

Orality: The Next Wave of Mission Advance (Revisited)

The Orality Movement has strong roots. The past ten years have been particularly strong. We were getting organized and I wrote the following news release, which *Mission Frontiers* picked up and ran for its January-February 2004 edition. For those new to the movement, this provides some context and history to the glory of God.

Chronological Bible Storying is changing Christian communication forever. Emphasis on oral learning preferences is the next wave of missions advance. Nearly 70% of the world's population—and 50% of the USA's population—desire a non-literate approach to learning and decision-making.

Programming recorded and distributed by many Christian ministries should take note. They are not off the hook just because they do not use print. The overall approach can be ineffective if attention is not given to communicating content effectively. For instance, the beloved “three points and a poem” is dead; long live the chronological narrative!

Literate preachers and educated media producers must give thought to their audiences. If Christians are serious about actually communicating with the lost, and discipling spiritually-reproducing believers, then “orality” will supersede relatively ineffective literate approaches. Just recording things in print is not good enough. An audio recording of something that was written for literates is different than an audio recording developed for an oral learner. To make the distinction, the word “oral” is used when stories are crafted for those in oral cultures.

Orality appeals to more than non-literates, but also to functionally illiterates, post-literates, and even post-moderns. People who do not read regularly, have only a tenth grade education or less or have been taught by rote memorization are attracted to Chronological Bible Storying. Key advantages for oral learners are memorization, retention, reproducibility, cultural appropriateness, and, well, they like it compared to exposition (including a non-linear frog-hop through Scripture).

Today it is possible for a non-literate to pastor, teach, minister, and plant churches effectively as a non-literate. Memorizing Bible stories is not enough. Oral learners must harvest the Bible truth from the presentations. Applications to real life emerge within the oral context. Often preachers complain about the disconnect between what they preach and their church members' lifestyles.

Storying is based on Bible principles that address theology and practical, real-life issues, many of which are barriers to faith and righteous living. Storying can also reinforce positive bridges to the gospel's acceptance and application. Dialogue, discussion, repetition, and even drama or singing the stories aid in retention and re-telling.

Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) is based on ancient storytelling principles. In modern times, New Tribes Mission and the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention workers collaborated to help cultures have their own “oral Bibles.” Dr. James Slack and J. O. Terry, Jr., refined the approach and brought it to the attention of the evangelical community.

There were nine missions agencies that helped to found the International Orality Network. It was originally called the Oral Bible Network. We conducted a Consultation on Orality in Ft. Worth, Texas January 20-22, 2004. World-class training professionals converged on Ft. Worth for introductory sessions and skills upgrading offered by the Oral Bible Network. The network's members include Campus Crusade for Christ International, International Mission Board (SBC), Wycliffe Bible Translators, Trans World Radio, the JESUS Film Project, Faith Comes By Hearing, Scriptures in Use, the Seed Company, and the God's Story Project. Registration was \$100.

