

A Description of Chronological Bible Storying with Missiological Considerations

Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) is a method of presentation that tells selected biblical stories in chronological order in the power of the Holy Spirit so as to bring people to genuine faith in Christ, mature discipleship, and fruitful Christian service. Ordinarily CBS includes a time of dialog after the story. In the dialog the storyteller uses questions to guide listeners to discover the meaning and significance of the biblical story. The formulation of this method has been relatively recent, but the basic elements of the method are ancient.

The Basics of Storying

- Storying is chosen because it is a primary communication vehicle of the target people.
- Storying is based entirely upon the Bible.
- Storying is chronological, sequential.
- Storying looks backward but never forward.
- Stories are chosen based upon the universal Biblical truths to be communicated.
- Stories are chosen based upon identified barriers in the target people's worldview.
- Storying is structured to give an "oral" Bible to individuals and to develop the competency to share it orally.
- Storying is a "win/win" approach until the story of the crucifixion and resurrection when the major invitation is given.
- Storying is predominately narrative with minimal exposition.

Missiological Considerations

We put a priority on people groups who have not yet heard the gospel or who have not heard in a way compatible with their oral learning style. We know that because of the literateness of Southern Baptist missionaries, we have frequently planted 75% of our churches among the 20% of the population that is literate. Those were the people we could best communicate with. If they were oral communicators when we evangelized them, our training processes made literates out of them. We are grateful for this harvest and will continue to work with them. Meanwhile we have neglected the 80% who are oral communicators. We are moving to remedy that neglect.

We offer the gospel to people irrespective of the availability of print materials in their language. In the past we have sometimes supposed that Bible translation must precede evangelism, church planting, leadership training, and the like. We will gladly partner with Bible translators because we believe in the value of their work, but we will not let the pace of Bible translation or the pace of literacy training determine with whom we will seek to sow the good seed of the gospel. We will sow it orally in the heart language through chronological Bible storying and seek to encourage those won to Christ to do the same. We support providing literacy training for those who want it but refuse to embrace any ministry approach that is dependent on literacy. In Jan. 2000 Dr. David Ross of SIL reported to a meeting of SBC professors of missions that at the current, recently accelerated pace of Bible translation, SIL will take decades just to initiate work

with groups already approved for a translation. Lost people cannot wait that long for the gospel. We cannot wait that long to evangelize when we know oral means are available to present the gospel meaningfully and establish Christ-honoring churches. Moreover, the research of Klem indicates that in Africa south of the Sahara, illiteracy is decreasing by only about 2-3% per decade; moreover, 75% of the illiterate expressed no interest in learning to read. We have anecdotal reports, however, that literacy enrollment tripled in the aftermath of the introduction of storying.

We select the most appropriate communicational approach available. If our favorite methods of communication are foreign to those we seek to reach, as Christians we bear the burden of changing in order to facilitate communication with them. We cannot justify asking them to adopt our communication preferences. This is doubly so when doing it would make them unable to communicate to their own people what we have taught them. Stories are how oral communicators learn and share, so stories are our primary vehicle. If a group chants or drums its stories instead of telling them, we will seek to chant or drum the biblical stories, too. It so happens that the Christian message is one large story composed of many sub-stories. Stories are powerful communication tools because of their familiarity, simplicity, and memorability. They engage multiple senses as they impact the human imagination. Wright insists that "stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favour which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden away for safety. This indirect approach is especially effective among resistant or hostile peoples. Stories are less likely to provoke arguments and premature rejection of the gospel message. If listeners do react against the story, the indirect form probably will allow any animosity to be directed more at the story and less at the storyer, thereby maintaining the relationship between storyer and listener that is so important.

We select stories essential to communicating the enduring truth of Scripture. For evangelizing we identify a core group of stories that are essential to tell God's overarching story of salvation. Typically this list of core stories includes 22-25 stories spanning from creation to the resurrection of Jesus. This group of stories is theologically necessary to set forth the character of God, the reality and seriousness of human sin, the necessity of satisfying God's righteousness, the mercy and grace of God in providing Jesus as the only acceptable substitute for us, the necessity of faith in him alone, and his triumphant resurrection from the dead.

We select stories needed to address the identified bridges and barriers in the worldview of the people we are working with. A careful worldview study needs to be done before storying begins. With the help of SIL and others we have developed a document to assist our personnel in doing worldview studies. Once the initial worldview study has been done, storyers select stories to supplement the core list. These additional stories contain biblical teachings that are needed to speak to the aspects of the prevailing worldview that are inconsistent with a biblical worldview. Dealing with these issues before the call for decision is designed to minimize syncretism. These supplemental stories also are chosen to convey that Christ meets the deep longings of the people in that culture. This process means that every people should be evangelized with a set of biblical stories chosen expressly for their worldview.

We lay a firm foundation for faith by telling the biblical stories sequentially in chronological order. This procedure provides a firm foundation for salvation, Christian living, and church health. It progressively reveals God's attributes. It discloses our need of salvation and how God provided it. This more complete introduction to the Christianity provides a context for interpreting every portion of the Bible.

We seek to initiate a church planting movement that can progress under local leadership and the power of the Spirit without outside subsidy or control. We want to respect the local believers and empower them with training that they can sustain long-term because it does not require printed materials or expensive equipment and because it uses the same communicational approaches by which they have transmitted their heritage and culture for generations. This means our training is done primarily by modeling and by using their own storytelling style, music, and other performing arts. CBS is designed to give individuals an oral Bible and the competence to share it orally with others. We will recognize biblically qualified pastors and other leaders irrespective of their literacy or lack thereof. We will recognize biblically sound congregations irrespective of their literacy or lack thereof. We seek to develop a strong grassroots ownership of the training processes such that the larger church can survive persecution or economic hardship.