

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

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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 attention 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 rid 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, 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-literature 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 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.storahntelling.org/index.jsp>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storahntelling>
<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/>

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?