

WILLIAM CAREY
International Development Journal



The Importance of Oral Learning Methods

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A Note from the Editor

In “Communicating Gods’ Message in Oral Cultures” Rick Brown comments on the differences between print and oral communicators,

Unfortunately it is often happens that a print-oriented community wrongly expects that the oral communicators in his or her audience will understand logical, analytical, and abstract ways of thinking, or he expects that sermons and radio programs designed for a print-oriented audience can be translated and used effectively with an oral audience. But this is not usually the case. (Rick Brown, 2004)

Brown’s article highlights the lack of understanding and concern for oral communicators in cross-cultural ministry. What is true in the field is also reflected in theological education in the West in which a significantly large proportion of the student body is represented by oral learners.

During one of our faculty forums we talked about the article by Dr. Jay Moon, “Understanding

Oral Learners,” a research project focusing on the learning preference of seminary students of various cultural backgrounds. The study actually shows that “the slight majority of contemporary seminary students studied are oral learners” (Moon 2012). This immediately became a heated topic for discussion among faculty members as it was closely related to the issues that needed to be addressed here at WCIU. How could we best serve our students who come from oral learning tradition and empower them to bring wholeness and human flourishing to their own communities? This interest led to our decision to sponsor a Winter Institute on the topic on Feb. 11, 2013, when key advocates in the field of Orality, Dr. Jay Moon of Sioux Falls Seminary, Dr. Bill Bjoraker of William Carey International University, and Dr. Tom Steffen of Biola University shared perspectives on oral learners as well as conducted a workshop to engage more closely in their relevancy to theological education.

You will be able to read in this issue a paper by Jay Moon on the Winter Institute on Theo-

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logical Education for Oral Learners, detailing some of the outcomes of the survey and the workshop. Some of the other papers in this issue include:

- The Case and Call for Oral Bibles: A Key Component in Completing the Great Commission by Rick Leatherwood
- Objections and Benefits of an Oral Strategy for Bible study and Teaching by Larry Dinkins
- The “People of the Book” are the People of the Story: Storytelling in Contemporary Jewish Ministry by Bill Bjoraker

Through the publication of this issue, we invite readers, especially our graduates and faculty students out there serving among oral learners/communicators, to reflect on issues related to theological education for oral learners, including some of the following:

- how oral learners learn
 - how we can affirm and empower oral learners
 - how we can adapt our curriculum for oral learners
 - what assessment tools we can develop to facilitate oral learners
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Encouraging Ducks to Swim: Suggestions for Seminary Professors Teaching Oral Learners

JAY MOON

Introduction

The seminary student spoke clearly and deliberately, as he presented a story that made me re-think my own teaching methods. Even though this class discussion was several years in the past, the memory is still fresh. I can still hear the sincerity in his voice and picture the earnestness in his eyes as he unfolded the following story:

A man once owned a baby duck. He wanted to encourage the duck to walk on land instead of swim in water. Whenever the duck waddled close to the water, the man would spank the duck on its backside. WHAAACK!

At first the duck was stunned. Looking at the duck's webbed feet, it is obvious that the duck was meant to swim in water. After several whacks to the backside, though, the duck reluctantly succumbed to the man's wishes by waddling behind the man, following him on land. As the duck grew, he continued to walk on land, trailing behind the man wherever he went, since he was discouraged from swimming in the water.

Eventually, the man died. Finally, the duck was free to swim in the water. The duck was excited for the big day when he could finally swim again. He inched over to the water's edge, scanned the surroundings to make sure the coast was clear, and finally jumped in the water. The duck floundered in the water since he forgot how to swim. Unfortunately, he had walked on land for so long that he was unable to swim in the water!

The student then looked directly at me and concluded, "That is how I often feel during my seminary studies. I grew up in an oral culture but in school we were discouraged from using oral methods to communicate; rather, we are rewarded with good grades for writing fine research papers and other print assessment methods. Unfortunately, when I go back to my home in Korea, they do not understand me any more. I forgot how to communicate using the oral methods that the local people appreciate! I feel like a duck out of water."

W. Jay Moon and his family worked with SIM from 1992-2001 with the Builsa people in Northern Ghana doing church planting and water development. He learned about oral learning by participant-observations with the Builsa people, who are a primary oral people. Jay has written two books and several articles that discuss oral learning. He is presently the Professor of Intercultural Studies and Director of the Wesley House of Study at the Sioux Falls Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

This story still haunts me. I wonder what we professors are doing to seminary students. Are we assisting in the process of fulfilling the calling that students were created by God to fulfill OR are we asking them to adjust to the professor's print methods of assessment, like forcing a duck to walk on land? Poor grades, like a whack on the backside, send signals that students respond to. Perhaps, these good grades indicate how well students adjust to the professors' assessment methods instead of assessing how well students are learning and being transformed.

What can seminary professors do to encourage ducks to swim in water? Where would they start? What are some of the underlying issues involved here? To address these questions, this article focuses on the following three objectives:

1. Briefly describe a learning preference shift from print to oral learning that has been described as "secondary oral" or "digit-oral" learning.
2. Summarize a few common characteristics of oral learners.
3. Describe a process for seminaries to better understand and start to address this learning preference shift.

Learning Preference Shift¹

Walter Ong (1982), a seminal author on orality and literacy studies, noted that learning to read changes the way people think more than any other single invention. Neuroscientist R. Douglas Fields conducted imaging studies on the brain and concluded, "learning to read restructures the brain – we can see it with human brain imaging" (Fields 2011). Someone who has learned to read then will think and compose their thoughts very differently than someone who has not had the opportunity to learn this skill called reading. A primary oral learner is one who cannot read or write; rather, they rely upon oral means to remember and utilize information. As a result, teachers in primary oral cultures have developed elaborate and ornate mnemonic devices and teaching methods to aid in recall, such as storytelling, ceremonies, symbols,

proverbs, songs, dances, drama, etc. (Moon 2010).

Ong observed, however, that a new type of orality called "secondary orality" is occurring due to recent technological advances, such as television, radio, movies, and more recently computers, iPods, cell phones, etc. Secondary oral learners are those who have the ability to read and write, but they prefer to learn or process information by oral rather than written means, aided by electronic audio and visual communications (Lovejoy and Claydon 2005, 63–64). Brown (2004) notes, "A general trend in history has been the progress from primary orality to some literacy with residual orality, and from then in some cases [e.g., U.S. academia] to a print-oriented culture. The modern trend is to move on to secondary orality, to a post-literate or multi-media culture..."

Whereas previous generations in U.S. seminaries assumed that print-based means of teaching and assessing were effective to produce student learning and transformation, many contemporary students prefer to learn through oral means. Sachs observed that contemporary learners are accessing information through digital means and they are exhibiting the characteristics of oral learners. As a result, he described these secondary oral learners using the term "digit-oral." Sachs (2012, 20) noted,

The oral tradition that dominated human experience for all but the last few hundred years is returning with a vengeance. It's a monumental, epoch-making, totally unforeseen turn of events . . . our new digital culture of information sharing has so rejected the broadcast style and embraced key elements of oral traditions, that we might meaningfully call whatever's coming next the digital era.

While some have called this learning preference the "21st Century Literacy" (NMC 2005), the roots of this learning preference stretch far back into oral cultures. At one end of the continuum then, primary oral learners cannot read or write and at the other end of the continuum there are highly print learners. In between, there is a range

of learning preferences. The secondary oral learners fall near the middle, as they shift from a print to an oral learning preference as shown in Figure 1:

What do these secondary oral or “digit-oral” students look like? How do they learn best and have their lives transformed through the seminary experience?

Characteristics of “Digit-oral”/Secondary Oral Learners

While other sources (Ong 1982, Lovejoy 2007, Moon 2009, Moon 2010) describe this more thoroughly, Table 1 below highlights a few common differences between oral and print learners:

Table 1. Oral vs. Print Learning Preferences

Category	Oral Learners' Preference	Print Learners' Preference
Dialogue	Learn mostly in dialogue with others, often communicate in groups	Learn mostly alone, often communicate one to one
Oral Art	Appreciate clarity/style of speech through oral art forms (e.g., stories, proverbs, songs, drama)	Appreciate clarity/validity of reasoning through interesting literature
Experience	Learn best when teaching is connected to real events, people, and struggles of life	Learn by examining, analyzing, comparing, and classifying principles that are removed from actual people and struggles (events are examples)

Category	Oral Learners' Preference	Print Learners' Preference
Holism	View matters in the totality of their context, including everyone involved (holistically)	View matters abstractly and analytically (compartmentally)
Mnemonics	Mnemonic devices like stories, symbols, songs, rituals, and repetition serve as valuable memory hooks.	Written words can be recalled later; therefore, value brevity and being concise. Stories merely help illustrate points
Participation	Respond to a speaker and participate in a storytelling event	Read alone and listen quietly

To research the prevalence of this learning preference shift in U.S. seminaries, I conducted research² during a nine-year period with over 230 seminary students³ from various cultural⁴ backgrounds. I discovered that 51% of the students evaluated via an Orality Assessment Tool (Abney 2001) had a preference for oral learning⁵. Keep in mind that all of these students have completed an undergraduate degree; therefore, they CAN read and write but they prefer to learn via oral means. When I tested 23 seminary professors⁶, however, a different picture is painted. Only 22% of the professors were oral learners compared to 51% of the students. To state it another way, the majority of professors prefer to walk on land while the majority of students prefer to swim in water!

How can seminary professors address this learning preference shift? Where should they start? In short, what process can professors use to encourage ducks to swim? To answer these questions, we will finally discuss the process that WCIU faculty undertook during a Winter Institute in February 2013.

Process for Faculty Discussion

Dr. Yalin Xin, Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies at WCIU, contacted me to introduce the above topic to the WCIU faculty. The following is a reconstruction of the process to lead the faculty in a discussion and exercises to address oral learning in their university setting. There are five stages in the process that are similar to the stages of learning to swim.

Stage 1: Send the invitation to swim

In conference calls with Bill Bjoraker, Associate Professor of Judeo-Christian Studies & Contemporary Western Culture at WCIU, Dr. Xin, and myself, we discussed the context at WCIU and agreed upon the following objectives for the consultation:

- a. Increase professors' awareness that orality is a real and important educational issue.
- b. Understand oral learners better in order to adapt teaching and assessments methods to supplement print methods.
- c. Apply this discussion to professors' work at WCIU with secondary oral learners.

With these objectives in mind, Dr. Xin sent an email to the faculty a month prior to the consultation, asking them to complete the LPA. The completed LPA results provided a snapshot of the faculty learning preference. The results reveal that 29% of the WCIU faculty is oral learners.

In addition, faculty was asked to post responses on a Wallwisher.com⁷ site to the statement, "Describe briefly the changes you have noticed (in the last 5-10 years) in the learning preferences of students that you are working with?" This website includes images and allows for the posting of videos, papers, comments, etc. in order to invite the faculty to start swimming in the digit-oral waters.

Stage 2: Survey the water

On the day of the consultation, I led a presentation/discussion on "Understanding Oral Learners in Seminary." This was then followed

by Dr. Bjoraker's presentation/discussion on "To Teach is to Learn: Matching Teaching Styles to Learning Styles in an Age of Increasing Orality." A discussion panel was then conducted with the two presenters, who were joined by Dr. Tom Steffen, Professor of Intercultural Studies at Biola University. These hour-long events provided a brief survey of the field of orality studies in relation to seminary education. The aim was to prepare the faculty to get their feet wet with further participatory activities during the rest of the day.

Stage 3: Submerge in the water

The comments posted by the faculty on the Wallwisher.com site prior to the consultation were grouped into the following themes, and presented to the faculty. Each faculty member was asked to pick one of the following topics to meet in a small group. They then broke into small groups to discuss the five most important changes (related to their chosen topic) that faculty need to address. The five small groups were based on the following student changes:

a. Students do not prefer Western research and writing approaches to learn and demonstrate what they have learned:

Faculty comments: "*Students find it hard to do academic writing (organizing paper, progress of arguments, analytical thinking, English language usage). Research Papers and a lot of reading are not the way our Majority World people learn best and demonstrate their learning. The heavily cognitive WCF curriculum teaching style was not matching the learning style of these, largely, oral learners. I am in favor of adjusting the "deliverables" that students use to demonstrate what they are learning.*"

b. Students want access to information in print materials in combination with oral methods:

Faculty comments: "*How do students access the rich learning tradition of the West from printed materials (in libraries) and print learning methods? Internet facilities are the biggest issue to fix to allow everybody to participate. Hard to afford to purchase hard copy texts.*"

c. Students find it hard to apply print teaching methods in their “home” context:

Faculty comments: *“Hard for students to effectively communicate with oral learners who will never be university students. Target group is most likely highly oral. What is the predominant learning style of the people that they minister to?”*

d. Students learn through digital/graphic media, symbols, and narratives:

Faculty comments: *“Learners are digital in orientation and graphic/media as well. We need to recognize this and admit that such learners are gravitating back towards more narrative/story type learning.”*

e. Students favor oral discussion and interaction with professors, mentors, and students:

Faculty comments: *“Hearers genuinely appreciate and resonate with more oral presentations. [Students are] more comfortable with face-to-face oral teaching and enjoy the online discussions. [Students] enjoy the in-person discussions, and appreciate having a face-to-face mentor to discuss reflection questions with. [I recommend a] combination of a face-to-face mentor-coach (who does not give grades) and an online facilitator.”*

The faculty small groups reconvened with the rest of the faculty team in order to present their five points to everyone (written on poster paper). Clarifications of the points were provided based on questions asked. Then, each person was asked to select the top three most important issues that they need to work on together, using the Nominal Group Technique (Delbecq et al. 1975) for scoring. Basically, the most important issue should be given three points, the second most important issue was given two points, and the third most important issue was given one point. Once each faculty member posted their scores, the scores were totaled, and the top five point getters emerged as the most important issues for the faculty to work on together. This stage provided consensus and buy in for further engagement with oral learning in seminary. The faculty was then ready to stir the water.

Stage 4: Stir the water

Using the list of five items that were selected in the previous stage, the faculty now had a short list of the most important items to work on together. For further motivation, I presented a summary of the LPA results for the faculty. 29% of the WCIU faculty was oral learners compared to 51 % of the seminary students tested from previous studies. This disparity highlights the need for faculty understanding and action.

Each faculty member was then asked to select one of the five issues and form a new small group to address the question, “What are the most important challenges and opportunities to address these changes?” At this point, the faculty was getting ready to stroke the water and swim.

Stage 5: Stroke the water

Once the small group # 2 reconvened and presented their suggested actions to the group, it was time for individual faculty members to select an action that they would take this school year to address oral learning in their courses. I used the “body part debrief bag”⁸ to assist in the selection process. This debriefing tool is a collection of fourteen spongy body parts including a hand, foot, eye, brain, heart, liver, etc. After I spread the body parts on the table, I described how each part of the body relates to something they may have learned today. I requested that they pick up the part that relates to the action they want to take and describe the action for the rest of the group. E.g., the liver filters toxicity from the body. If they want to stop doing certain things in the classroom that have been preventing students from learning well, then state this action. The metaphorical significance of each body part was presented.

One by one, each faculty member picked up one of the spongy body parts and described the action that they would take this school year. The faculty actions, along with my comments included:

a. *“For my online classes, I will start the first week with a video introduction.”* A program such as Animoto.com could facilitate this. In addition, a

screen capture program like Jing.com allows you to record a narration of the most important parts of the online course. The students see your (recorded) screen as you move the mouse over the parts that you want them to be familiar with.

b. *“For an assignment, I will ask the students to draw a picture.”* Students can either post a photo of the picture or describe it to the class. I had an interesting discussion with students when I asked them to draw a picture that comes to mind when they hear the term “Kingdom of God.” The pictures helped some students to visualize and then articulate difficult concepts.

c. *“I will use more storytelling, pictures, and rituals in my classroom.”* These oral art forms are very engaging and provide memory hooks to promote long-term recall and learning. In one class, I gave the option for students to compose lyrics for a song, based on the reading material. Another student presented their final project in the form of a collage. As she described the collage, it was clear that she captured well the course contents, had reflected on it, and integrated it with other learning.

d. *“I have used many of these oral methods at home. Now, I want to combine the oral and print methods in my classroom.”* A good way to combine both approaches is to require a final project in the class that includes both a written paper and an oral presentation with each aspect receiving 50% of the grade. For the oral learners, they will shine in the oral presentation and be challenged to strengthen their writing skills. Oral learners will also appreciate that their oral presentation factors into their grade. After all, once they finish seminary, most pastors are assessed by their oral presentations more than their written works. If you grow tired of PowerPoint for presentations in class, try Prezi.com for a non-linear and creative presentation tool.

e. *“For oral learners, I will develop an oral rubric to assess their learning.”* For those interested in assessment rubrics, I have an oral presentation rubric that I have used in many classes (see rcampus.com for sample rubrics). This rubric measures how well the student presents what they learned using oral

methods.

f. *“I will use more team teaching in the classroom.”* Since oral learners thrive on dialogue, they appreciate the dialogue between professors in a team taught class, as well as the dialogue between students and professors.

g. *“I want to integrate oral and print learning methods in my online class.”* For online classes, the natural tendency is to make this a print medium (a lot of printed words on a computer screen). To help oral learners, think of the online class as a visual medium instead of a print medium. To start, incorporate images in the online class to make it more visually appealing. Instead of long threaded discussions with a lot of printed words, consider using programs like Voicethread.com. This site allows you to post a picture and then students can respond to the picture via a voice post, camcorder post, type-written post, text message, or a simple drawing tool that allows you to draw on the picture.

h. *“I watched you today. You modeled what you are advocating.”* The best way to start teaching oral learners is to observe those who model this. I learned how to teach oral learners from observing African teachers who did this well. One student from India explained, “We did not learn as much in class as by what we observed when the professor related to students, his family, and others.”

i. *“Before I started my PhD studies, I painted all of the time. If I had a problem with a sermon, I would paint and it would unclog the clog so that it would flow again. The PhD program destroyed that. I want to restore this in my own life and in the classroom.”* It has been said (probably by an oral learner) that you only truly understand what you can draw. For this professor, the path to promote oral learning in the classroom is likely linked to restoring the life-giving practices that were part of his background. For many PhD students, they often get stuck when they attempt to formulate their dissertation. Instead of using an outline approach to formulate their thoughts, many oral learners can conceptualize and process their thoughts with a mind map (developed by Tony Buzan). A program

like [imindmap6.com](http://www.imindmap6.com) can get students unstuck. A demonstration of the mind mapping process can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wZ5wV5dPZc>

In addition, oral learners may consider writing portions of their dissertations using a narrative approach. I incorporated a fair amount of narrative in my own dissertation. The professor who has lost his painting background during his PhD program reminds me of a duck that was encouraged to walk on land instead of swim in the water. There is still hope to learn to swim again, though.

Conclusion

I just finished a presentation on the subject of secondary orality to Religious Studies students at LeTourneau University in Texas. These were undergraduate students that would likely populate the future incoming class for American seminaries. As the time for questions approached, a hand shot up from the back.

His question was simple and direct, “Are seminary professors listening to this?”

Not knowing specifically how to answer this question, I did what many professors do. I asked him a question!

“Would you like them to?” I responded.

Without a second’s hesitation, his voice raised as he exclaimed, “YES!”

I looked around the room at this group of 32 students that would likely become the next generation of pastors and church leaders, and I saw several heads smiling and nodding in agreement. Their LPA results revealed that 78% of them were oral learners. Yet, I also knew that only 22% of the seminary professors I tested were oral learners.

Images of the duck raced across my mind. Will we encourage ducks to walk on land, or swim in water, or do a bit of both?

How would you respond to the pleas of these students?

Endnotes

1. Portions of this article are drawn from the article “Understanding Oral Learners” (Moon 2012).
2. The research results will be presented at the fall, 2013 International Orality Network (ION) Conference and then published in the ION journal.
3. The seminary students were from the Sioux Falls Seminary in South Dakota and Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky during classes taught by the author and Terrence Mournet, Assistant Professor of New Testament studies at the Sioux Falls Seminary (at the time).
4. The various cultural backgrounds represented were Native American, African, Asian, South American, and North American. They were enrolled in the Master of Arts, Master of Divinity, Doctor of Ministry, Doctor of Missiology, or PhD programs.
5. In order to assess a person’s learning preference, an “Orality Assessment Tool” was developed by Lynn L. Abney (2001) for use in primary oral cultures, based on Ong (1982). To test the learning preferences of secondary oral learners in a seminary, the students were asked to complete the “Learning Preference Assessment” (LPA) as a class assignment. This assessment measures the importance of: learning via dialogue with others, traditions, stories, engaging real-life experiences, learning in context, the importance of sound and drama, etc. The students were not informed that this assignment was to assess the preference of oral vs. literate learning; rather, they were told that this simply assessed their learning preference without any correlation to intelligence or IQ. The assessment provides 40 learning preference pairs and students are asked to respond with a score from 0 to 4. A total score of 80 or below indicates that the student has a preference for oral learning.
6. The LPA was conducted for seminary professors at Sioux Falls Seminary in South Dakota (2012), the Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond in Virginia (2013), and the William Carey International University in California (2013).
7. This is a free website that acts like a bulletin board for posting notes that all can read. It is very user friendly, visually attractive, and easy to create. The notes can later be rearranged into common categories/themes for further discussion. Recently, this site has been improved and changed to: Padlet.com
8. Michelle Cummings designed this group-debrief-

ing tool. It can be purchased online at: <http://store.training-wheels.com/bodyparttools.html>

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Objections and Benefits of an Oral Strategy for Bible study and Teaching

LARRY DINKINS

After participating in over forty orality/storytelling workshops in the last few years, I have become accustomed to a general skittishness that many people have concerning Bible story telling. There was a time when a church actually called a special meeting of the elder board to discuss at length whether they would allow our story seminar to take place on their property. They came up with seven questions about Simply the Story that we had to answer in detail before they would allow the seminar to take place. Since we consistently encounter objections to oral strategies, it would be helpful to address some of the main concerns that are voiced and balance those concerns with the major benefits.

Concerns about Storytelling

1. *Misuse of Stories:* There is a modern trend in more liberal churches to substitute stories for solid

authoritative teaching. Many fear that when Bible stories are featured, the listener will come away with a nice Aesop Fable type moral, but will miss the true meaning of the passage. Thus in more conservative churches, there is a concern that in our postmodern age, absolute and objective truth will somehow be reduced to subjectivism and relativism, if not mere moralism, if narrative sections and stories are emphasized.

2. *Undermines Rigorous Bible Study:* An inordinate stress on stories will undermine the inductive study of the Word of God. There is concern that featuring Bible stories in an oral fashion will somehow make people lazy when it comes to diligent study of the more doctrinal parts of the Bible. An accompanying assumption is that storytelling is great for children, but adults and scholars need to study more solid and meatier sections.

Dr. Larry and Paula Dinkins came to Christ through Campus Crusade at the University of Oklahoma. After their marriage in 1978 they were accepted to OMF International for ministry in Thailand. In 1981 they started their church planting ministry with leprosy patients in Central Thailand, and in 1987 they transitioned into a Bible teaching ministry at the Bangkok Bible College and Seminary where Larry served as Academic Dean and Dean of the Seminary. In 1995, he finished classwork for a PhD at Biola University which allowed them to move to North Thailand to start a TEE program. Larry acted as director of the newly formed Chiang Mai Theological Seminary in 2000 before the family evacuated Thailand in 2002 due to a diagnosis of cancer in Paula's bone marrow. After nine years of treatment, Paula's struggle with cancer ended and she went into the Lord's presence. Larry has returned to Thailand to resume a ministry of Bible teaching, oral Bible story telling, counseling and mentoring. Larry has four children Andy (32), Timothy (30), Amber (27) and Titus (26).

3. *Loss of Control*: Unpacking a story using questions, dialogue and discussion can open the door to ideas that may be at variance to the true meaning of the passage. Without someone to bring more authoritative control over the Biblical content, you could open the door to spurious teaching.

4. *Discourages Literacy*: If you affirm an oral approach too much, then people will not be inclined to improve their literacy. A person who relies on an audio player to receive the sacred Word, may not make the effort to learn how to read the text.

5. *Not for Large Groups*: Story telling is designed for smaller groups and is not effective in larger groups. The idea of having a large group repeat a story or asking questions on a Sunday morning is unwieldy and could be counter productive.

6. *Neglecting the Non-Narrative Genres of Scripture*: What about the epistles? An oral approach may work with narrative genre, but epistolary, prophetic and poetic sections need a propositional approach.

7. *Misses Authors Intended Meaning*: If you tell an individual story, you can miss the authors intended meaning, which is discerned by a careful study of the entire book. To get a proper interpretation one must have a good grasp of the context of the story, why the narrative is included at that point and just what the author has in mind by placing it there.

8. *Orality is a Passing Fad*: The current emphasis on story telling is missiologically fashionable at the present moment, but will not last.

9. *The Telephone Game Effect*: When you pass down a story orally, won't you dilute or even distort the story itself by multiple tellings?

Benefits of Storytelling

The above nine concerns about orality will be addressed as the benefits of story telling are enumerated. After those nine are treated, more benefits will be presented.

1. *Finding Deep Truths Through Questions*: Deep truths are accessible to not just a chosen few with academic advantages, but can be mined together at a deep level as a group of believers directed by the Holy Spirit discuss and interact over a Bible story. We have found that by asking insightful observational and applicational questions of the story, audiences are actually able to discover meaty truths that may not be apparent on the surface. There is actually a way to do inductive Bible study, but in an oral style, so that important interpretations and applications arise directly from the Bible story itself. Not only Jesus, but also Socrates in the time-honored Socratic method, knew and used questions as a key to effective teaching.

2. *Develops Critical Thinking Capacity*: An oral learner can still be taught principles of inductive Bible study, but in an oral style. Critical thinking is valued in Western higher education, but is usually thought to occur through reading and analysis of texts. An oral discussion of the interpretation and application of stories in real time with a group, face-to-face, develops new analytic skills. Participants gain the ability to think "on one's feet" as they work through the story. This ability to dig into stories pays benefits when the person increases their reading ability and is able to study other genres of Scripture like poetry, prophesy and the epistles.

3. *Andragogy (Adult Learning)*: For the majority of Christian history, pedagogy has held sway. Pedagogy literally means "teaching children" with the main stress placed on the teacher who exercises control over the flow of information to often passive listeners. Information is often inculcated into the student by rote in a kind of indoctrination process. In andragogy you honor the life experience and spiritual background of the adult learner by allowing opportunities for dialogue and discussion through questions. The role of the storyteller is that of a facilitator who monitors the discussion and ensures that the group stays on track biblically. The leader stipulates that one must stay within the story at hand, which limits extraneous information from outside the story and insures that the mean-

ing of the story arises from the text itself. The storyteller/teacher does exercise a level of control over the group and the discussion, but in such a way that discovery-learning can take place as the story is discussed at both a cognitive and the affective level. The stress is on active learning rather than the passive absorption of facts from an expert. The group leader must do all the necessary background study of the story being treated, but be careful not to tell those treasures directly to the students. Instead, the facilitator's job is to allow the students to discover the treasures for themselves, which acts as a powerful aid to memory.

4. *Improves Literacy:* Our experience is that when an oral person becomes excited about Bible narratives, they often show a hunger for more stories. At that point they realize that literacy is a means to gain access to more of God's Word and their interest in reading and education is heightened.

5. *Effective in Large Groups:* There are ways to have the whole congregation repeat the story (usually in pairs), followed by questions addressed to the entire congregation. Individuals then respond verbally to the questions right from where they sit. In much larger groups, wireless microphones can sometimes be brought right to the person who answers. In other settings it may be more advisable for the storyteller to ask the questions, pause for the congregation to think, and then answer the question himself in a more rhetorical manner. In either case, the goal is to get the audience participating in the story itself so that they walk out the door knowing both the meaning of the story but also having confidence to retell it. The operative principle is "Don't teach anything that is not immediately reproducible."

6. *Other Scripture Genres Can be Oralized:* There are "narrative like" sections even in poetical and epistolary *genre* of the Bible. In our training we give examples from the epistles, like James 1:22-25 as well as Psalms 1 and 23. These and other sections lend themselves to an oral treatment due to their graphic images and underlying

story line. The key is to honor the genre and treat it accordingly. If an epistolary section is heavy with propositional doctrine, then it should be treated in a more propositional manner. The Major and Minor Prophets are full of images, parables, acted out signs and short story lines that can be orally told and dramatized. The same is true of certain parts of Wisdom literature as well. These propositional and poetical portions make up 25% of the Bible with the remaining 75% dedicated to the narrative genre.

7. *Sensitivity to the Context:* Story training helps the student be sensitive to the surrounding context. Most every story needs an introduction in which the storyteller gives relevant background information, or summary reference to the back-story that precedes it. During the introduction you can treat contextual issues, hard terms, cultural insights and even aspects of the authors intended meaning. By telling stories in chronological order throughout a book like the Gospel of Mark, you will more clearly see how the stories fit together and with it the underlying message that the author is seeking to communicate.

8. *Appreciation for the Storytelling Tradition in All Societies and in Christian History:* Every society and people group has their stories, legends, creation myths and bards. True, story is being rediscovered in the secular world due to the postmodern shift. But this resurgence of story in the secular world should not color the valid Biblical emphasis on narrative, nor be used to label orality as the "latest-greatest" fad in missiology. The storytelling art has enjoyed a long history in the annals of history. There is a vast corpus of qualitative research and extensive bibliographies that have been assembled to buttress the validity of oral strategies even in academic circles. It is true that the term "orality" is fairly recent. Walter Ong coined the term in his classic book, *Orality and Literacy* in the year 1982.¹ The contemporary orality movement has gained momentum especially in the last twenty years and will no doubt continue to flourish as our knowledge of oral learners increases.

9. *Reliable Generational Reproducibility*: People play the telephone game by whispering a phrase to one another around a circle. The last person is then asked to repeat the phrase, at which point everyone laughs as they see how much it was altered. This game is often cited when concerns about the transmission of stories is brought up. The flaw in the comparison, however, is that oral societies do not pass on their stories by whispering to one another. As group cultures, they all hear the story corporately and because it is a sacred story they seek to maintain the integrity of the story. In fact, in primary oral cultures, the very history, identity and heritage of the people group depends on knowing how to transmit stories faithfully from generation to generation. Also there is a self-correcting dynamic in any group that values a sacred story. This is illustrated in the current phenomenon of *Wikipedia*, on the Internet. The community corrects the wiki post; if someone sees information that is wrong or incomplete the public nature of the content allows public correction.

Having addressed some of the chief concerns about story telling, we can move on to even more benefits:

10. *The Jesus Model*: Jesus was the consummate oral storyteller of all history. It is said at one point, “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable” (Math. 13:34). He used stories and parables with both the common people, but also with the most highly educated scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was particularly adept at using questions. He was asked a number of questions but most often chose to answer them obliquely by using a parable, a story, another question or simply not answer the question at all. The benefit of using stories and unpacking them with dialogue and discussion through questions serves as a reminder that you are using a proven method that the master teacher used extensively.

11. *Honoring the Nature of the Bible*: The majority of the Bible is in a story form with 15% dedicated to poetry and the remaining 10% to

more doctrinal material. God decided to present the bulk of his revelation through story knowing that through the ages most cultures would resonate and identify with the embedded truth contained in the stories that make up the sacred Word. A believer who knows the key stories and characters of the Scriptures is able to trace the redemptive message from the beginning to end as well as place the other writings and genres within that historic framework.

12. *Holistic Impact*: No doubt all Christians who teach God’s word are hoping for broad transformational change in their target audience. Yet the teaching/preaching that is done on the field today usually ends up with a more narrow cognitive impact. We certainly want to influence the way people think and believe since “renewing the mind” (Rom. 12:3) is always a valid and necessary goal in biblical teaching. But changing ones religious beliefs or even outward behavior does not mean that you have affected the core worldviews of the person. Messages on the field are for the most part presented in a propositional, sequential and logical manner as one might hear in the west. Such messages are respectfully listened to, but the question remains, “How deep do they reach into the core of the person?” Stories have the potential of affecting the listener not only in a cognitive way but also emotionally and even at a core/gut level in the Hebraic sense (Gen. 43:30). Seeing oral learners deeply identifying with characters and responding holistically is one reason why educators are taking a renewed look at the ancient art of oral story telling.

13. *Internalization and Ownership of Scriptural Truth*: When a story is learned and retold repeatedly, the storyteller is able to absorb and gain personal ownership of the story. The story itself as it is held in the head and heart serves as a kind of “oral outline” of the passage, so that notes are no longer necessary. That means that the story teller is ready to use stories or parts of stories at a moments notice for evangelism, counseling, discipleship, leadership training, preaching, teaching, etc. Over

time a storyteller can accumulate large numbers of stories in his personal database and in this way store up a wealth of truth to draw upon.

14. *Bible Memory*: A common goal in most all discipleship programs is to have people memorize scripture. Most often individual verses are learned by rote with care given to quoting it verbatim and giving the correct verse reference. All of us have benefited by such a practice, yet most all would give testimony concerning how difficult it is to put such verses into long term memory. Scores of verses faithfully memorized are eventually lost unless they are diligently reviewed for long periods. What is amazing about learning and absorbing stories is that many more verses can be retained in a shorter time. If you absorb thirty stories of ten verses each, you end up learning three hundred verses. As a pastor I would love for my people to be able to retell three hundred verses of sacred text. There also comes a point with multiple retellings that certain stories ends up needing no review at all.

15. *Generational Involvement*: In most every context I have participated in, be it a church, camp or conference, there comes a time when the adults are separated from the children. With a story approach you can actually keep the adults and children together as you share the Word. Once a couple who were home schooling their 12 and 13 year old asked if their children could participate in our five day training course. At the end of the week, these two young people became two of our best storytellers. At the lower ages you may need to separate them out, but you can still tell children the same stories that the adults experience. That way parents and their children can discuss the same stories together after the service.

16. *Family Devotions*: The father of the two children in the above illustration was thrilled to find an approach to family devotions that everyone in the family could contribute to and actually lead. As a father with four children, I used to read an age appropriate devotional to my family. If I had it to do over again, I would train my children to lead

an entire story session. In this way I could assign relevant stories to each family member so that everyone could take part.

17. *Immediate Feedback*: When a typical message is finished in a church context the speaker has no idea of how the people processed or understood the material. The nature of story telling means that as you unpack the story and ask open-ended questions you get immediate feedback. You can promptly tell whether the group is tracking with the story or is confused. With their relational and high group culture, the Thai appreciate the chance for such group participation and interaction. Be aware, however, that it may take a while for people to feel safe enough to share, especially if the only style they have had in the past is a lecture style. One needs an oral skill set to handle a group in this way and it may seem “messy” at times, yet adult learners appreciate and respond best when they sense their opinion is heard and valued.

18. *Equal Playing Field*: I once put on a seminar in the North East of Thailand and placed a pastor and housewife in the same group. The pastor was a strong leader and powerful speaker but the housewife was not a leader and had no significant role in the church. However, after a few story sessions, the pastor took me aside and asked, “What has gotten into that woman? She is asking questions that even I can’t answer.” In Thailand, usually an enlightened expert will arise within a group and culturally the Thai will always differ to the one with this “special knowledge”. The nature of a story group, however, means that the emphasis is on the story itself. You end up with a “level playing field” in which the novice along with the seasoned Bible student can contribute equally to the discussion.

19. *Improves Communication Skills*: What people fear most are not snakes or sharks, but having to give a speech in front of their peers. In story telling you are not tied to a podium or notes, but are free to express yourself by kinetic movements, gestures, voice inflection and facial expressions. We have seen very shy people blossom when they

realize that they can indeed tell a story in an effective way. Bible schools would especially benefit by including a section on the dynamics of story telling as a core part of the curriculum.

20. *Master the Minimum:* This was a basic point that Dr. Howard Hendricks often drove home to his students. Seek to simplify your communication to an essential minimum and then reinforce this core so that your listener gains a level of mastery over the subject. The fundamentals of effective story telling can be expressed in just a few basic steps. Mastering those steps will take much practice and many retellings of various stories. The preparation phase of story telling and forming of insightful questions is more involved, but this phase can also be reduced to a few basic steps.

21. *Interdenominational:* Recently I was asked my opinion of the topic that an American speaker coming to Thailand had chosen to speak on. I vetoed the topic because I knew that it would only breed controversy among the diverse group that this speaker planned to address. I have never found that to be true in any of the many story workshops that I have been involved in. When groups are restricted to dealing with the story at hand, then everyone can stay on the same page and dig together equally. Certainly there are lively discussions and even disagreements within groups as the scriptures are unpacked, but keeping the focus on life and blood situations that are mankind's common experience tends to keep the group focused on the essentials rather than peripheral matters.

22. *Intercultural/Cross-Cultural:* Because they are about human experience, stories are applicable to every culture. There is a saying, "Humans differ widely, but not wildly". There are universal human experiences in Bible stories that apply to all humans. One should strive to understand your target group's language and worldview as best as you can. However, stories in the Bible are actually very supra-cultural and speak powerfully into every worldview and felt need. I am constantly amazed at how a story, which someone designates as being

for discipleship, actually ends up being used to lead people to Christ. I have heard hundreds of messages that were only suitable or even understandable to the specific group they were aimed at. Story training, on the other hand, has a commonality that appeals to very diverse groups. Once we held training for eighty participants on the border with Laos, which had representatives from twenty-three churches. Although the background of the people and even languages spoken were quite diverse; they were able to process the stories together in an effective manner.

Filling Your Heart Pocket

This paper started with specific concerns that hamper people's involvement in oral strategies. Although various objections are voiced, I have sensed that there is an underlying reason why people fail to embrace Bible story telling in an enthusiastic way. For one thing, they have invested a great deal of time, money and education in highly literate approaches. Often the bulk of their training and experience in communication has stressed a propositional, analytical and logical paradigm. So strong is this literate conditioning, that the majority of Christians I meet are unable to tell me even one Bible story in an accurate way (and there are around 1000 stories in the Bible). Many are able to give the gist of some Bible stories, but our western literate training does not put a premium on absorbing and retaining Bible stories and then telling them in our own words while maintaining content accuracy. If given a clear assignment and time to prepare a content accurate story, then most all would be able to comply. However, my concern is not what they can read to me from the Bible or explain to me from their notes, but what do they end up having in their "heart pocket" at that moment. What have they have internalized so as to have the confidence and competency to, like Paul, be "ready, in season and out of season"?

I can only speak for myself, but it was a sobering and embarrassing moment for me when I realized that my heart pocket was bereft of even

one accurate Bible story. I had taught in a highly propositional and western manner in four Thai Bible schools during my twenty plus years in Thailand. I had even used a very analytical and literate method with the semi-literate leprosy believers that I mentored during my church planting days. My students did benefit from this propositional approach and I will always affirm the need to train disciples in literacy and in an inductive study of God's word. However, a kind of epiphany occurred when I finally accepted the fact that my target audience was at their core preferred oral learners and sought to match my teaching style to their oral learning style. The result was a major paradigm shift in my view of both teaching and learning. The response by the Thai to this change was both compelling and immediate. The benefits listed above are just a part of the reason why myself along with many others are finding value in oral strategies.

Hammers and Tweezers

A good carpenter does not arrive at the job site with only a hammer in his hand. I arrived in Thailand fresh out of seminary with a number of tools, but the main one was a literate/western hammer that I used in all my preaching, seminary teaching, and local church training. My oral/story communication skill, however, was the size of a tweezers. I noticed that my fellow cross-cultural Christian workers were carrying their tweezers as well, since they had been trained in a manner similar to myself. I still carry my hammer of course, and continue to pass the same hammer along to the Thai so they will know how to wield a propositional tool for the expository messages they give. But when treating the narrative portions that make up three-fourths of the Bible, I pack an oral tool and want to make sure the Thai own one as well.

With hammer in hand, I used to make sure people mastered certain *subjects and topics*. Now I see my calling is to teach not just content, but teach *people*, and oral people at that. To teach these people we need: 1) a variety of tools in our communication belt; 2) the knowledge of what tool to

use for what type of learner; 3) skill plus diligence in using those skills. The communicator who possesses such a tool chest of approaches will be well prepared when called upon to teach "the whole counsel of God".

Endnotes

1. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982).

The Case and Call for Oral Bibles: A Key Component in Completing the Great Commission

RICK LEATHERWOOD

In 2006, the late Avery Willis, former vice president of the Southern Baptist's IMB and founder of the International Orality Network, stood before 40 Christians in northern Iraq and began his talk by saying, "For forty years I did it wrong." I was amazed. I had no idea what orality was and didn't really care. I had simply come to the seminar to hear Avery Willis. He was one of the biggest names in cross-cultural ministry and yet here was Avery beginning his presentation saying he had done it wrong for forty years! Without exception Avery had our attention as he turned and drew a circle on the white board and asked, "What is that?" and we all said, "Circle." He then drew a square and asked, "What is that" and we all said, "Square." Then he drew a triangle and we all said, "Triangle." Avery turned around and looked at us and said, "You say that because you are literate. If you were a non-literate person you might see a ball, a block, and a pyramid, because non literate people do not think

in abstract terms like literate people do. When we learn to read, something happens in our brain and we begin to think in more abstract terms." Two years later I was conducting my first orality workshop in Liberia, West Africa, which is 80% non-literate, and I drew a big circle on the chalk board and asked what is that? Everyone said, "Ball." Hum. Then I drew a square and asked, "What is that?" and everyone said, "Block," just like Avery had said. The point is if we come to people preaching the gospel using circles and squares (abstract concepts) and they are thinking in terms of balls and blocks (concreteness), we don't communicate in a form the people understand, and this was the 'wrong' that Avery was talking about.

Jesus was literate. But He knew the vast majority of the people listening to him were not literate. So He did not speak to the people in abstract terms. He taught them through storytelling. He taught them through the concrete stories of

Rick and Laura Leatherwood served with OMF in the Philippines until 1987 when they felt the call of God to go to Mongolia and formed Mongolian Enterprises International. In Mongolia, Rick directed the Bible translation which published the NT in 1996, and the complete Bible in 2000. Rick and Laura then moved into the Middle East and served in Iraq from 2003 to 2008. At this point after 25 years in ministry the Leatherwood's lives changed as they were introduced to orality. It was clear to Rick that with 65% of the world's unreached peoples still not literate and coming from oral cultures, it would take an oral strategy to complete the Great Commission. The Leatherwoods moved to Liberia and began making oral Bibles. Between Jan. 2009 and April 2013, the Leatherwood's ministry now called Kairos International, has recorded oral Bibles in 45 languages. Rick and Laura Leatherwood are presently living in Ethiopia.

fishing and farming, vineyard owners and laborers, merchants, pearls, hidden treasure, wheat, tares, nets, tax collectors and Pharisees. Jesus was the master storyteller whether it was about a money-lender and his debtors, a rich man and a beggar, two sons, an unjust steward, and on and on. Even when Jesus talked to a religious expert, someone who was obviously literate and could quote the Scriptures, Jesus told the expert of the law the story about the Good Samaritan. Nothing too abstract here- a Levite, a priest, a Samaritan, robbers, an inn keeper, two coins. Where did this story come from? It came from the mind of Jesus, as He graciously gave the expert in the law the direction he needed to leave his racial prejudice and religious hypocrisy behind and “go and do” as the Samaritan had done.

Storytelling is the fastest growing method of evangelism and discipleship in the world today. It is effective and people like it. Jesus said, “You are truly my disciples if you continue in my word.” Jn. 8:31. You and I have become disciples by reading the word of God and following its teaching. But what if someone cannot read? Jesus did not say, “Go and make disciples of everyone who can read.” He said, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” whether they can read or whether they cannot read. Sixty five percent of the world’s population is not literate. Most of those living within the unreached peoples in the world today are oral learners. If we are going to reach oral learners with the gospel we must use oral strategies. Christians all over the world who are serious about making disciples of oral learners are now engaging in storytelling.

But more than just storytelling is needed. A few stories here, a few stories there, people get excited . . . and then time passes. Where is the continuity and sustainability needed to make disciples? These are two very important components to spiritual growth. Where is the breadth of vision that is needed for people to come to really know God and His purposes so that they can participate with Him and find true meaning in life? Storytelling as it is being practiced in many areas today creates ‘story sets’ which deal with topics such as leader-

ship, evangelism, marriage, women’s issues, poverty, sickness, demons, men’s issues, etc. But where is the big picture that provides the needed continuity and sustainability? It is in making an oral Bible.

So just what is an oral Bible? An oral Bible is the recording of a core set of stories of the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation that gives the chronological panorama of God’s word as it unfolds in the most central, essential, and fundamental stories of the Bible. It is not a summary. Nor is it a children’s Bible. An oral Bible is the word of God. Great pains are taken to maintain the integrity of the Scriptures. Nothing is added or expounded. It is not embellished or expanded upon in any way. It is a selected portion of stories from God’s word which non literate people can understand better than they can understand the abstract portions of Scripture such as Paul’s epistles.

An oral Bible is more than a story set of 6 to 10 stories dealing with a particular issue. It is a story set of 70 stories that gives the whole overview of the purpose of God from beginning to end. Not too many. Not too few. The IMB is one of the leaders in the storytelling movement and has prepared more than 180 stories. But 180 stories is a lot for a native living down on the border of Kenya and Ethiopia to try to get his mind around. By keeping the story set short in an oral Bible (60-70 stories), the end can be clearly seen from the beginning and even non literate people can see and understand the plan of God. After that more stories can be added.

In speaking of oral Bibles, a moment is needed to note the difference between an oral Bible and an audio Bible that an organization such as Faith Comes by Hearing is producing in many parts of the world. The audio Bible produced by FCBH is a dramatized recording of the New Testament onto a cassette tape or an audio player. But the text for audio Bibles such as FCBH produces comes from a written New Testament which has been translated and approved by Wycliffe or a Bible Society. The problem here is Wycliffe says it will take another 125 years to complete written translations

in the languages of all the unreached peoples. But an oral Bible beginning from Genesis and not just the New Testament can be quickly produced from the written translation of the local trade language which has already been completed by Wycliffe or a Bible Society. In Liberia we made oral Bibles in 16 languages in just 18 months. So the oral Bible is not dependent on 125 years of future new translations. It takes what is there in the previously completed translation of the trade language, and building on the years of hard work to produce that translation, records a selection of 70 stories orally into the mother tongue of the unreached tribe. Another advantage of an oral Bible is the oral Bible is done by a team in a group setting, with a consensus coming forth from the group to determine the best way this or that should be said in their language.

Another difference between an oral Bible and an audio Bible is that the stories recorded in an oral Bible have been crafted for reproducibility. Instead of recording the whole text (as is done in an audio Bible) the stories in an oral bible have been shortened. The story of David and Goliath is a good example. The written text includes the details of Goliath's clothing, his armor, the weight of his spear, etc. Are these details important to the main point of the story? Are knowing these details essential for becoming a mature Christian? Including all the written details makes a story hard to reproduce in an oral form. If the story is not orally reproducible, the good news that a man has risen from the dead does not spread among unreached non-literate people. Therefore in order to make the stories reproducible, an oral Bible keeps the heart of a story but omits unessential details like Goliath's clothing, enabling the stories to be remembered and retold. As Bruce Wilkinson of Walk Through The Bible said, "We try to get our stories down to the irreducible minimum." Exactly. To get an idea of a complete 70 story set and the text used to create an oral Bible, go to www.oralbibles.org.

So a team of 5-6 native speakers of a given language, who also know how to read their trade

language, take on the task of providing the Scriptures orally for their tribesmen who don't read. These 5-6 native speakers learn two or more Bible stories a day, taken from the written text of the Bible in the trade language. With such a team, usually an oral Bible of 60-70 stories from creation to Revelation can be recorded in a week. First the group sits together in the morning discussing the key terminology of the stories they will be telling in their mother tongue that day. Their goal is to find the best way to say this word or that one in their language. They collaborate as a group discussing the word's meaning in the context of the passage until they all come to agreement. Then each one studies their story using the group's consensus of the correct terminology or as is more often the case, the best phraseology, and then with one of their team members listening to check for accuracy, they tell their story in their mother tongue as it is being recorded. The oral Bible then goes through another check as it is edited. With a native speaker listening to the recordings while following the written text, the editor makes any changes necessary, making sure the oral story agrees with the written word in the Scriptures. Together the editor and the recorder then arrange the stories in chronological order. The recording is then put onto one of the solar powered audio players that are now on the market.

And so we come to the question of distribution. Who gets the players? From what I've observed, at present, the practice is to get a player into a village so that all can use it. But let me ask you a question. When you are ready to read the word of God, do you want to begin by taking an hour out to go down the block searching from house to house to find which one of your neighbors has the Bible? No. Your spirit is calling for the word of God to come into your soul right at that moment, so you take your readily accessible printed Bible and begin to read. Historian Paul Johnson records that in the 1630s and the years following, every home in Boston had a Bible, and that Bible was being read on a daily basis giving guidance and direction and consensus to the settlers living there

as they tried to live by God's word. This is discipleship. The same will be true for people who do not read. Oral Bibles need to be available to every household that wants one.

The church in the 20th Century did a wonderful job of getting the cost of printed Bibles into hundreds of languages down to around \$3 per Bible, providing access to the word of God for millions of people all over the world. As we move closer to completing the Great Commission in the 21st Century, the church must come to grips with the fact that the word of God needs to go into every home that wants it. The cost of solar players must come down from the present \$15-\$60 price range to \$5. If the secular world can put a calculator on the market for \$3, surely it is possible for the church to get solar powered players containing an oral Bible into every non literate person's home for \$5.

Our commission is to "go and make disciples," but it is pretty difficult to make disciples without the word of God. It is surely time for the whole translation component of the church to take a major step toward reaching every tribe and tongue with the word of God by creating oral Bibles. It is good to see Wycliffe moving more and more into the creation of oral Bibles. As a result of their participating in a project called 'One Story' they have revised their projection from 125 years to finish the task of reaching every language with God's word to just 25 years by producing oral Bibles. This is good news indeed. Without doubt oral Bibles are the best way forward to make disciples of the non-literate unreached peoples of the world by bringing them the word of God in a form they can understand.

The “People of the Book” are the People of the Story: Storytelling in Contemporary Jewish Ministry

WILLIAM BJORAKER

At the conclusion of the Fall Feasts of Israel, the Jewish High Holy Days, is the feast of *Simchat Torah* (“Rejoicing in the Law”), when traditional and Orthodox Jews passionately celebrate the gift of God’s Word. To witness the exuberant dancing and singing while carrying the adorned Torah Scroll at the Western Wall in Jerusalem shames the paltry expression of devotion to the Word that characterizes most of us late moderns.

Yet it is clear that the Word of God is in three forms: 1) *The Living Word* (the “Memra” in Hebrew; or “Logos” in Greek), 2) *The Written Word* (the final authority and judge for all faith and life), and 3) *The Oralized Word* (Scripture brought to life through human communicators, words made flesh). This article will highlight the vital role of oralized Word, for our moment in history, and especially for Jewish ministry.

The Jewish Roots of Orality and Storytelling

The Hebraic roots of storytelling pre-date the

Written Torah by many centuries. The archetypal stories of Adam and Eve, of Cain and Abel, of Noah and his family, of the Tower of Babel, the stories of the families of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were transmitted orally over generations by good storytellers before ever they were written down in the form we have them in the Torah.

Moses taught the people of Israel that when they came into the land promised to them, they were to bring a tithe of the firstfruits of their produce in a basket to the place God designated. They were to offer it to the priest, who would set it before the altar. But then this striking practice is commanded,

5 “And you shall **make response before the Lord your God, and say,** ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6 And the Egyptians treated **us** harshly and humiliated **us** and laid on **us** hard labor. 7 Then **we** cried to the Lord, the God of **our** fathers, and the Lord heard **our** voice and saw **our** affliction, **our**

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toil, and **our** oppression. 8 And the Lord brought **us** out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. 9 And he brought **us** into this place and gave **us** this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Deuteronomy 26:5-9 ESV)

Note from the bolding above that this was an oral act and a community event.

The people are commanded to annually recite the story of father Abraham, of his families’ decent into Egypt and then of the great deliverance that forged the Israelite peoplehood.

Thus, to the present time, each year at Passover the Jewish people are commanded to tell their children the story of the nation’s founding and of God’s awesome deliverance from Egypt. “And you shall tell your son on that day...” (Exodus 13:8). The Hebrew verb is “*vehiggadta*”—to tell. Hence the Passover event and the “Haggadah” is the oral “telling” and annual retelling of the story that establishes and reinforces the Jewish people’s identity. And each Jewish holiday provides an opportunity to tell another story of God’s acts toward the people.

Prior to the invention of movable type printing (Gutenberg, 1437), books were rare and expensive; readers were rare. Reading was an oral act and a community event. People usually did not read to themselves silently; they listened as someone read out loud. Curiously, the Ethiopian eunuch (wealthy enough to have access to a written scroll), though he was alone, was reading *out loud*, because Philip heard him reading from a distance (Acts 8:30). (See also Deuteronomy 31: 9-13; Nehemiah 9:3, and I Timothy 4:13 for references to such community oral events of reading aloud).

The printing revolution changed all that. As Eugene Peterson observed, “A thoroughgoing orality in which the word held people in a listening community gave way to discrete individuals silently reading books alone. Widespread literacy “changed the act of reading from an oral-aural community

event into a silent-passive visual exercise” (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1987:91).

The Hebraic tradition, though holistic, involves the hearing ear more than the distancing eye. Biblically, we see God always speaking personally to His people, not writing to them. The Shema reads “*Hear O Israel! ...*” not “*Read O Israel! ...*.” There are very few times in Scripture where God or Yeshua wrote anything: The Ten Commandments, the handwriting on the wall in Daniel, and Yeshua writing in the sand in front of the woman caught in adultery. Yet the phrase “Thus **says** the LORD” is repeated over 400 times. When the Apostle John sent the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, here were the instructions, “Blessed is he who reads **aloud** the words of this prophecy, and blessed are **those** who **hear**” (Rev. 1:3). Reading the Scriptures is not exactly equal to listening to God. To do the former is not necessarily to do the latter. Atheists can read Scripture.

Why is orality (the oral-aural process) so singularly important? One reason is because of the interpersonal-relational contrasts highlighted by the following table:

Reading	Listening
Eyes	Ears
Read marks on a page	Attend to the sound of a voice.
A lone person with a book, written by someone miles away, or dead, or both.	An interpersonal, relational act.
The book is at the reader’s mercy. The book does not know if I am paying attention or not.	Listener is required to be attentive to the speaker, at speaker’s mercy. The speaker knows if I am paying attention or not.
The reader initiates the process; the reader is in charge.	The speaker initiates the process; the speaker is in charge.

Reading	Listening
<p>Images in life: the stereotype of the husband buried in the morning newspaper at breakfast, preferring to read scores of yesterday's sports events, and opinions of columnists he will never meet, than to listen to the voice of the person who has just shared his bed, poured his coffee and fried his eggs, even though listening to that live voice promises love and hope, emotional depth and intellectual exploration far in excess of what he can gather informationally from the New York Times.</p>	<p>Images in life: All Israel assembled at the foot of Mt. Sinai as Moses addresses them.... A first century Pauline congregation gathered to hear the oral reading of a letter from the apostle Paul... A soldier standing at attention, listening to the commands of his drill sergeant.... Boy scouts around a campfire listening in rapt attention to a storyteller tell a ghost story... A family Passover seder dinner, in which the father animatedly tells, once again, the Great Story of our Freedom, the children ask questions, the symbolic foods are eaten, and the songs are sung.</p>

(Adapted from Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans: 1987).

Storytelling has always been part of the Jewish tradition. The *Aggadah* is a part of Judaism's Oral Law in the classical Rabbinic literature of Judaism. Talmudic tractates, the Halachic rulings and mitzvot are legal and propositional in form. In contrast, the *Aggadic* and *Midrashic* tradition is largely in narrative form, or simply put: stories (historical anecdotes, parables, homilies, folklore).

According to well-received Jewish tradition, it was King Solomon who, popularized (if not invented) the parable. "The Torah until Solomon's time," commented Rabbi Nachman in the *Agada*, "was comparable to labyrinth with a bewildering number of rooms. Once one entered there, one lost his way out. Then along came Solomon and

invented the parable that has served as a ball of thread. When tied at the entrance to this labyrinth it serves as a secure guide through all the winding, bewildering passages." (Ausubel: 1948:56).¹

As the well-known maxim has it—"History is His Story." God's "Master Story" is the "Ariadne's thread" (drawing from the Greek story here, as the Rabbi did) that runs through the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.² The Master Story begins in Genesis with Creation and covenant. Genesis 3:15 is the first announcement of the Master Story that finds fulfillment in Messiah. Genesis 12:1-3 makes the story more specific—the plan of redemption will follow the historic thread of Abrahams' descendents. At the end of the thread, we see Messiah Yeshua establishing His Kingdom and putting everything to rights. This metanarrative³ is the framework into which all the smaller stories fit. This master story also provides a hermeneutical key for interpreting other *genre* of Scripture as well, and is evoked by the question — How does this passage or story follow the thread of God's Master Story?

Taking up the thought, Rabbi Nachman's colleague, Rabbi Hanina said: "Until the time of Solomon, the Torah could have been compared to a well full of refreshing water, but because of its extraordinary depth no one could get to the bottom. What was necessary was to find a rope long enough to tie to the bucket in order to bring up the water. Solomon made up this rope with his parables and thus enables everyone to reach to the profoundest depths of the well." (Ausubel: 1948:56).

Often modern Western preachers and teachers think of stories as mere illustrations or "icing on the cake" of a lecture type sermon. They think the real cake (the substance) is the more abstract, propositional truth in logical, linear, statement-of-fact form. Rabbi Hanina knew that stories were the rope that reaches to the profoundest depths of the well.

As N.T. Wright has written, "Human life, then, can be seen as grounded in and constituted

by the implicit or explicit stories which humans tell themselves and one another. . . . Stories are often regarded as a poor man's substitute for the 'real thing', which is to be found in some abstract truth, or statements about 'bare facts'." ("The New Testament and the People of God," Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992:38).

The Power of Story

Humans are wired for stories. Everyone loves a story. Every person's life is a story, with plot twists and interesting characters. When we hear stories, we identify with characters in the story who dealt with situations like we face. We learn vicariously through the truths we draw from the story. A story features real life, concrete situations like our own. A story touches us at deeper levels than abstract propositions or stated principles can. A story can penetrate our imagination, conscience and emotions, touching us at a deep personal level. Someone has observed, "A picture is worth a thousand words; a story is worth a thousand pictures."

Rabbi Jacob ben Wolf Kranz of Dubno, the "Dubner Maggid," was a Lithuania-born preacher who lived from 1740 to 1804. "Maggid" is Hebrew for storyteller (from the same Hebrew root as "Aggadah" and "Haggadah"). A contemporary of the Vilna Gaon, the "Maggid" was famous for explaining Torah concepts by using a *mashal* or parable. Moses Mendelssohn named Kranz "the Jewish Aesop." He was once asked, "Why are stories so powerful?" Kranz's legendary reply was to tell the following story (below a modern re-telling):

There was once a poor old woman...she was well...ugly...very ugly...she had a bent back and hooked nose, her chin was covered with warts and pimples...her eyes bugged out, her mouth was crooked and her teeth broken. She dressed in old rags that smelled. No one would listen to what she said or even look at her. If they saw her they would run away...slam doors in her face. So she was very sad because all she wished for was some company, companionship. But no one would pay atten-

tion to her or talk to her. So she wandered from place to place looking for friends.

She crossed a great desert and came to a city in the middle of the desert. She thought to herself, "Surely, I'll find friends in this city. People in the desert know how hard life is and they'll take pity on me and I'll find a friend." But, alas, this city was like all the rest ...people ran away and slammed doors, closed their shutters...no one would talk to her or listen to her. She became very upset. "Why go on? What's the point? Life is too hard. I think I should just give up on life" ...so she wandered out of the city and sat down on the dusty road just outside the city. She waited... and watched life passing her by.

Before long, a good-looking young man dressed in beautiful clothes arrived in the city and received a great reception. The people came out to shake his hand, hug him. They brought him food, drink and lavished him with gifts. The old woman said, "Life is so unfair. When you are young and good looking, everyone loves you, but when you are old, ugly and sick, they forget you and ignore you...it is so unfair! After a while the young man gathered up his gifts and said good-bye and headed out of the city. He stopped on the dusty road, sat down opposite the old woman to pack up his gifts. The old woman could keep her tongue no longer, "What is going on? What's with you? Is it like this everywhere you go? Do you always get treated so well?"

The young man blushed and said, "Well... yes... I guess... Everywhere I go they treat me well."

"Well why? Why!? You must be someone special! Someone extraordinary," said the old woman.

The young man said, "Oh, no, Ma'am, actually, I am quite ordinary."

"I don't believe it. You must be an emperor, a king, a prince or a general," she said.

"Oh no...I am not like that...I am very common. You find me everywhere, me and my type." He said.

"Well then, what are you? said the old woman. ... "Who are you that people are so happy to see you when you come along?"

"Well, I am a Story and I think I am a pretty good story at that." ... Because people like a good story and they are happy to see me...but old woman, 'what are you'? Who are you? Why don't people like to see you?" said the young man.

"Ah, that is the problem, It's what I am...I am Truth, nobody likes to hear the truth.

Narrator: This may seem a bit strange to some of you...but when you think about it what the old woman said is really true...If someone said to you, "I'm going to tell you what your friends really say behind your back. Do you really want to hear it? Or if you are a student, do you really want to know what your teacher thinks about your homework. People don't like to hear the truth.

The young man said, "I'm sorry about that." And began to think how he could help the old woman. "I've got an idea, old woman," he said. "Let's team up...let's journey together! You and I can travel together and wherever I go, you'll go. Anything I am given, I'll share with you."

"That won't work," she said. "They'll see me. They'll take one look and run away from both of us!"

"No! ... you don't understand, you'll hide behind me! —hide behind my cloak. Whatever they give me I'll share equally with you. Let's try it."

The woman agreed and they partnered up and travelled together. Wherever they went, the old woman hid behind the young man's cloak and anything he was given he happily shared it with the old woman.

And it worked out so well that their arrangement lasts to this very day. That is why to this very day the truth always hides behind a good story. ⁴

The Maggid (Hebrew for "Storyteller")

This story has also been put into verse form:

"Truth and Story"

Naked Truth walked down the street one day.
People turned their eyes the other way.
Parable arrived draped in decoration.
People greeted parable with celebration.
Naked Truth sat alone, sad and unattired.
"Why are you so miserable?" Parable inquired.
Naked Truth replied, "I'm not welcome anymore.
No one wants me. They chase me from their door."
"It is hard to look at Naked Truth," Parable explained.
"Let me dress you up a bit. Your welcome will be gained."
Parable dressed Naked Truth in Story's fine attire,
With metaphor, poignant prose, and plots to inspire.
With laughter and tears and adventure to unveil,
Together they went forth to spin a tale.
People opened their doors and served them their best.
Naked Truth dressed in Story was a welcome guest.

(Heather Forest, 1996)

What follows is a Biblical example of truth hiding behind a good story. Imagine with me: Had Nathan the prophet approached King David, after his sin with Bath Sheba, and told him the abstracted truth—“You have committed adultery and murder, O King.” Would the King have readily received this truth? Likely not. He may have ridiculed himself of this troublesome prophet. He did not want to hear the ugly, naked truth. But instead of presenting him with the naked truth, Nathan told him a story,

“There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, 1 and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” (II Samuel 12:1-4 ESV).

This story opened a window for David to see. He vividly could see the injustice done. David bought into the story. The King became enraged and said, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” Nathan said, “You are the man!” Nathan had opened a window, which became a mirror to David. Herein is the power of story to bring truth home.

Suddenly, it is easy to see why about 70% of the Bible is in narrative (story) form, with about 15% poetry and only about 10% in propositional (didactic epistolary material, laws) form. The Hebrew Scriptures (the Tanach), without the New Testament, have an even higher percentage of narrative form, approaching 90%.

Yeshua the Messiah, the Master Teacher, Was a Storyteller

Yeshua was the Master Teacher and Communicator of all time. In His wisdom, He knew the power of story to teach, to impact and change lives: *“Jesus always used stories and illustrations... when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.”* (Matthew 13:34 NLT). Yeshua stood in the Jewish tradition as a teacher using *mashal* (parable) and story. He was the master storyteller and understood the power of stories to instruct, encourage and convict his audience. He adapted his stories and chose them carefully in order to meet the felt needs of the *am ha aretz* (the common people of the land). And He knew how to deliver truth to the religious people—truth they needed to hear, but did not want to hear, and would not hear unless it was wrapped in a story. He was an expert in using dialogue and questions in order to engage his audience and gain a response.

Often we think that stories are for the illiterate and uneducated. But Yeshua used stories with the common uneducated folk, as well as with the most literate and learned of His day, the Pharisees.

A Storytelling Revival

Those in the evangelical foreign ministry movement have been using chronological Bible storying for years in reaching non-literate peoples, who are oral learners. Expository presentations (abstract lectures, outlines, steps, lists) are formidable obstacles to not only non-literate but to semi-literate people. Oral learners have discovered how to learn differently through story. Often it was assumed that storying was only for primary oral cultures. However, the postmodern turn in Western Culture is driving a storytelling revival here in America and in other Western countries. The advent of TV and movies, and now the digital age has brought changes in our learning style preferences. The majority of the millennials, the baby busters/Gen Xers, and even many baby boomers now prefer to learn through spoken and visual

means than through the printed word. We have been conditioned to be more visual and oral by our iphones, ipods, YouTube, and the social networking media like Facebook.⁵

This new learning style by people who are literate but prefer to get their information by visual and oral means is called "secondary orality." They are adopting orality as their preferred communication style. This phenomenon is also called "post-literacy." We may be rightly disconcerted about the loss of literacy in America, but this turn also offers opportunities. Oral cultures have always been characterized by relational face-to-face communication using stories, proverbs, songs, chants, drama, poetry, and other forms of communal and interactive events. Western literate people are hungering for these elements in an increasing way. When a wave like this arises in our culture, we advance Messiah's mission should get out our "surfboards" and ride it for Kingdom purposes.

This shift in learning and communication styles challenges us to communication strategies that meet people "where they are at." There is a new receptivity out there to the stories of God...if we can tell them effectively. So often the great stories of Scripture are read from pulpits as if it was a lecture being read by someone else than the author who wrote it. Stories told with emotion and appropriate inflections and gestures impact the memory. Most people remember the story that was told as an "illustration" in last week's sermon better than they remember the three points of the erudite sermon.

There is a growing "Orality Movement" in the evangelical world seeking to address this situation.⁶

Effective Jewish Ministry through Storying/Bible Storytelling

We have discussed how storytelling has always been part of Jewish tradition. We have discussed the power of story, and how 70% of the Bible is in story form. We have discussed "secondary orality" and the new receptivity to story in Western Culture. So what of its use in Jewish ministry today? Jewish

people are generally highly literate and well educated. Storytelling has been associated with non-literate and uneducated people, so my first response was to think it not relevant to Jewish ministry. But it did not take me long to think twice—storytelling would be Jewish-friendly, if using the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures (the "Old Testament"). The majority of Jewish people today are secularized and, though generally highly literate, they not very Biblically literate. Yet they instinctively know these are the stories of the Jewish people, the stories of Israel. They resonate with them. Surely the People of the Book will be People of the Story!

Storytelling is Jewish-friendly. The Jewish tradition of storytelling has continued on the present day, surviving the scorching last few centuries of modernity. Note this network of Jewish storytellers of the Jewish Storytelling Coalition: <http://www.jewishstorytelling.org/>. They include a directory to professional and amateur Jewish storytellers all over the United States. This remains a familiar and acceptable Jewish cultural form. Think of how much more powerful the stories are when they are stories from the Hebrew Bible, told by Messianic Jewish storytellers. They are the Word of God empowered by the *Ruach ha Kodesh* (the Holy Spirit).

By "storying" or Bible storytelling, we mean the entire process of the oral and visual communication of a *Bible story* (not folk tales) followed by group discussion, interpretation, application, accountability, drama and/or song and the retelling of the story such that the story is internalized by the group and can be retold to others.

Storytelling is seeker-friendly. People of any faith or none can participate and not feel preached-to, or lectured-at. Anyone can hear and discuss the story. Seekers feel on a more level playing field, because everyone in the groups is discussing the story just told. All are looking for the treasures in the story together. And then the story does its work of speaking to hearts.

Another advantage of storytelling is that it bypasses the pitfalls of apologetics and argumentation that goes nowhere. Jewish people, and

especially those schooled in Rabbinic thought can argue and debate you to a standstill over who is the Messiah and the theological issues. Head-to-head Messianic vs. Rabbinic apologetics is the “naked truth” approach. Reflecting upon a story and keeping the group focused on drawing out its treasures shifts the matter to a whole different dimension. We let the story do the work of speaking to hearts, rather than us trying to convince the defensive rationalist mind.

The Holy Spirit is our internal Teacher who promised to guide us into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13; I Corinthians 2:9-16). Bible storytelling acknowledges the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit through power of the Word of God and. Theology is embedded within every Biblical story. The Holy Spirit applies the truths most relevant to the life needs of every hearer as the telling and discussion transpire.

Traditional schooling models have been teacher-dependent, with the students too passive; the teacher breaks down the Bible text into digestible form, and the student mechanically records the bits on paper, like a mother bird would feed a baby bird. Reflecting upon a Bible story in a group setting and drawing out its treasures actively engages people so the learning reaches the heart and sticks.

I have been using storytelling from the Hebrew Bible on a weekly Jewish Seeker’s Study for about two years now in the Los Angeles area. We have between fifteen and thirty who attend each week and about one-third of them are Jewish. We have storied our way from Exodus through to I Samuel, the marvelous David stories. A Jewish believer led the story of David and Goliath last week, bringing his young son to play David, with football shoulder pads as Saul’s armor. His dad used Aragorn’s sword, Lord of the Rings commemorative edition, as he played the Philistine champion. Humorous and fun, but we also had serious discussion about honor and shame, victory, faith, and courage, and applications and prayer for facing our own “Goliaths.”

Bible storytelling provides a context for discipleship as well as leadership training. I have been

coaching Jewish believers to lead the story telling, and they are growing in leadership skills as they do so.

One Jewish man has embraced Yeshua as his Messiah through our group several months ago. Several Jewish seekers have attended, and 3 or 4 have continued to come for months; they have not yet embraced the Messiah, but they are participating in the stories and bonding to the group.

Let’s oralize the Word, and bring these stories to life from the dead page in our day! Yeshua the Messiah said to those who revered the Book, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5:39-40). The purpose of the Book of the LORD is to know the LORD of the Book. The Written Word points beyond itself to the Living Word.

Let’s revive the truth that the People of the Book are also the People of the Story!

(See APPENDIX I for a description of a Storytelling Method)

Appendix I: Storytelling in Five Steps (Two Phases)

According to the Simply the Story (STS) Method

Storytelling in Two Phases:

Phase One

By telling the story three times the listener becomes familiar with the story so that questions can be answered accurately in phase 2.

Step 1 — You tell the story

Begin with a brief introduction. The story should be thoroughly studied in its context noting the setting, characters, plot and structure. The goal is to orient the listener to the historic and geographic setting and where it falls in the biblical timeline. Certain aspects of the story may need to be clarified. The goal is to prepare the listener so that he will not be distracted by any new information but instead will be able to concentrate on the story itself.

The Bible is closed during the introduction. The actual story begins when you open the Bible in your hands and begin with "Now this is the Bible story..." Tell the story with passion and drama, using plenty of gestures and adjusting your voice to reflect the mood of the passage and characters. You may briefly lay the Bible down in order to make a point, but at the end of the story you should close the Bible and set it down. The listener will understand that as long as the Bible is open you are not making your own comments but are communicating the sacred Word.

Step 2 — You ask the story to be retold

Ask a volunteer to retell the story for the whole group. It may be difficult to find volunteers at first, but as they understand the method they will find it easier to participate. Make sure you set them at ease by promising to help them and affirming them. Let them know that you do not expect them to remember it all, but to simply retell what they do remember. Sometimes you may want more than one person to retell the story. The group

will help correct any errors in the telling. Hearing the story over and over will help fix the story in their minds.

Step 3 — Lead-Thru through the Story

As the storyteller thinks through the story, he asks questions to make sure the listeners are grasping the basic facts of the story. Begin the story as if you are telling it, except that at every phrase or sentence, (or maybe new thought), you start it, then hesitate and invite the listeners to fill in the rest of the information. You may ask, "Jesus and his disciples were traveling through which town?"; "What did Martha ask Jesus?"; "How did Jesus make the blind man see?" etc. There is no need to analyze at this step, simply make sure the group understands the key facts. You may need to help the group out by giving hints and key words to trigger their memory. Sometimes you may start the story and then ask someone to retell the next part of the story.

Phase Two

The storyteller leads the listeners to the spiritual treasures in the story. This is done in two sections and two skills need to be developed to do both well. If you stumbled on a treasure in a field you would have great joy and take your neighbors to see it. But their joy would not compare to the one who discovered the treasure themselves. In Matthew 13:52 it says, "Therefore every scribe which is instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which brings forth out of his treasure things new and old." We need to honor the adult learner by allowing him to gain insight into the Bible without being told directly by the teacher. The goal is to design questions that help the listener discover biblical truth for himself or herself. We want to impart the joy of discovery-learning. We remember only 20% of what we hear, 40% of what we hear and see, but 80% of what we discover for ourselves. Our temptation is always to teach by telling, to feed the little birds, rather than provoke the listeners to discovery learning through questions.

Step 4 — Spiritual Observations

Questions are used to highlight how God is working behind the scenes in people's lives. The listener is invited to take a look at the activities of the characters in the Bible. Then in response to questions, the listeners share what they learn about God and the people in the story. Our stress is on "what" happened, more than "why" it happened. "Why" questions tend to result in too much speculation. During this step we will gain insight into the character and actions of both God and people. An example would be, "What attribute of God is shown by the feeding of the 5,000?"

Example: What does each one in the story do or say? What choices did they have? What choices did they make, and what were the consequences? Then ask yourself:

- What does this show me about that person?
- Can I know from the story if the person is a believer, a seeker, a doubter or a rejecter?
- Is faith or doubt being shown?
- How does God use circumstances to warn, teach or encourage?

Step 5 - Spiritual Applications

Spiritual Observations emphasize how God is working in the lives of people in the biblical story. The goal of Spiritual Applications is to discover spiritual truths that apply to our lives and ministry TODAY. Resist the temptation to just hand them the treasures. Design questions to help listeners to discover for themselves the treasures in this story.

1. Example: Is there anything in the story that surprised me: actions of God, or people or the results of people's behavior? \
2. Are the people in the story, believers, sincere seekers, skeptics or hardened rejecters of God?
3. What choices do the characters in the story make? What choices could they have made that they did not make? What are the results or consequences of the choices they

actually made?

4. Does anyone change his or her beliefs, attitudes or behavior? What causes them to change? What might that teach us today?
5. How does God respond to people's beliefs, feelings, words or actions?
6. How does my understanding of God's attributes (justice or mercy for instance) affect my life today?
7. How does this truth affect my life in my marriage, home, parenting, job, church, synagogue, community, and society?

Note: Many in the group will not be used to discovering or discussing spiritual truths for themselves. The leader must be very patient and fight the urge to preach, use cross-references, or exegete the meaning of the story. As people get used to the method and you create a safe environment in which to dialogue, people will be more open and participate more. The leader must be very humble and refuse the urge to share his knowledge and answer the questions himself. The group needs to see that this method is reproducible and that any among them could lead a session.

Summary of the Story Method

Phase One — becoming familiar with the story

1. You tell the story
2. You ask for the story to be retold
3. Step through the story

Phase Two — Discovering Spiritual Treasures

4. Spiritual Observations
5. Spiritual Applications

Appendix II — “The Path”

(An allegory on how to go slowly through a story to find its treasures)

By Bill Bjoraker (adapted from Dorothy Miller)

Once there was a man who left his village of Jericho and went to the city of Jerusalem to conduct business. In the many years he was in the city, the man earned a lot of money. Finally, he returned home whereupon everyone greeted him as a great friend.

This newly wealthy man wanted to use some of his money to give gifts to his true friends. So he thought of a plan. He left his village for a day and then came back. Then he called everyone together who was saying, “I am your true friend,” and he asked them all to come meet him at the other side of the nearby hill.

The wealthy man gathered the people who came and then made an announcement. He said, “I’ve been working on the path that goes to the River Jordan. If you follow the path, you will find some treasures. Now go. Find my gifts for you.”

So the people left and started walking down the path. A few of them were scribes, and experts in the fine details of the Law and the Talmud, went a short ways, “Hmmm they said. This is an interesting path. Let’s look into this.” So they stooped down and picked up some sand from the path and took it home to study.”

Others from the party of the Zealots ran down the path toward the river. When they reached the end of the path, they complained, “We know this path well. It is very familiar. There is nothing new and revolutionary here. We didn’t see any treasure.”

The rest of the people, some who had been following the storyteller Yeshua of Nazareth, continued walking down the familiar path. As they moved along, they began talking with each other, saying things like, “Look at this old chariot wheel. Our friend moved it out of the way to make our

walk on the path easier.” Other walkers noticed that the thorn bushes had been cut back to make the way safer.

Instead of running down the path looking for gifts, these people began walking even more slowly. They enjoyed the results of the hard work that their wealthy friend had done for them. They recognized that the path itself was a gift from their friend.

Suddenly, one walker stopped, and called everyone over to look. “Look by the side of the path here, under this bush! There are bags of choice dates and figs and grapes as big as those first brought back from the land of Canaan!”

Then another walker called out, “Look over here, under the bushes beside the path! I found this beautiful hammered gold menorah, just like the one in the Temple.”

Again and again the slow walkers kept discovering hidden treasures just off to the side of the path. They realized that their rich friend had placed these gifts there for them. This wealthy man knew that his true friends would trust him and appreciate his path, so they would be the ones to discover the gifts he had placed there for them.

The Zealots who had rushed down the path, which had been lovingly prepared by the rich man, missed all of the treasures. They did not go slowly enough to be able to appreciate the path, or the path maker. Those scribes who decided to study the sand on the path are still studying it. They still have not yet traveled the path!

Every story in the Bible is a path prepared for us by God. And the whole Bible is God’s Story, the path of life. Those who walk slowly through the path of a Bible story will find the hidden treasures, gifts of truth from God (the joy of discovery-learning).

Appendix III

Resources for Orality and Storying

Websites:

<http://www.oralbible.com/>
<http://biblestorytelling.org/#>
<http://www.storyforall.com/>
<http://www.bibletelling.org/>
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/BibleTelling/209661911216>
<http://www.echothestory.com/>
<http://www.christianstorytelling.com/>
<http://www.jewishstorytelling.org/>
<http://www.storahtelling.org/index.jsp>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storahtelling>
<http://www.simplythestory.org/oralbiblestories/>

Books:

Boomershine, Thomas E. *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988.

Jensen, Richard A. *Thinking in Story: Preaching In A Post-literate Age*. Lima, Ohio. CSS Publishing Co., Inc., 1993, 1995.

Koehler, Paul F. *Telling God's Stories with Power: Biblical Storytelling in Oral Cultures*. Pasadena, CA. William Carey Library, 2010.

Lipman, Doug. *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play*. Little Rock, Arkansas: August House Publishers, Inc., 1999.

Miller, Dorothy A. Simply the Story: Inductive Bible Study "Oral Style": Exploring Scripture Through Discussion, STS Handbook. The God's Story Project, 2006. Downloadable at: <http://www.simplythestory.org/oralbiblestories/index.php/resources/free.html>

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 1988.

Pink, Daniel H. *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005, 2006.

Steffen, Tom A. *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry: Crosscultural Storytelling at Home and Abroad*. La Habra, CA. Center for Organizational Ministry and Development. 2005.

Walsh, John. *Bible Telling: Interactive Bible Learning*. 4 Volumes. Bloomington, IL: International Learning Solutions, 2005.

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

Walton, John H. and Kim E. Walton, *The Bible Story Handbook: A Resource for Teaching 175 Stories From the Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.

Journal:

Missiology: An International Review, "Orality," Volume XXXVIII, Number 2, April 2010.

Endnotes

1. A wonderful resource for traditional Jewish stories is *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore: Stories, Traditions, Legends, Humor, Wisdom and Folk Songs of the Jewish People*, edited by Nathan Ausubel, New York: Crown Publisher's, Inc., 1948.
2. A more Biblical metaphor is the "scarlet thread" let down the window by Rahab the harlot (Joshua 2:18-19). Scarlet, the color of blood, symbolizes the theme of blood redemption also threading its way through the whole Master Story.
3. Sociologists concerned with the postmodern shift describe our times as being characterized by "incredulity to metanarratives." (Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *The Post-modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* 1979, English translation, University of Minnesota Press, 1984). A metanarrative is a master story. The grand metanarratives that have driven modernity— Progress and the Perfectibility of Man through Science, Industrialism, Communism, Fascism, and other "isms"— have largely become "wasms" at the turn of the 21st century; they have lost their compelling power, no longer holding the same credibility. Thus, the Western world is searching for a new metanarrative. There is a receptive climate in which for us to communicate God's Master Story, and the smaller stories that make it up.
4. From the web site of the Surrey County Council: http://www.saldr.org.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/LookupWebPagesByTITLE_RTF/Truth+and+Story?o

pendocument#

5. Pink has argued that our moment in history is a time of "right brain rising." To put very simply the argument of his book: "Left brain direction" (rational, mathematical, scientific, analysis, text-oriented, logical, linear, sequential, detail-oriented) was dominant during modernity. "Right brain direction" (artistic, aesthetic, emotional and relational expression, literary, synthesis, non-linear, context-oriented, big-picture, holistic, metaphor and story-oriented) is rising in postmodernity out of human hunger for its lack during modernity. Left brain direction remains necessary, but it is no longer sufficient. We need a "whole new mind," a holistic mind. See *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* by Daniel H. Pink, New York: Riverhead Books, 2005, 2006.

6. See the fine treatment by Avery T. Willis, Jr. and Mark Snowden, *Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in A Teflon World*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010. And Snowden's web site- <http://truthsticks.ning.com/>