ask and follow your culture’s best ways of showing your main idea.
2. **Showing Characters.** The team needs to decide what each character is like, what each character wants, and how each character is going about trying to achieve what he or she wants. Great characters contribute well to the story’s main idea. If you are a director or team leader, you can encourage actors to play their parts well by asking each one to find and play their character’s objective with their whole heart and show what

their character is like with their whole person. Whereas story tells, drama shows. Show what each character is like.

3. **Showing Actions.** Stories tell; plays show. Stories happen in the past, but plays pull the action of the past or the future into the present. Decide what actions happen in each scene. Actors should move frequently to show the story as well as telling the story through their words. Create actionable goals for each character. Break down the logical order of scenes and decide how people enter and exit. Set the pace. The play needs to move quickly enough to keep people's interest, but slowly enough for the audience to follow the action without becoming lost. When a character is not for the moment central to telling the story, the actor should pay attention to the other characters, without unnecessarily drawing the audience's attention by shifting position or speaking. When it is an actor's turn to show a certain central part of the story, it is often helpful for that actor not only to speak but also to move, because audience attention tends to follow movement.

People watch plays to learn without pain.

I call the last two elements, character and action, the play's "feet." A play with interesting characters, but where little happens, is like a play hopping on one foot—the character foot. A play with interesting actions, but where we don't get to know the characters well, is also a play hopping on just one foot—the action foot. A strong play runs on two feet, interesting characters and interesting actions, rather than hopping. Both feet take a journey toward an interesting idea. Ideas are remembered well when they involve performers' and audiences' emotions. People remember what makes them laugh or what touches them. If the team cares about their characters and their story, then their audience will go on their journey with them.

Through action and character the audience grasps interesting ideas. Audiences come to the theater, or listen to a play, to deal with life vicariously through other people's experiences in an enjoyable way, or as one of my Burkinabé director friends said, "People watch plays to learn without pain." A play may allow people to hypothesize how needed change could happen in their world, or it may reaffirm endangered parts of a society that should be strengthened.

Scripture is full of interesting ideas, characters, and actions. Our lives are full of these three things, too. Scripture Relevance Dramas show applications of Scripture to people's lives.

Creating Scripture Relevance Dramas

Scripture is full of interesting ideas, characters, and actions. Our lives are full of these three things, too. Scripture Relevance Dramas show applications of Scripture to people's lives. Here are some pointers how to create a successful Scripture Relevance Drama Team:

Research the characteristics of different kinds of local plays, to meet audience expectations well. If you are working cross-culturally, you can not assume that all your criteria for good acting are universal.

- **Ask to what extent actors interact with audiences.** Some acting traditions involve audience members as impromptu actors, while others maintain a strict imaginary wall between performers and audience.
- **Ask how to introduce and close a play in ways that let the audience know what kind of story you are portraying,** such as fiction or news. In the West, we may start a children's fictional

story with "Once upon a time," but people who believe Scripture is true would not start a story from Scripture that way.

- **Research how to begin your play in a way that meets audience expectations for a good story of this type.** Meet genre norms for setting up a good story, so your audience wants to know what happens next.
- **Research how "the moral of the story" is communicated.** As previously mentioned, in some cultures, a narrator or MC tells audiences at the beginning what the story will be about and what it teaches. In other cultures the narrator or MC states at the end what has been seen and learned. In still other cultures, audiences infer the meaning for themselves without being overtly told.
- **Ask how actors introduce themselves.** Some traditions introduce all the actors at the beginning; in other cultures, actors introduce themselves at the end; in others, actors never introduce themselves, but audiences have a printed program. Give your actors respect in the appropriate ways.

- **Ask how long play events typically are, and whether they consist of one story or a series of stories.** Some traditions perform a series of short plays on different topics; other traditions deal with one story at length.
- **Research how to end your chosen type of story well.** Show the story's problem being resolved in a satisfying way that meets audience expectations for how a good story of this type ends. Find responses that are empathetic, culturally appropriate and Scriptural. Consultation with experts such as leaders, elders, or health practitioners may be needed to provide the most accurate information possible to resolve certain problems well, rather than relying only on the team's limited understanding of an issue.
- **Find out about your audience's interests.** Discuss topics, themes or issues your drama team cares about exploring, and ones you believe your audiences will care about. In West Africa, for example, actors initially wanted to create stories about subjects like tithing, which they then realized would be of little interest to a wider audience. They learned to engage whole

communities with Scripture, not just the church audience. They created live drama and radio drama about topics like being reliable with money, leadership, and relationships.

When you have done research, you are ready to create:

Work with your *gatekeepers* (people who have influence and need to give you their blessing for the performances to happen). Ask your gatekeepers to announce your performances, recommend you for other possible venues, and critique your rehearsals.

Listen together to your chosen Scripture read aloud, and discuss it to make sure all members of the team know the story well with all its details. Then agree together about the meaning and implications of the passage before they begin to rehearse. In oral societies, actors may like to hear the Scripture read aloud in their local language more than once before they talk about it together.

Decide the scenes that are needed to build the story. The team can either write a full script or agree on a scenario of events. In the latter type of theater, every performance

is slightly different. Determine who needs to be part of each scene, and the main action of each scene. Decide how to show a difficulty or conflict building, and what its resolution or ending will be. Decide how Scripture can be shown, paralleled, or integrated.

Show your story through movement and placement. Make sure during rehearsal that everyone in the audience will be able to see every part of the performance well, and actors do not obscure one another from the audience's line of vision. Actors should keep their faces or profiles to the audience as much as possible. Actors should generally turn their backs to the audience as infrequently as possible because emotion is expressed mainly through the face. If the audience is seated on many sides of the actors, then actors may need to change position frequently, so no part of the audience sees a given actor's back for very long. Even if you are creating audio-only drama, such as Radio Theater, actors' gestures and hypothetical movements can be heard through their voices.

Through their words, actors show their characters and work toward attaining their goals. Ask actors to speak loudly enough that everyone

in the audience will be able to hear clearly. Remind actors during rehearsal that when audiences laugh during a performance, the actors should wait to continue the story until the audience has stopped laughing, or the audience will not hear what the actor says next.

Empathize with your characters and with your audience. There's an old saying that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. A danger of Scripture Relevance Dramas can be giving shallow answers to deep pains, but the audience leaves satisfied when they know they are valued and respected, because characters they identified with were valued and respected.

Add details your audience may not know that they need to know to grasp your story. Weave needed background information in. Think of how people could misunderstand what you're trying to say, and try to make it hard for them to misunderstand you. Characters can ask other characters questions that allow the audience's questions to be answered as the characters' questions are answered.

Rehearse well. Actors are less nervous the better they know their parts. Rehearse for a small group before performing for a large one.



You may be most familiar with acting traditions in which you need to rehearse for weeks or months before a performance, and create realistic costumes and props. In improvisational traditions, actors use objects they find on hand to represent whatever they need them to be as they improvise from scenarios or from Scripture they have heard read aloud. For such traditions, rehearsing over the course of a few days is rehearsing well, because they rely heavily on their improvisational versatility. Improvisational actors often put a two-hour performance together in a few days, usually consisting of a series of shorter plays.

Establish a time and place for a performance and invite people to attend. Ask your gatekeepers to invite people to the event.

Perform and keep performing. Encourage and inspire one another's creativity. Evaluate and refine the work (as laid out in "Improving New Works" below).

Coaching Actors during Rehearsals

Some cultures like to establish a Director to make choices. Other cultures like to advise one another and make choices by consensus. Synergogy means teaching one another and learning from one

another, including deciding together how to tell the story through movement. When leadership is by consensus, every member of a drama team has something to learn from every other team member. New teams learn not to be defensive when team members suggest improvements. Sometimes an idea may be helpful, other times less so. Share ideas respectfully and sensitively, and listen to one another. It is a good idea to have a pastor or Christian leader be part of your group to help shape your work. Be sensitive to cultural ways to lead and to provide critique.

To develop acting skills at rehearsals, we use Philip Bernardi's book, *Improvisation Starters: A Collection of 900 Improvisation Situations for the Theater* (Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 1992.) Bernardi's situations are American, but with a little thought, we adapt improvisational situations. One of Bernardi's situations asks two actors to play two students working together on a research paper; one wants to make up some footnotes to make the paper more impressive, and one is afraid of getting caught. West Africans generally have little interest in research papers, but a local actor helped me adapt it:

“Two seamstresses are working in the tailor’s shop. Their boss isn’t there. A client pays an apprentice for a dress. One apprentice tailor wants to keep the money without telling her boss that the client paid. The other apprentice tailor would never dream of doing that, and wants to convince the other not to do this.”

Every actor in the group has a chance to improvise a two to five minute scene with another actor, while the other actors watch, applaud, and give suggestions for improvement. Sometimes an improvisational exercise gives the team an idea for making a performance piece. Actors make use of their improvisational skills while performing to help a character sound more natural, interesting, and believable. When using scripts, writing that sounds natural in print may need revising as it comes to life in oral form. Actors become progressively more natural by learning from one another, repetitions and practice.

Improving New Works

There are three ways a new work can improve before it is publicly presented, and a fourth way a work can improve for future performances after it is publicly presented.

1. **Self Check.** During story creation and rehearsals, each member of the team may consider how to improve their own performance and how to strengthen their clear presentation of the play’s ideas, characters and actions. The director or actors who are not part of a given scene may watch the other actors and advise them. Help one another play each objective wholeheartedly. Decide together how to make the acting more touching, powerful or believable. Remind actors not to turn their backs to the audience for long, and not to stand in a place that cuts off the audience’s view of some of the other actors.
2. **Consultant Check.** Ask people who have a strong grasp of the Word of God and local culture, such as pastors or consultants knowledgeable about the issues involved, to tell you how accurately and empathetically you are applying Scripture to local life. You may want to ask a few people who have experienced similar circumstances to tell you how well you are drawing them in to your story.

3. Pre-Performance Community

Check. Rehearse for a small audience before performing for a large one. Initial audience members need to be people who trust the team enough not to be excessively polite. Instead, you need people who will tell you how to improve, rather than tell you only what you would like to hear. Ask them what they liked, what they did not like, what they did not understand, what they learned, what parts needed to be louder and what parts were difficult to see. You probably want audience members to empathize with some characters more than others. Verify that people liked the characters you wanted them to like and did not like the characters you did not want them to like—they may like the talents of an actor playing a negative role, of course. If needed, ask actors to speak more loudly, change their arrangement in the performance space, or emphasize different elements.

4. Post-Performance Audience

Check. After a performance, ask a few audience members for feedback to help improve the next performance. Ask them the same kinds of

questions that you asked during the pre-performance community check.

During all four kinds of checking, evaluate:

Clarity of the story. Ask what people remember happening in the play. If their attention was captivated by less important aspects, diminish those aspects and place more emphasis through action and words on more crucial aspects. When people are unclear on an important story point, add necessary background. Verify the main point people understand is the main point your team intends; if not, bring the main point to the forefront again.

Biblical and cultural accuracy. How balanced is the way the issue is handled, according to the full picture of the Word of God? Does the presentation come across as local, or foreign? Is it really “us”? This resolution in particular needs to be believable. At one rehearsal in West Africa, the play’s theme was a troubled husband-wife relationship. In the original script, the couple heard from a friend how the Bible says they should love and respect each other. The narrator said something like, “and they



lived happily ever after.” Another team member said, “Wait! I don’t believe the narrator. Show me how their relationship works out.” The story was revised to show, not just tell, how they worked out their marriage.

Audience engagement. Character and action should both be equally-well developed, so the story is moving forward on both feet toward the main idea. Some team members should watch your audience watch the performance, and suggest parts that need to

move more rapidly or parts that need to be cut. How engaging is Scripture? Making Scripture audible is not the same thing as making Scripture engaging in its style of presentation. You may want to have a character read God’s Word aloud formally, but consider having a character give God’s Word in a less formal style, or act out a portion of Scripture or its application. When you need to deal with hard issues, verify that characters are respected, and issues are dealt with sensitively.

Response

As illustrated by the two examples at the beginning of this description, Scripture Relevance Dramas have been well received in many cultures. In rural villages in Burkina Faso, evenings of live play performances drew crowds of around 150 in a church setting, and around 350 in open air performance. Actors trained to perform Scripture Relevance Dramas during three day workshops say they intend to continue presenting dramas to their communities on a regular basis. In a West African regional language, listeners to Scripture Relevance Radio Dramas commented to actors, “Where do you get all this wisdom from?” “Your teaching is good. We like your stories.” “No one can interrupt our friend when she is listening to your program. She doesn’t want to miss a word.” “I made peace with my rival wife after I listened to the story about the unforgiving servant.” “Can you make me a cassette copy? I need to give it to a friend.”

Actors sometimes have lively discussions at rehearsals, trying to find the most appropriate ways to show the Bible’s applicability to local life. Applying the Bible to life situations has become so natural to them that sometimes they may be overheard saying to their real-life friends and neighbors, “Your situation reminds me of a story in the Word of God. May I tell you a story?”

Conclusion

Scripture Relevance Drama hones the presentation of Scripture to each audience’s background knowledge, artistic styles, cultural wisdom and values. Drama teams work with local talent to tailor local plays to each audience, rather than relying on mass-media approaches that supply as many cultural audiences as possible with the same media product. Locally created plays can make people at home with Scripture, so God is not seen as a foreigner.

¹Originally published in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, by Krabill, James, Frank Fortunato, Robin Harris, and Brian Schrag, eds., 2013, pages 473-480. Used with permission by William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA.

²T. Wayne Dye. *The Bible Translation Strategy: An Analysis of its Spiritual Impact*. Dallas: WBT, 1980, p. 61.

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Questions from New Storytellers

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.

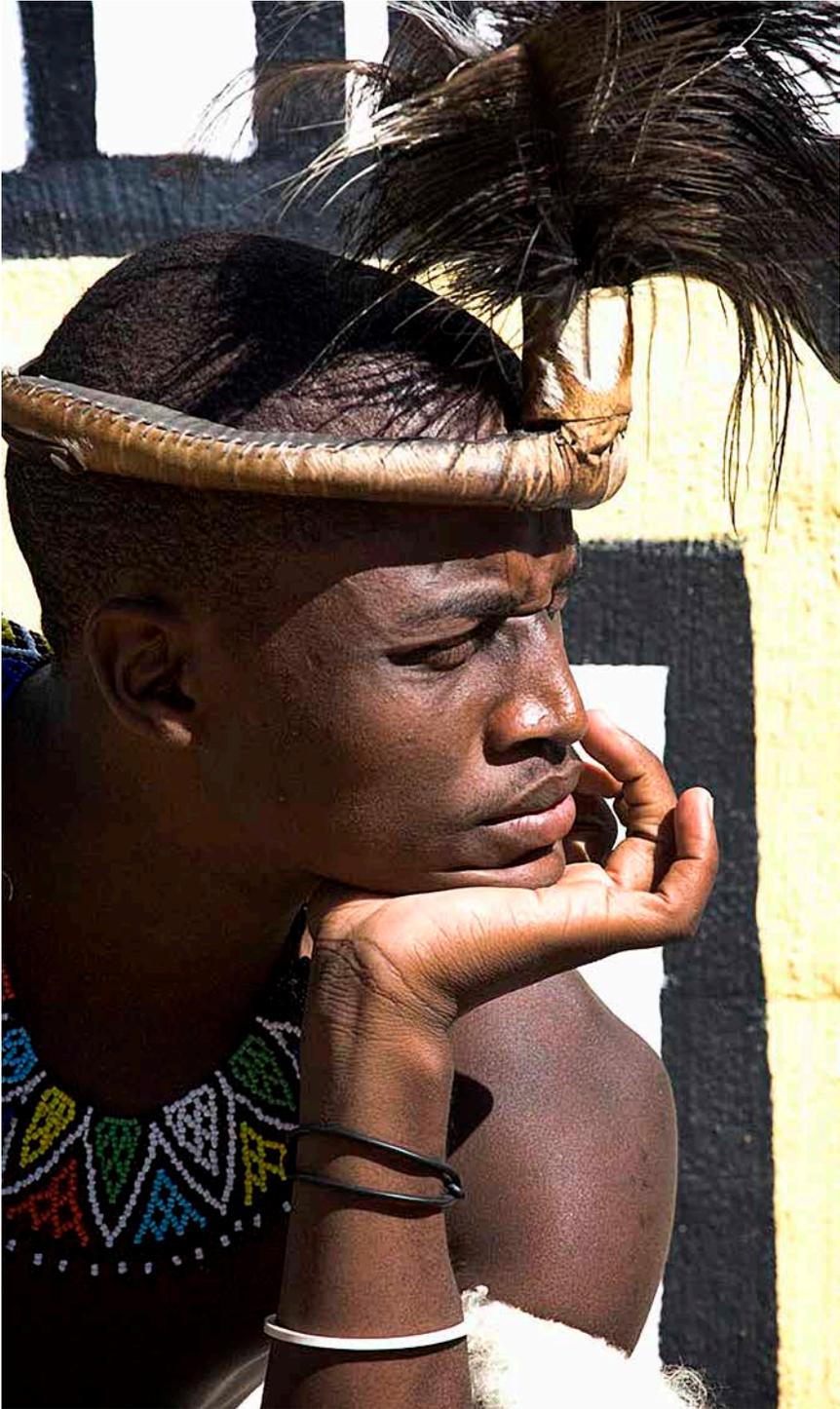
Since the early 1990s I have been receiving questions from those new to Bible storying. In the earliest days, I sometimes didn't have answers to the questions people were asking. There wasn't much literature on the methodology of using Bible stories for evangelism and church planting. These questions, however, helped me to understand the growing interest and questions many missionaries and others were asking.

Looking back, I realize that some of the responses were not the most helpful since all I had to go on was my experiences. I learned little by little and became more competent in methodology. Learning from my mistakes, I was able to make the necessary changes and respond with greater authority. Also, increasing correspondence with other missionaries was very helpful. In fact, in January 1994 we began publishing a Bible storying newsletter. The newsletter was first sent to Southern Baptist

missionaries whom Jim Slack, Grant Lovejoy, and I had led in training conferences in Africa. These newsletters were shared among other mission agencies and soon the subscription list had expanded significantly, leading to more questions and shared case studies.

I always treated each question as best I could and the contact as an open-ended inquiry. Occasionally, these questions would lead to ongoing correspondence. I have also learned to rely heavily upon a growing list of competent Bible storytellers who have kept me up to date on the changing methodology and have served to provide answers for questions I could not answer. I owe a debt of gratitude to each person.

Following are a representative sampling of questions sent to me over the past 20 years. For various reasons, I have kept the names and places confidential.



Frequently Asked Q&As

Question #1: I have heard about this new method of telling Bible stories. I think that my people group would like this. Where can I get a copy of these stories?

Answer: My first response would be to wish that I could have some training time with you and your co-workers so I could share how myself and others go about selecting the best stories to tell. At the moment (1992), I do not have literature describing this process, except for an outline that my co-trainers and I use in workshops. Basically, we first consider the Bible truths that lead listeners to an opportunity and desire to place their faith in Christ as Savior. Second, from our knowledge of the spiritual worldview and certain cultural issues, we consider what might be a bridge to the gospel or a barrier to understanding and accepting the Bible teaching. This gives us a list of criteria for selecting which stories to tell. There are other things to consider like how long you can tell or teach the listeners, which affects how many stories you can use. Also, we recommend testing the story set on a friendly informant to see if there are any changes needed. Then, after telling the stories several times,

you can make any needed changes, like adding additional stories or deleting unneeded stories. We do have a list of commonly-used Bible stories that we call “Core Bible Stories” that speak in a generic way to the typical Bible truths that lead listeners to a salvation invitation.

Question #2: One of my colleagues was in your training session recently. He was telling me about selecting Bible stories to tell. Could you give me some practical examples or case studies that could illustrate this?

Answer: Yes, I can provide two case study illustrations that were helpful for me. I was initially familiar with two Bible story sets being used in the Philippines, but I had the same question you asked. A missionary in the Philippines pointed me to a book published by William Carey Library. As it turned out, I already had a copy in my library but had not paid attention to the chapter “Bible Stories: Message and Matrix.” In this chapter, the author recounts a case study of the beginning use of Bible stories in Panama around 1950.

The chapter tells of the criteria for selecting 24 Bible stories and a comment on why each story was chosen. The book is now out of print, but I have purchased

permission to share a limited number of copies of that chapter. The book is *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective* by Jacob A. Loewen.

A second source that I happened to stumble upon was shared in the SEEDBED Journal of Arab World Ministry. A New Tribes missionary in Senegal, West Africa, Dubby Rodda, wrote an article titled “Sharing the Gospel with Muslims: A Chronological Approach.” In the article, Rodda compared the worldview of Muslims with that of Christ’s disciples. Then, he talked about selecting Bible stories related to the Basic Christian doctrines needed for salvation. This led to a list of stories that he divided into four tiers or priorities ranging from *must tell to helpful* if time allows. In addition, Rodda lists the Bible doctrines (truths) found in each story as a reason for using that story. This journal is still being published (Vol. VII, No. 4, 1992).

Question #3: I have a question about telling Bible stories. My friend says that one must tell the story exactly word for word as it is in the Bible. If not, you are changing God’s word. Is this true? Please help me because some of

the stories I would like to tell are quite long and difficult for me to remember and tell exactly like they are written.

Answer: I understand your friend’s concern about telling each story accurately. That is easier to do with the shorter stories and parables. First, let me ask you to review several passages where Jesus or a disciple either told or referred to Old Testament stories. These are: The Flood (Matt. 24:38; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5), Jonah (Matt. 12:40; Luke 11:29-30), Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:225-27), and the witnessing stories by Peter, Stephen, and later Paul in Acts. In each case, the intent was not to tell each story in every detail, but to speak to certain truths among the listeners.

One of the things I am learning from the people I work with is that they generally do not understand large numbers and if a story has many numbers in it, there can be confusion. My first experience was to tell stories that another missionary had paraphrased—expressed simply in their own words. Some of the stories were okay, but I was not pleased with the paraphrase of some of the others. So I began to work out my own stories.

One thing I learned is that too many details were often confusing for listeners. I had to learn to tell stories like they told stories. I learned by seeing how they retold a story that I had taught them. Sometimes, they left things out they did not understand, or that they thought were unimportant to the story. I learned the value of story character dialog as the listeners enjoyed hearing the people in the stories as they talked. So by trial and error I began to refine my stories to be understandable and generally accurate when my listeners retold the stories.

The *de facto* Bible story is always the verbatim story. But experience in telling many stories to non-literate peoples has been a good teacher and has led me to adapt complicated stories or shorten longer stories as needed—not for my convenience, but for the understanding and reproducibility of my listeners. Talking about the story after the listeners hear it will often tell you whether they understand the story as you told it.

I must end with an important note that prayer is needed for the Holy Spirit's anointing and guidance when preparing the Bible stories for telling.

Question #4: What do you talk about after telling a Bible story? Do you try to explain the story to the listeners, or perhaps give a devotional message based on the story? I plan to go on a mission trip soon and I want to use Bible stories as I have heard that people will listen to stories.

Answer: While I was in Africa training some missionaries and nationals, an older African man said that if I told a story well, then I did not need any pictures. I took his words to mean that if I told a story well, then I did not need to explain it or even to use a picture to illustrate the story. We tell carefully-chosen stories in order to systematically take the listeners from where they are in their spiritual knowledge to the story of Jesus, providing an opportunity for each listener to relate to Jesus as Savior. Each story should contribute to a listeners' understanding and lead him or her a step closer to an invitation to believe in Jesus.

However, we have learned from the experience of pioneering missionaries who are using Bible stories that it is good first to get the listeners to repeat or retell the stories. This seems to help most to gain a better understanding. Some Bible stories are self-explanatory,



but it can be helpful to review some of the key items in the stories.

Before I go any further, let me say that non-literate people generally do not like to take a story apart to talk about its pieces. The story loses its “storyness” for them. But we can usually talk about the characters in the story. Comments like, “Tell me about such-and-such character” will often give opportunity for listeners to identify with the characters or to increase their curiosity. We want to explore the relationships between the characters and between the characters and God or Jesus. Then, we want the listeners to talk about what they have learned from the story and what they will now do since they have heard the story.

It takes patience for listeners to learn how to talk about a story. Sometimes, they do not want to talk about it. But after they have thought about the story, it is not uncommon for listeners to want to talk. Sometimes, the best talk comes after they have heard a series of stories. A colleague of mine uses the term “dialog” to mean that it is a two-way discussion. This means that it is not a time for a sermon in which you tell the people what to believe. Hopefully, you will be able to lead your listeners to discover what each story teaches.

One missionary friend in West Africa likes to ask many questions to explore each story thoroughly. I have learned that my people usually do better with fewer

questions. We are learning that missionaries can ask too many questions to get at the truths we want listeners to understand. But if we are teaching the stories and encouraging listeners to retell the stories, we need to have a very simple set of questions that they can easily remember. There are five or six questions from our Ethiopia and Bangladesh experiences that we often use.

Let me close by saying that sometimes a good way to begin a discussion is to ask if anyone has a question about the story or would like to talk about what they have learned. We try to avoid debate and like to answer challenging questions with a question or refer to an earlier story. A good rule to follow is to keep it conversational and encourage participation by everyone.

Question #5: I was in one of your training sessions in Kenya. I have done all the things you taught us to select and prepare Bible stories, to tell the stories, and to talk about the stories. But when we came to the end of the stories after the Resurrection of Jesus, no one responded. Now what do we do? I am discouraged because of the time that I have spent in preparing and telling the stories.

Answer: Would you feel better if I told you this has happened to me? As we tell and teach the Bible stories, we are in a partnership with the Holy Spirit. Our task is to find listeners and to tell the Bible stories. We often cannot tell what is happening in listeners' hearts. Let me list several common options. First, you could simply begin again by reviewing the key salvation stories. If you have not had any problems due to worldview issues, you may be able to skip some of the stories that directly address listeners' worldview. Patiently go through the key Bible stories a second time. Many non-literates enjoy hearing a repeat of what they already know. Perhaps you had new listeners joining your group. So the time is not wasted. I generally found that I could often lump several related stories together into one session unless I was attempting to teach each story to my listeners. Some are finding that repeating just the stories of Jesus—mainly the Passion stories—may be all that is needed.

Second, it can also be helpful to use one or more invitation stories. I found that the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14) was powerful because of the refused invitation which is generally a terrible sin in most Asian cultures. Also, the





prospect of tasty food is interesting. I have reiterated the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man for some as it deals with eternal destiny. Another parable I have used is The Prodigal Son, which speaks about several issues, but really is about the humility and filial piety as the father accepts his wayward son. Others have used Peter's sermon in Acts 2 where the people cried out, "Brothers, what should we do?"

Sometimes, we find that response is delayed in coming for any of several reasons. So we wait and may continue to visit from time to time to see what happens. I have encountered people who wanted to think about making such a decision and what it might mean for them personally or for their community.

In many communal societies the people follow the decisions made by their leaders. For some, it involves a possible culture change. Others may be afraid of persecution and so do not openly respond, although they may be secret believers. We pray while waiting and answer any questions. We listen if the people want to talk about the stories and what they should do. Pray while waiting. In some cases, I only planted and others harvested. I have been off the mission field now for nearly 12 years. I hear from colleagues about responses that came in South Asian countries after I was no longer there.

Last, I suggest there will be times when you need to move to another location and begin again. I have

seen people from one location follow to hear the stories again. This means the interest is still alive and they are still spiritually hungry and searching. However, mission administrators want to see results in decisions, baptisms, and new churches planted. In the later years working with Bible stories, I spent more of my time training local leaders to use the stories. I learned from the story sessions I conducted and then used this experience to train those who lived among the people, knew the people, and could speak to the people on a peer level.

A last thought: Over more than 20 years, I have received many questions. Some were general, like these I have shared. Others were specific to certain stories or situations. Generally we have learned to be more specific in story selection and the way we tell the stories so that listeners can easily relate to the stories. I remind many that telling Bible stories is not a “silver bullet” to quick and easy decisions and church plants. Let me share a few advantages, however:

1. It is a reproducible method that anyone can learn.
2. It can provide a lengthened learning time for those who are far from the gospel and need time to find their way to the cross.
3. Using Bible stories has greatly reduced resistance and hostility to the Bible’s message of salvation and to Christianity (as a foreign or Western religion) by those who have been traditionally unresponsive.
4. The Bible stories, once planted in a culture, can travel where missionaries may not be able to go and linger among the people.
5. The methodology provides a successful way of making the word accessible to those lacking scripture in their heart language, or literacy to read and understand, or often providing the truth in portions that are easier to understand, relate to, and remember.

Be prayerful and persistent. One good thing about asking questions is that someone may have an answer for you.



Storytelling Works at the Salon

Paul Trinh

Paul Trinh served as missionary, church planter, and pastor for 30 years, both in the States and overseas. For over 10 years, he has applied situational Bible storying and chronological Bible storying in his daily life and at church. He is currently pursuing a Doctoral of Missiology at Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary focusing on Bible storytelling. He will also provide a blog at orality.net in the coming year.

I sat down in the hair salon chair. The stylist, who was in her thirties, asked me, “What should we do with your hair?” I explained what I wanted to her. Then, looking at her, I asked, “Did you cut my hair last time?”

The stylist nodded, “Last time, you said you read a story and then told me the story. Did you read another story lately?”

“Just this morning,” I answered, “I read the story of ‘The Talking Donkey.’” [Yes, I read it and prepared to tell her that story.]

“What is it?” She asked.

Then I told her the following:

One day, a man was riding his donkey. The donkey saw an angel holding a sword in the road in front of them. She went off the road to protect her owner. The owner himself didn’t see the angel, so

he beat her. When they reached a road with trees on both sides, the donkey again saw the angel with the sword. She tried to squeeze by the angel to keep her owner safe. But she scraped his foot against one of the trees. The owner beat her a second time. Later, they traveled onto a very narrow path. When the donkey once again saw the angel standing before them with a sword, she squatted on the ground to save her owner’s life. The owner lost his temper and beat his donkey again.

Then God opened the donkey’s mouth. She asked her owner, “You have beaten me three times. What have I done?”

He shouted, “You have been playing games with me! If I had a sword, I would kill you!”

The donkey answered, “Have I not been your donkey for so many years? Have I ever done anything like this before?”



The owner admitted, “No.”

At that moment, God opened the owner’s eyes. He saw the angel standing in front of him holding a sword.¹

At the end of the story, I summarized, “The angel wanted to kill the owner because he had not listened to God. His donkey saved his life, but he didn’t know it. Finally, he realized it.”

After listening to the story, the stylist asked me, “Where did you read this story?”

“From the Holy Book, the Bible,” I replied.

As usual, I shared my joy of Bible storytelling with my wife. While examining my hair, she pointed to the sideburns, “Look! The sideburns are cut unevenly.” Viewing at the mirror, I told her, “You are right. One side is higher than the other side. I was so focused on telling the Bible story that I forgot to look at my hair.” She comforted me, “Don’t worry! Your hair will grow again.” I said to myself, “To share the gospel, such a cost is completely worth it.”

Three weeks earlier, I had told the same stylist, “I just heard a story.” “What is it?” She asked.

At the end of the story, the stylist and I both remained silent. She did not seem to know this Bible story.

“A woman had a jar of expensive perfume,” I told her. “One evening, she took that perfume to dinner. She found Jesus there. So she broke the jar and poured the expensive perfume on His head. Some people at the dinner were displeased, ‘Why waste such expensive perfume? It could

have been sold and the money given to the poor people.’

“Jesus defended the woman. ‘She did a wonderful thing for me. Don’t bother her. You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could—she anointed my body for burial ahead of time. Let me tell you, wherever the gospel is shared, people will talk about this woman’s act.’”²

At the end of the story, the stylist and I both remained silent. She did not seem to know this Bible story. For me, I appreciate a non-threatening environment in storytelling for her. People love listening and telling stories. Bible stories can encourage them in their lives and their faith.

As an introvert, I used to enjoy relaxing and meditating while I got my haircut. After I discovered the power of storytelling, the hair salon became one of my favorite places to tell Bible stories.

When my family lived in another town for a period of time, I visited the same salon every month. Each month I told the same stylist a part of the Creation to Christ.³ At the end, I asked her, "Are you willing to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord?"

"Yes," she answered.

Then I led her to accept the Lord in prayer.

Afterwards, my family moved away. One year later, we returned to the area and I visited the stylist. I took the opportunity to ask her, "Do you still trust in Jesus Christ?"

"Yes," she replied confidently.

I believe that each salon visit can become a divine appointment for storytelling. Although the stylist is with me for only a short period of time, all kinds of stories can be told and exchanged during that time. Why can't Bible stories be included? In addition, it usually takes me less than three minutes to

tell a Bible story. The stylist does not feel offended.

In another city, I found a salon owner and stylist. He had grown up in a Christian family but was no longer attending church. During the Easter season, I talked to him, "Easter is at the corner."

"When is it?" He questioned.

"Ten more days," I answered.

"As a child, I loved to hunt for Easter eggs," he shared.

"On the first Easter, Jesus' students didn't believe His resurrection." I tried to arouse his interest.

"I heard about Easter, but I didn't know that His students didn't believe it." He was surprised.

"Let me tell you." Then I shared the following story with him.

On the afternoon of Jesus' resurrection, two of His students walked home from the capital. As they walked, they talked. At that time, Jesus approached them, but they didn't recognize Him.

"What are you talking about?" Jesus asked them.

“Don’t you know the big news these few days?” One of them reacted. “What news?” Jesus inquired.

“It is about Jesus. He spoke for God and did powerful and wonderful works. But our leaders sentenced Him to death and nailed Him to the cross. Today is the third day. Early this morning, some women went to His grave. They didn’t find His body. An angel announced, ‘He is risen!’”

Then, Jesus taught them what the Old Testament had said about Him. Finally they arrived home. These two students insisted that their new friend to stay overnight. However, at dinner time, this man took the bread, said grace, broke the bread, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, “Our Teacher!” Then Jesus disappeared.

These two students became excited. They immediately returned to the capital. There they reported this good news to other students. As they talked, Jesus appeared to them, saying, “May you have peace!”

They were stunned.

“Why do you doubt? Look at my hands and my feet. A ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones as I do,” Jesus said. Then He asked, “Do you have any food?”

They gave Him a piece of fish. He took it and ate it in front of them.⁴

The owner looked interested. While I saw no other client waiting for a haircut, I told him another story. And he listened.

The owner looked interested. As I saw no other client waiting for a haircut, I told him another story. And he listened.

The first Easter evening, Jesus appeared to His students. One of them named Thomas wasn’t there. Afterwards, other students told him, “We saw Jesus!”

“I won’t believe until I see the marks in His hands and His side.” Thomas didn’t believe.

A week later, all students, including Thomas, were together. Jesus appeared to them again. He said, “May you have peace!”

Then He turned to Thomas, “Put your finger into My hands. Put your hand into My side. Don’t doubt. Only believe!”

“My Lord and my God!”, Thomas confessed at that time.

“Because you have seen Me, you believe. Blessed are those who have not seen Me, yet believe!”, Jesus told him.⁵

As is becoming my habit, I told this owner a Bible story during each visit. He listened each time and dialogued the story with me. When I left that city one year later however, he chose not to make a commitment to the Lord.

From these salon experiences, I have learned that I don’t need to ask for permission to tell Bible story. In fact, people don’t ask for

permission before telling a local or international news item, sports news, big sale, or even a joke. They just tell it naturally. In the same manner, I tell the story in each divine appointment.

To summarize, I am thankful that God has given believers this useful tool—storytelling. Together with other evangelistic and discipleship tools, the church is spreading His word to the end of the world. Nowadays, I love to say with Avery T. Willis, Jr., “It thrills me to use Bible stories because I am actually telling people the *Bible*.”⁶

Reference

¹Numbers 22:21-31

²Mark 14:3-9

³The Creation to Christ is a gospel presentation of 40 basic Bible stories in 15 minutes. It includes 8 parts, and has been adapted in various situations. One may learn more about it at: www.t4tonline.org.

⁴Luke 24:13-43

⁵John 20:24-29

⁶Willis, Avery T., Jr., and Mark Snowden, 2010, *Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World*, Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, p. 59.







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What are people

What are people searching for?

Now that people anywhere in the world are able to search the Bible on-line and these searches can be tracked by country, we have a new glimpse into how people think about the Bible. Though we cannot tell how many of the searchers already follow Jesus, the country by country overview still presents a fascinating picture to ponder and discuss.



Bible verses searched online from the 10 most populous countries in the world show that people are looking in Psalms, Genesis, the Gospels, and 1 Corinthians 13.



Implications of the search for truth:

If many searches in your country are of interest in the Old Testament, how are you weaving the Old Testament into your presentation of the gospel?

Are people in your country of interest looking for the chapters you would expect? If not, what do the surprises tell you? How could you capitalize on something they are looking for?

1 Cor. 13 is the newly chapter from any Pauline epistle that made the top five in any country. Are you using Pauline epistles too much in your evangelic message and/or your training of pastors?

Missionaries, does your presentation of the gospel relate more closely to the chapters listed for your own country than for the country where you are working? If so, how might you adjust better?

Sources: Bible Gateway, Operation World 2010 and Percentage of Individuals using the Internet 2009-2012 (International Telecommunications Union)

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