

NAPERVILLE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

ORALITY IN MISSIONS

SUBMITTED TO ADAM BLOOM
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
SENIOR THESIS

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One day, when evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." Leaving the crowd of people behind, the disciples took Jesus along with them in their boat. Without any warning a furious storm came up on the lake. The wind was strong. The waves were beginning to sweep over into the boat so that it was nearly filled with water. Jesus was in the back sleeping on a cushion. The disciples urgently woke him saying, "Teacher! Teacher! Don't you care if we are about to drown?" Jesus woke from his sleep, stood up, and commanded the wind and the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and the sea was completely calm again. Jesus then said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you have no faith?" They were terrified at what happened and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Another time Jesus sent his disciples ahead of him in a boat while he dismissed the crowd and went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came the boat was already far from land and being buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the night Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water. When the disciples saw him they were terrified. Jesus said, "Take courage! It is I, don't be afraid." The disciple named Peter said, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come." Then Peter got out of the boat and began walking on the water to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and sank into the stormy water. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. "You of little faith," Jesus said, "why did you doubt?" When they had climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then the disciples said to Jesus, "Truly, you are the Son of God." That is the story from God's Word.¹

It most likely only took one minute to read this story. For a literate audience, it probably seemed choppy and poorly written; it lacks any literary style that western learners are accustomed to. Yet the simple facts are straightforward and clear; it is easily remembered and retold. No extra frills were needed to get the main points across. For two-thirds of the global population, this style of storytelling speaks directly to the way that they learn: *orally*. In fact, "studies have shown that 80% of the world's population are oral learners... approximately 5.7 billion people."² In these communities, culture and history are not inherited through written texts. Rather, truth gained from the past is passed down from generation to generation:

¹ Terry, J. O. *Bible Storying Handbook for Short-Term Church Mission Teams and Mission Volunteers*. Revised ed. 2008. <https://orality.imb.org/files/1/409/Bible%20Storying%20Handb.pdf>.

² "Who are Oral Learners?" International Orality Network. <https://orality.net/about/who-are-oral-learners/>.

Through oral storytelling. Over two thirds of the world's population are oral communicators. When someone hears the phrase "oral communicator," they often equate it with "illiterate" or "uneducated." In some cases that's true.... But being an oral communicator goes deeper than that; it affects the way people perceive the world and interact with information.³

In secular terms, scholars understand orality as:

A thought and verbal expression in societies where the technologies of literacy (especially writing and print) are unfamiliar to most of the population.⁴

At its very essence, orality is simply a form of expression for many cultures around the world. It is a reliance on oral communication and auditory learning rather than on a written language.

Three main categories can be used to divide oral learners:

There are those who *cannot* read or write, those whose *most effective* communication and learning format is in accordance with oral formats, and those who *prefer* to learn and process information by oral rather than written means [emphasis added].⁵

Examples of these three types of learners can be found from all around the world:

- Take Dipu, a 55 year old, from the the Marma people in Bangladesh. He can't open the Bible in his language, because it's never been translated.
- Or Abebe, a 45 year old from the Central African Republic. Her uncle has a Bible in her native language, Sangu; but it's no use to her because she can't read....
- Or Moe, a 15 year old from Atlanta, Georgia. Her parents migrated here from Burma, and she can speak Burmese, Kareni, and English... but when it comes to her reading any of these languages, it's a headache.
- Or Dave, a 25 year old from Chicago. He's smart, but he never reads books (he is one of the 23% of Americans who did not read a book last year).¹ Instead he texts, instagrams and flicks through tech blogs in 10 second intervals. He wants to follow Jesus, but he is not going to follow a printed Bible passage with you for more than 3

³ "What is Oral Communication?" StoryRunners - A Cru Ministry. <http://www.storyrunners.org/about/#how>.

⁴ "Orality." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orality>.

⁵ Meijer, Durk, "How Shall They Hear?" (presentation at International Orality Network Meeting, Plano, TX, February 2008) quoted in Casey, Anthony. "The Rise of Orality in Modern Missions Practice." November 30, 2010. Culturnicity.files.wordpress.com—rise-of-oralty-final2.pdf.

minutes, without reaching for his phone....

For most people in our world, reading about Jesus will never connect to their heart, only hearing about him. And yet so many of our evangelism and disciple-making strategies rely on words printed on a page. In fact 70% of the world are ‘oral learners’ – they prefer to learn through stories, proverbs and sayings, not conceptual explanations.⁶

For Christians then, orality carries greater spiritual implications. The staggering number of cultures that are naturally oral must be considered in the construction of modern-day evangelism strategies. Reaching out to these people needs to be specific to the way that they best learn. Regardless of where they live or what their cultural background is, all oral learners follow the same general thought processes.

Literate communicators tend to think abstractly, whereas oral communicators tend to think concretely. Literate communicators learn from outlines and expositions, whereas oral communicators learn from concrete examples. Many oral communicators can read, but wouldn’t be able to explain to you what they read. When it comes down to it, if you hand an oral communicator a Bible written in their heart language, they won’t learn from it. In order to reach these people, we need a way to bring them God’s Word not only in their heart language, but also in a form of communication that they will naturally and readily learn from.⁷

Understand that evangelizing to oral cultures is an intentional approach of how to best relate the Bible to unique peoples. Yet since the sharing of Scripture alone does not complete the whole discipleship process, there are multiple different aspects of evangelism that need to be considered in reaching oral cultures. In Christian terms then, orality is more than just a way of communicating the gospel, for the implications of orality itself are far broader than just a people’s means of communication:

It... implicitly [touches] every aspect of the economics, politics, institutional development, and human development of oral societies. The study of orality has

⁶ Atlanta, GFM. "3 Ways Bible Storying Can Open Hearts to the Gospel." Global Frontier Missions. March 16, 2016. http://globalfrontiermissions.org/bible_storying/.

⁷ "What is Oral Communication?" StoryRunners - A Cru Ministry. <http://www.storyrunners.org/about/#how>.

important implications for international development, especially as it relates to the goal of eradicating poverty, as well as to the process of globalization.⁸

One very important resource for this discussion, the International Orality Network, divides orality into seven main categories, or “gateways” that are helpful in understanding all that orality encompasses:

- 1) Storying - Sharing of Bible stories in a creative but accurate form; not directly quoting from Scripture, but “retelling” through precise narrations.
- 2) Arts and culture - Emphasizing or teaching Scriptural truths through drama, music, and art that specifically reflects and enriches the culture being reached.
- 3) Media - Using audio or visual resources such as mp3 players and Jesus Film.
- 4) Education - Training the young and old using resources made for oral cultures versus the typical literate resources made for western cultures.
- 5) Development - Forming strategies to reach unique cultures and people groups.
- 6) Research and innovations - Finding new data, investigating new action steps, and formulating updated analyses.
- 7) Focused outreach - Planting churches and promoting discipleship specific to set communities.⁹

The creation of these distinct categories should prove that orality is a loaded term. Its implications are far-reaching to many facets of culture, disproving the common misconception that orality in missions refers only to storytelling. Although storytelling is a key aspect of orality, a full understanding of this movement comes with the recognition that it has a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Gateways." International Orality Network. <https://orality.net/networks/gateways/>.

comprehensive influence on all aspects of society. Indeed, orality has the power to completely transform a culture economically and spiritually. Because of its great influence and the sheer number of natural oral learners on the planet, this topic can not go ignored.

Yet this issue does not come without its complaints. Especially now, as this is a growing issue in the mission sphere, much debate and discussion surrounds this topic; not all people agree on the essentiality of orality. Most Christians recognize its value, but not all recognize its necessity as compared to literary methods. Yet anyone who believes in the Great Commission must be aware of the arguments made for orality's cruciality. If a Christian's responsibility on earth is to proclaim the good news of Christ all around the world, the methods of doing so need to be the most effective as possible. Since it most specifically targets the natural learning mechanisms of an astounding number of the global population, orality has always been and will always continue to be absolutely essential for gospel proclamation and community transformation - most especially for those who primarily function orally, but also for those who do not.

Jesus Himself made it clear that His message was for all humankind. As Christians are to be like Christ, they need to be holistic in their gospel approach. Christ did not come to proclaim freedom only to the captives in His town, or to heal only the blind in Israel.¹⁰ He did not preach in ways that only He could understand, but rather He spoke simple and plain truths for all of mankind. In the same way, Christians must reach out far and wide in a way that will best influence the greatest number.

¹⁰ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:17-19, quoted by Jesus from Isaiah 61).

There are *5.7 billion** passionate, intelligent, and dedicated men, women, and children who desperately need the same unrestricted access to the truth that we rely on every day, but in a way that they can immediately understand and take to heart. Through spoken words.¹¹

Of the whole world population, about 80% are oral learners - approximately 5.7 billion people. These numbers encompass those who are both “functionally illiterate [and those] at least much happier with oral than written/read communication.”¹² This includes 3 billion adults. In fact, about 6 out of 10 adults are oral. This means that over 60% of all adults learn best by oral means, not by the more commonly acknowledged western methods.

Equally astounding is the sheer number of languages with no translated Scriptures. “2700 languages still have no written script and 2252 languages still have no Scripture translated into their heart language.”¹³ Thus, of the “6,909 distinct languages” in the world, *over a third* have no relation to the Scriptures at all, and almost 40% don’t have them in written form.¹⁴ “Yet, it is estimated that roughly 90% of the time the gospel is presented in a Western, literate style of communication.”¹⁵ These numbers simply don’t add up. Why would the gospel be presented almost all of the time in a format that more than 60% of the world will not understand?

Due to the scientific evidence that has been discovered about how the brains of humans in oral cultures and in literate cultures have been trained to work similarly or differently, it is clear that the brains of those who live in oral cultures are stimulated most effectively with oral

¹¹“Why Not Written?” T4 Global. <https://t4global.org/why/>.

**5.7 billion* is the more updated statistic, rather than *4 billion* as this quote originally says

¹² Harker, Andy. “The Orality Movement and the Word of God.” Watumishi wa Neno. July 30, 2012. <https://watumishiwano.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/the-oralty-movement-and-the-word-of-god/>.

¹³ Wiles, Jerry. “Oral Disciple Making: Changing the Face of Missions.” Godreports. April 20, 2011. blog.godreports.com—.

¹⁴ Anderson, Stephen R. “How many languages are there in the world?” Linguistic Society of America. 2012. <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/how-many-languages-are-there-world>.

¹⁵ “Orality Is Changing the Face of Missions around the World.” Christian Today. October 27, 2012. www.christiantoday.com—30904.htm.

teaching methods. Thus, investigations done on the scientific history of oral brain development provide further proof for modern evangelists that oral methods are necessary.

“In a purely oral culture, thinking is governed by the capacity of human memory.”¹⁶

Thus, over the history of oral cultures:

Language evolved to aid the storage of complex information in individual memory and to make it easy to exchange that information with others through speech.¹⁷

People in oral cultures began to retain information through “formulaic verse” and by singing or chanting aloud.¹⁸ Because of this, many believe that ancient oral cultures actually had a deeper, more emotional connection, “a particularly intense ‘sensuous involvement’ with the world.”¹⁹

McLuhan argues that when humans learn to read, they actually suffer a “considerable detachment from the feelings or emotional involvement that a nonliterate man or society would experience.”²⁰ Literate cultures, however, are not limited to the amount of knowledge their people can store in their memories; the written word allows for extensive facts to be stored exterior to the mind alone. Cambridge anthropologist Jack Goody writes:

The specific proposition is that writing, and more especially alphabetic literacy, made it possible to scrutinise discourse in a different kind of way by giving oral communication a semipermanent form; this scrutiny favoured the increase in scope of critical activity, and hence of rationality, scepticism, and logic to resurrect memories of those questionable dichotomies.²¹

Yet, just because literate cultures certainly have a more extensive bank of knowledge

¹⁶ Carr, Nicholas. "The Oral World vs. The Written Word." Poems Out Loud. June 18, 2010. http://poemsoutloud.net/columns/archive/oral_world_written_word/.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, referencing Havelock.

¹⁹ Ibid, referencing McLuhan.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Goody, Jack. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://newlearningonline.com/literacies/chapter-1/goody-on-the-differences-between-orality-and-literacy>, pp.15-16, 27, 37-38.

accessible to them, this does not change the fact that all people's brains - no matter from what culture - were originally created to function in similar ways. Oral and literate cultures may have different techniques for learning that they've grown accustomed to overtime, but *natural oral learners* are found in every culture - whether labeled as a literate society or not. This is why recent research on the power of storytelling provides great support that oral methods are extremely effective for any human in any society.

For one thing, "telling stories has been one of our most fundamental communication methods... for over 27,000 years."²² In general conversation, the amount of stories that are used to tell about events in our lives is substantial.

When asked about some event we have observed or what has happened to us, we usually do not recount the details and then discuss their merit and meaning. Instead we often remember the event as a story and tell it as we remember it happening.... Our stories are the containers for the events, memories and things we have learned.²³

Leo Widrich, the co-founder of Buffer - an extremely successful social media manager with 3+ million users - noticed that when he started using stories for promotion "instead of benefits and bullet points," his sales went up exceedingly.²⁴ Based on his findings, he wrote an article on why the science of storytelling is so powerful. He says that when students are listening to a powerpoint with bullet points, a certain part of the brain known as the Broca's area and Wernicke's area gets activated. However, when students are listening to a story, the brain

²² Widrich, Leo. "The Science of Storytelling: Why Telling a Story Is the Most Powerful Way to Activate Our Brains." Lifestacker. December 05, 2012.

lifestacker.com—the-science-of-storytelling-why-telling-a-story-is-the-most-powerful-way-to-activate-our-brains.

²³ Terry, J. O., Jim Slack, and Steve Evans, comps. *Chronological Bible Storying: An Introduction to the Oral Communication of the Bible*. Edenvale 1610, South Africa: International Publications Services - Johannesburg, 1996. <https://orality.imb.org/files/1/426/Chronological%20Bible%20Storying.pdf>, p 14.

²⁴ Widrich, Leo. "The Science of Storytelling: Why Telling a Story Is the Most Powerful Way to Activate Our Brains." Lifestacker. December 05, 2012.

[Lifestacker.com—the-science-of-storytelling-why-telling-a-story-is-the-most-powerful-way-to-activate-our-brains](http://lifestacker.com—the-science-of-storytelling-why-telling-a-story-is-the-most-powerful-way-to-activate-our-brains).

mechanisms drastically change. Listening to a powerpoint only activates the language processing parts of the brain - basically limiting brain activity to just “decoding words into meaning.”²⁵ However, from storytelling, the brain doesn’t only decode the meaning of words, but it also activates the parts of the brain that are used when *experiencing* the story’s events. So if the story tells about foods, the sensory cortex lights up; whereas if the story tells about motion, than the motor cortex lights up. This graph depicts this relationship:²⁶



In fact, further research from Uri Hasson (Associate Professor, Department of Psychology and the Neuroscience Institute of Princeton University), says that “the brains of the person telling a story and listening to it can synchronize”:

When the woman spoke English, the volunteers understood her story, and their brains synchronized. When she had activity in her insula, an emotional brain region, the listeners did too. When her frontal cortex lit up, so did theirs. **By simply telling a story, the woman could plant ideas, thoughts and emotions into the listeners' brains.**²⁷

Ultimately, this is because storytelling is “a connection of cause and effect.”²⁸ Just like metaphors, oral stories help people relate personal experiences and emotions so that they can

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

understand at a deeper level.

All this to say, storytelling definitely affects the brain in a significant way. Thus, to reach out to people specifically from oral societies whose brains have been trained to regularly function in this detailed way with a form of teaching that stimulates their brains far less comprehensively would be utterly foolish. Equally foolish would be not applying any of these lessons to how regular literate learners are taught. The scientific research backs the claim that storytelling affects the brains of all peoples, because God created all peoples with the same natural learning mechanisms. But especially for those who primarily rely on these oral techniques, methods that quickly and thoroughly trigger the most brain connections must be applied for efficient gospel proclamation.

God's intentionality in creating humankind to have many oral learning mechanisms must be recognized and respected for what it is. Through examples of orality in and from the Scriptures, God has provided much evidence that His oral design of humans *was* purposeful. First, the Bible fits perfectly in the oral framework, because it is a story itself (only transformed into a literate form generations after it had already been passed on through speech):

The story of God at work creating, blessing, judging, promising, redeeming, revealing Himself and all His work bringing glory to Himself. The story begins in eternity past when only God existed and continues until eternity future when redeemed man will join the glorified Christ in the presence of the Father.²⁹

Within this greater narrative, there are smaller stories - yet each builds on the universal themes of God's work, man's response, and Satan's opposition to make one complete Book of Truth. "The

²⁹ Terry, J. O., Jim Slack, and Steve Evans, comps. *Chronological Bible Storying: An Introduction to the Oral Communication of the Bible*. Edenvale 1610, South Africa: International Publications Services - Johannesburg, 1996. <https://orality.imb.org/files/1/426/Chronological%20Bible%20Storying.pdf>, p 14.

Bible is chronological history -- God at work in His world.”³⁰ John Piper asserts that the very languages that the Bible was first written in, Greek and Hebrew, were “used when centuries ago ‘men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’ (2 Peter 1:21).”³¹

In fact, the ancient traditions of the Jews, God’s own chosen people, were oral. Before the second temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the Jewish people orally passed down their “Oral Law,” or the “Torah,” from generation to generation.³² Their dedication to memorization preserved this holistic code of conduct that now makes up most of what is found in the first five books of the Bible. Many other passages are considered “oral” narrative - the proverbs, songs, poetry; much of the Prophets, law, Jesus’ discourses - and were meant to be read aloud. Consider Deuteronomy 31:11-13 or Nehemiah 8, when God commands the public reading of the law, or in Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27, when the church is instructed to read the epistles aloud.³³

Moreover the actual style of the Word points to its original oral purposes:

Increasingly, Bible commentators are recognising how many of the ‘literary’ features of the Bible – the repetitions, recapitulations, bookends, summaries, word plays, spiral or numbered structures – are *oral* features – designed to help the ear and the memory of an oral listener rather than the eye of a silent reader (even private reading in the ancient world would have been out loud – e.g. Acts 8:30).³⁴

In the New Testament, Jesus’ own teaching style furthermore points to the effectiveness of oral methods. Because “more than 90 percent of the people [in Jesus’ day] were nonreaders,”

³⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

³¹ Piper, John. "Missions, Orality, and the Bible." Desiring God. November 16, 2005. www.desiringgod.org—missions-orality-and-the-bible.

³² "Oral Torah." Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_Torah#The_interplay_of_the_Oral_and_Written_Law.

³³ See also Rev. 1:3

³⁴ Harker, Andy. "The Orality Movement and the Word of God." Watumishi wa Neno. July 30, 2012.

<https://watumishivaneno.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/the-orality-movement-and-the-word-of-god/>., Judges 5 and Exodus 15 are more examples of originally meant-to-be oral Scriptures

“it was basically an oral culture.”³⁵ Thus, Jesus “used all types of stories, questions, and so forth to communicate spiritual truth to His hearers.”³⁶ The many parables found in the gospels exemplify this.³⁷ Over 90 percent of His teaching is considered poetic; He uses “alliteration, paronomasia, assonance, parallelism, and rhyme.”³⁸ Overall, Jesus’ teaching was directly designed to be easily memorized and thus later written down by the apostles with complete accuracy. The very truths and exact words of Jesus were preserved through memorization and constant communication for multiple decades even before the four gospels were transcribed.

It’s clear then why Jesus’ teaching methods were so effective: because He was teaching to the learning style of His listeners. His methods allowed for quick retention, effortless reproduction, and detailed application. Rather than only reading the Scriptures or teaching in the synagogue, Jesus built a community of disciples, equipping them to go out and repeat the message He shared with the world. Since He is the perfect model for us to share the gospel, Christians need to learn from His techniques and put them into practice, just as the orality movement purposefully seeks to do.

Examples of organizations that are modeling after Christ in this way are increasingly growing in number. And the hundreds upon thousands of testimonies of people who have been directly impacted by these organizations provide even more support that this movement is indeed effective. Dozens of corporations that are working to encourage the growth of orality awareness and implement it in cultures worldwide have received endless amounts of positive feedback.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ i.e. Matthew 18:21-35, Matthew 20:1-16, Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 7:36-47 Luke 18:9-14, Luke 10:25-37, John 10:1-30

³⁸ "ThinkApologetics." A Look at Oral Tradition/The Orality Phase of the Jesus Story. August 10, 2012. https://chab123.wordpress.com/2012/08/10/a-look-at-oral-traditionthe-orality-phase-of-the-jesus-story/#_ftn3.

Jerry Wiles, president emeritus of Living Water International, writes of the influences of oral disciple-making in a report:

In a country where 85% of the population is non-literate, several hundred evangelists, pastors and church planters have made the transition from a more western, literate style of communication to oral disciple making methods and are seeing dramatic results. One elderly evangelist said, “This is how our forefathers started out; this is more effective than what we have been doing.”... In Ethiopia, an elderly man who has been an evangelist for more than 50 years said, “This is a better way of presenting the gospel, and is more appropriate for our people.” Another evangelist who had received the training six months earlier said, “My previous way of outreach was to distribute literature and give my testimony, and people would want to argue. Now I tell stories and ask questions and people want to receive Jesus.”³⁹

In 2013, a small Illinois-based ministry, OneWay Ministries, developed a new “portable missionary” known as BIBLEplus+.⁴⁰ This small hand-held audio player contains “Bible stories, Scriptures, powerful testimonies, worship music and community health information” in the Komba language of Northern Ghanaians.⁴¹ Hundreds of people have been able to hear the Word of God in their own language, equipping them to memorize these truths and continue to spread the message, fueling a great movement of Christianity in the bush of Ghana, West Africa.⁴²

Faith Comes by Hearing is another organization, “offering hope to 6 billion people through Bible recordings in 1,066 languages.”⁴³ To reach people without access to or knowledge of the written Word, FCBH has recorded 6 billion people speaking the direct Bible in over 1,000 languages. They report that “over 454 million people in virtually every country have been reached through our wide range of programs.”⁴⁴ A partner, a pastor in the Middle East, reported:

³⁹ Wiles, Jerry. "Oral Disciple Making: Changing the Face of Missions." Godreports. April 20, 2011. blog.godreports.com—.

⁴⁰ "BIBLEplus+." OneWay Africa. <http://owm.org/africa.html#bibleplus>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Faith Comes by Hearing." <https://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com>.

⁴⁴ "Sharing Our Story." Faith Comes by Hearing. <https://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/about/our-story>.

Because almost all the people in this village are illiterate and unable to read the Bible, *Mini Proclaimers and BibleSticks meet their needs exactly* [emphasis added]. We thank God for His provision, which allows us to give the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have not yet heard.⁴⁵

A college student in another unnamed Middle Eastern country shared about an evangelist:

Pastor G. . . . runs a club for college students several evenings of the week. In this setting, non-Christians can come to learn more about Christianity and ask questions; they are also welcome to debate the differences between [various religions]. Pastor G. stated that most of these students do not own Bibles and *could not take one home if they wanted to* [emphasis added], for fear of rejection from their families. Pastor G. will use the Proclaimer for group listening, discussion, and study.⁴⁶

Numerous other people have shared their testimonies of the influence of the audio Bibles produced by FCBH. Hearing God’s Words in their own language has been key in the transformation of thousands of cultures.

Dozens of other organizations similar to these exist. The International Orality Network is perhaps the leading force in this field.⁴⁷ The International Mission Board does a ton to advance orality.⁴⁸ Spoken is a ministry that “delivers truth... where words can’t go.”⁴⁹ The Union Baptist Association, History Cloth, The Seed Company, and YWAM are more examples.⁵⁰ And these many cases only scratch the surface of the extensive orality proponents around the globe.

Note that third world countries aren’t the only places where the orality movement is working. For example, churches all across the United States are now using many different forms

⁴⁵ "Sharing Stories of Hope." Faith Comes by Hearing. <https://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/mission/story/those-who-have-not-yet-heard>, (Mini Proclaimers and BibleSticks are audio Bible players).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "International Orality Network." <https://orality.net/>.

⁴⁸ "International Mission Board." orality.imb.org---strategies.

⁴⁹ "Spoken." <http://spoken.org/>.

⁵⁰ "Union Baptist Association."

<http://www.ubahouston.org/initiatives/discipleship---missions/orality-movement/orality---articles-by--jerry-wiles.>, "History Cloth." <http://historycloth.com/stories/>., "The Seed Company" <https://theseedcompany.org/>.

of oral art - such as spoken word, drama (stage and screen), music, and poetry - in their worship and outreach programs. The effectiveness of these methods further showcases the value of oral methods to even more literate-based cultures.

Ultimately, this points back to the fact that oral techniques can trigger the *naturally oral* learning mechanisms of people from all cultures. For example: no one doubts that for all humankind, communication with another individual through speech carries a different effect than communication only through written words. For with the written word, there can often be an element of clarity or influence that is lost. The tone, inflection, and emphasis of the speaker are all absent when something is read versus being heard. One of the greatest advantages of hearing words over reading words is *how* the words are being portrayed or meant to be understood. Thus, no matter what culture, or what country, or what language, spoken words carry this authority that the written word can never quite achieve.

One specific example of a modern oral artist who carefully crafts *how* he speaks the words he uses is Jon Jorgenson. Reaching over 15 million people all around the globe from every different age group and culture, Jon is a motivational author, speaker, and spoken word poet. In this new media-infiltrated age, Jon is using tools such as YouTube to create audial (and visual) masterpieces that will entice any and all. For instance, Jon uses spoken word to provide “a dynamic and creative experience that captures the imagination of audiences everywhere.”⁵¹ This craft in of itself is completely structured on the direct way that the words are being spoken so that the listeners can hear the artist’s exact message. For his YouTube channel alone, Jon

⁵¹ "People who liked me..." Jon.Jorgenson.Blog. <http://www.jonjorgensonblog.com/>.

Spoken word: “It is an oral art that focuses on the aesthetics of **word** play and intonation and voice inflection. It is a 'catchall' that includes any kind of **poetry** recited aloud, including hip-hop, jazz **poetry**, **poetry** slams, traditional **poetry** readings and can include comedy routines and 'prose monologues'.” - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spoken_word

creates and posts spoken word videos, sermons, weekly bible study lessons; vlogs daily; and answers difficult questions. Without a doubt, Jon is the perfect example of a present-day evangelist using creative orality methods to impact literally millions.

The fact that so many ministries and resources using oral resources to reach oral people are experiencing fantastic results provides more evidence that this movement is necessary and quickly gaining ground. The overwhelming abundance of testimonies adds even further to the power of orality, and the fact that the testimonies are worldwide further highlights that no matter what culture, most people learn and retain information better through oral means than by written material alone.

A primary step towards an oral methodology must be avoiding the misguided notion that the greatest need is first for literacy for all people. The greatest need is in fact planting contextualized churches that are able to raise up indigenous leadership that can then reproduce themselves in other church plants. Oral cultures are not primitive or incapable of great advances in learning. Orality does not mean the people do not value knowledge. What is knowledge if it is not something that can be applied and transferred to others? The oral paradigm is capable of the task of church planting, evangelism, and discipleship.⁵²

Because God created human beings with naturally oral brain tendencies, these methods need to be utilized. Reality shows that this device is the most efficiently effective tool over all - even if literacy does carry great value and importance.

As a literate person (you may prefer to learn through written means, since you have picked up this book), you may lament the absence of highly developed literacy skills among citizens of your nation. Yet, as followers of Christ who desire to communicate the gospel effectively, we must address the reality of the ways in which many people receive and retain information today.⁵³

⁵² Casey, Anthony. "The Rise of Orality in Modern Missions Practice." November 30, 2010. culturnicity.files.wordpress.com—rise-of-oralty-final2.pdf.

Paper presented to Dr. George Martin for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, p. 16

⁵³ Wiles, Jerry. *No Greater Joy: Power of Sharing Your Faith Through Stories and questions*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2010, p. 11

Yet there are some major concerns with orality that must be addressed. The first great issue contenders have is that orality methods distort the direct truth of the Bible. They complain that when a storyteller is given any personal privilege in the way that he tells the stories, he will be prone to adjust the story to his own liking, whether knowledgably or not. Another worry: since orality depends on the oral passing of adaptations or direct Scripture, much like the game of telephone, truth could be changed quickly while being passed from one person to another. At the root of their argument, these contenders say that God's Word carries enough power to be understood by all people of all time, so no "adjustments" need to be made to the original text:

The assertion that a literate approach that makes use of the written Word is ineffective among two-thirds of the world people is contrary to Scripture, for God has promised that His Word will not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11).⁵⁴

Another concern is that orality hinders people's ability to learn for themselves, to inductively study the Word. They worry that no direct contact with the Bible means that the uninformed have to constantly rely on the informed to relate more stories to them, and thus, causes an issue in disciple-making. According to their arguments, if new oral believers do not have a way to glean Biblical truth on their own, how will they be able to teach others? Additionally, the emphasis that orality places on specific cultural concerns causes another wall to cross over in the passing of the message. If one people group understands the Scriptures through their own specific cultural means, it would be difficult to adjust the Truth in trying to reach other people groups with other practices. E.S. Williams writes:

The deception of the oral Bible is that it crafts Scripture to make it culturally appropriate and worldview sensitive. It offers a non-offensive gospel that is not the gospel of truth.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Williams, E. S. "Beware of the Orality Movement." Bible League Trust. www.bibleleaguetrust.org—.

⁵⁵ Ibid, referencing E.S. Williams. (E.S. Williams' speaks from an extremely reformed, Calvinistic worldview.)

Finally, another complaint more directed to the Western world: creative oral methods of teaching the Bible can quickly become entertainment-driven, driving listeners to interpret these means as performance rather than learning opportunities. Too easily, the “performer” can become the focus, rather than *what* he’s teaching or *Whom* he’s teaching about.

At the very root of all these complaints against orality, the heart is pure: preserving the direct authenticity of God’s words. And in certain situations, every single one of these complaints can be seen to be true. But, the complaints are mostly premature - the misunderstanding is that these issues flow out of orality itself, not from a *poor execution* of orality. An *accurate use* of oral methods will always overcome each of these worries.

First, the concern that storying distorts Biblical truth is invalid for every single situation. There are correct ways to take direct Scripture and retell stories without taking away from the exact message, even in the passing of the stories from one person to another. Jerry Wiles addresses this:

A concern we often face is the possibility of people getting into error and distorting the stories and the message. Gaining a better understanding of oral cultures, oral traditions and learning styles helps us to see how the stories can maintain accuracy over a long period of time of being retold and reproduced. Because oral cultures live and learn in community, review, repetition and retelling the stories, as well as the collective memory of the group, helps to safeguard their accuracy, keeping them true to the Scriptures.⁵⁶

Mission Frontiers, a Christian magazine that provides “innovative insights on a wide range of topics from the most creative minds and well-known thought leaders in missiology” gives ten straightforward steps to ensure accurate Bible storying⁵⁷:

1. Select a biblical principle, and make sure it is clear and simple.

⁵⁶ Wiles, Jerry. "Oral Disciple Making: Changing the Face of Missions." Godreports. April 20, 2011. blog.godreports.com—.

⁵⁷ "About Us." Mission Frontiers. <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/about/about-us>.

2. Consider the worldview issues of a chosen people group so that we know how to choose the correct stories and how to tell those stories.
3. Identify the pertinent bridges and barriers and gaps in the worldview of that chosen people group so we will know how to address them.
4. Select the biblical stories that need to be communicated to get this principle or concept across in their worldview.
5. Craft the story and plan the dialogue that is going to follow the story so that they learn how this biblical story addresses a critical worldview issue that they have.
6. Tell the story in a culturally-appropriate way (including narrative, dance, song or object lessons).
7. Facilitate the dialogue that will help them discover the truths and applications, usually by asking questions.
8. Guide the group to obey the biblical principle so that it can be lived out in their lives in practical ways.
9. Establish accountability within the group to help each other obey the biblical principle.
10. Encourage the group to reproduce all of this by modeling the principle in their own lives and then telling the stories to other people.⁵⁸

Although this is just one example of a storying guideline, the general format exists for all correct storying methods. Intentional storying always places first and foremost concern on staying as exact to the text as possible. Never is intentional changing of core tenets of a story acceptable; this would be replacing God's Words with man's, just as those opposed to orality worry about. Just like pastors and Bible teachers, storytellers have a responsibility to relay the direct Truth of the Bible without any personal tweaking that distorts meaning. Yes, they must adjust *how* they proclaim the truth, but not *what*.

[Oral teachers or storytellers] talk of 'crafting' stories to be 'sensitive to worldview' but they seem to mean this mainly in terms of the communication *form* and *style* because they also talk about the importance of overturning untrue worldviews. There is an explicit and recurrent concern to counter syncretism and to check the oral Bible stories

⁵⁸ Snowden, Mark. "Orality: The Next Wave of Mission Advance." Mission Frontiers. January 1, 2004. www.missionfrontiers.org—orality-the-next-wave-of-mission-advance.

“to ensure biblical accuracy.”⁵⁹

This is why orality at its very core does not always and automatically cause heresy. Just as the church wouldn't call a Sunday school teacher a heretic for simplifying a Bible lesson so as to be understood by toddlers, neither would a Bible teacher telling stories based off of God's direct Words, using orality as it is intended to be used, be heretical. Thus, it is critical that orality methods - no matter what art form is used (dance, drama, storying, technology) - do not stray from the distinct message of the Scriptures. Christians then must be weary of anthropologist arguments that place so much emphasis on preserving cultural practices that they excuse any evil traditions that are contrary to Scripture (child sacrifice, idol worship). Yes, orality should try to preserve cultural uniqueness through *contextualization*, but the users must be wary to not go too far - they must never allow sin so as to not hurt feelings or make relationships less challenging.⁶⁰ Excusing what's clearly wrong just for the sake of ease is not acceptable... what's most definitely wrong will still be most definitely wrong, even if it's ignored.

Scripture itself provides proof through the New Testament's use of the Old Testament that orality does not directly mean heresy.

It is quite evident that the apostles and early church did not always open and directly expound the Scriptures in the course of evangelism – they very often do (Acts 2:14-36; 17:2; 28:23) but not always (Acts 10:36-43; 17:22-31). Stephen's speech in Acts 7 and Paul's sermon in Acts 13 quote some Scripture but also retell Bible stories in a rather free way. When you look at the way the NT authors quote the OT there's often a certain freedom or paraphrasing going on (e.g. Matt. 2:23).⁶¹

⁵⁹ Harker, Andy. "The Orality Movement and the Word of God." Watumishi Wa Neno. July 30, 2012. watumishivaneno.wordpress.com—.

⁶⁰ *Contextualization*: “recognizing the need to frame the gospel in language and communication forms appropriate and meaningful to the local cultures.” from: Casey, Anthony. "The Rise of Orality in Modern Missions Practice." November 30, 2010. Culturnicity.files.wordpress.com—rise-of-oralty-final2.pdf. Paper presented to Dr. George Martin for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, p. 14

⁶¹ Harker, Andy. "The Orality Movement and the Word of God." Watumishi Wa Neno. July 30, 2012. watumishivaneno.wordpress.com—.

Even in the “freedom or paraphrasing,” the main message is never compromised.

Furthermore, Jesus Himself taught lessons that His audience would have known from the Old Testament understandings, yet He wasn’t restricted to only the direct words of the ancient scrolls. Jaclynn Krum Frisch writes in her dissertation, *Storytelling: A Source for Reducing Biblical Illiteracy*:

Jesus, the master storyteller, understood his audience and paid attention to their needs, making the teaching process more successful. He spoke their language, paid careful attention to their learning abilities, and offered them first hand illustrations and examples. He taught truth outside of the box. He was not confined within the synagogue walls or limited to the words on a scroll.⁶²

Frisch stresses that Jesus is indeed the perfect example of an oral teacher who was not tied down in any way, but instead spoke specifically to the culture of his audience.

Jesus was a relevant hands-on storyteller. He utilized stories which were full of things that people of his time could relate to. He spoke of things familiar such as, sheep, grapevines, and sowing seed.... He made God’s words relevant to everyday living. It is probable that if Jesus were to walk the earth today, he would tell stories about cars, cellular phones, superstars, and video games. He would work in AIDS clinics and walk the inner cities, inviting the homeless to dinner.⁶³

According to the example of history and the Scriptures, it is possible to use orality without disrupting biblical Truth by staying as literal as all possible. However, some might argue that this was only possible because Jesus (and his disciples) were divinely inspired. But the endless numbers of testimonies of everyday men and women who, through God’s strength, have been successfully consistent with the Bible, proves otherwise. All the same, if distortion *is* happening in any circumstance, the teachers must be stopped: they are spoiling the gospel, straying from the

⁶² Frisch, Jaclynn Krum. *Storytelling: A Source For Reducing Biblical Illiteracy*. Findlay, OH, 2010. <http://www.winebrenner.edu/Portals/47/Documents/DMin%20Projects/Frisch%20dissertation%20Final,%20Final%207-21-10.pdf>. Paper presented to the faculty for Winebrenner Theological Seminary, p. 35

⁶³ Ibid., p. 36, referencing: Hoffman, Mary, and Morris, Jackie. 2000. *Parables: Stories Jesus told*. New York: Phyllis Fogelman Books.

true intentions of orality.

Second, the worry that orality takes away inductive study is actually a concern that often does not take precedence. Very usually, the people that are being reached with orality methods are so destitute that they will never be able to read the direct Scriptures in their lifetime. How will cultures who do not even have a written language be reached? How will cultures who do not have a translator who can work with another language to interpret the Bible into their own ever hear the gospel? How will cultures who have a written language but still have no means or ability to learn how to personally read and study their newly translated, very foreign Bibles quickly grow? And even if there is a way to translate the Bible into a people's own language, this process takes years upon years of work, is very expensive, and requires great knowledge and skill of both the missionaries and the translator. And then when the work is done, the people still would have to learn how to read and interpret it, which would again take much time and effort. Yes, every Christian should yearn for the written Bible to be accessible for every people group, but usually this is just not reality for many people. In these circumstances, orality is essential because of its quick accessibility and effectiveness.

Also, the concern that oral learners can't learn for themselves is simply foolish. Yes, inductive study often takes great amounts of time, but often the memorization model helps quicken this process of understanding. If an oral learner memorized a myriad of stories, they would grow to understand new insights over time, just as a literate learner would reading a certain passage of Scripture over and over again. For the Holy Spirit is the one who provides the guidance in the understanding of Scripture, no matter how God's Words are being learned.

Again, Jerry Wiles on Living Water International:

An important feature of LWI's Orality Training is helping people to be aware of the creative capacity of the Holy Spirit to communicate spiritual truth to the human spirit.... There is power in telling the stories from the Word of God. We can have confidence that the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit will bring transformation. We, as His followers and messengers, have the privilege of being His instruments of righteousness.⁶⁴

Also, the worry that oral learners can not make disciples expresses a complete misunderstanding of the very nature of orality. Its whole design is purposefully centered around making discipleship more feasible in the ease of memorizing and retelling Bible stories. From the Orality Journal:

Discipleship occurs in the world where life situations occupy the primary point of reference. The typical non-oral approach relies upon truths and principles (i.e. abstractions) and requires the disciple to analyze situations. Contrariwise, the oral person learns by interacting with concrete situations.... The discipler conveys spiritual truths, theology, and biblical principles by applying them to specific, everyday situations.... The challenge is to move from a discipleship model that relies upon abstraction, syllogism, and textual analysis to one that privileges the particular characteristics, needs, and andragogy of the disciple.⁶⁵

It is crucial to note, however, that literacy is often eventually needed. Orality is not meant to diminish the value of literacy, but rather orality needs to be understood as an essential evangelistic device *along with* or often *preceding* literacy. Anthony discusses this further in his dissertation:

It only seems natural that it be beneficial to teach all peoples to read and write.... If the people can read and write, they can get better educations, better jobs, and create better conditions for their communities. The people will be able to have a voice in government and protect themselves from exploitation.... *The reality is, however, that the move to literacy does not always go smoothly and is not as beneficial as one might initially think [emphasis added].* Many Westerners would never think to consider that oral peoples

⁶⁴ Wiles, Jerry. "Connecting for Change: The Orality Movement - More than Storytelling." Assist News Service. August 09, 2016. www.assistnews.net—2065-connecting-for-change-the-oralty-movement-more-than-storytelling.

⁶⁵ Arnett, Randy. "Discipleship in the Face of Orality ." *Orality Journal: The Word Became Flesh*, 2017, 49-58.

would not want to become literate.⁶⁶

He sums this all up effectively in his conclusion:

So should oral peoples be allowed to remain oral? Does an oral Bible suffice indefinitely? Some would say yes. The author's opinion is that the first generation of believers should be allowed to remain fully oral. Leadership training must be in an oral format, even if some of the leaders can read. Literacy should not be seen as necessary for any believer or church function. Orality should be the primary method for all instruction. Once the first band of indigenous leadership is set up, if there is a desire among the people, literacy can begin to be taught. Still, it should not be used to supplant the oral structure and teaching methods. At some point, missionaries and believers should begin work together on a written translation of the Scriptures. A written copy will help ensure the oral tradition remains faithful to the Word of God over time. Even though a written Scripture is produced, oral teaching and training should still be the primary method.⁶⁷

For the effectiveness of orality cries out against any other option... Not recognizing its primary necessity is simply being blind to the facts. The hundreds of testimonies and statistics for the essentiality of this movement carry strong weight against the contrarian arguments, which misunderstand the correct use of oral methods. Thus, there is just no excuse. Christians must be aware of orality's growing implications in evangelism. Regardless of what culture a believer lives in, he has a responsibility to carry out the great commission, and to do so effectively, he must be smart and strategic. Orality, then, is the perfect tool to fulfill this evangelistic goal. And when Christ followers wisely decide to utilize this tool, they should still use further discretion to determine which gateways to emphasize or focus in on in reaching certain cultures.⁶⁸ For the great scope of orality provides for this, resulting in a more fully developed advancement of the gospel, one that touches every facet of oral cultures and peoples in both western and third world

⁶⁶ Casey, Anthony. "The Rise of Orality in Modern Missions Practice." November 30, 2010. Culturnicity.files.wordpress.com—rise-of-oralty-final2.pdf. Paper presented to Dr. George Martin for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, p. 26-27

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 28

⁶⁸ see p. 4 of this thesis

nations.⁶⁹

So may the modern church show their love of the Savior by loving people in this way. Every living day, we must be intentional in evangelism - stewarding our gifts, abilities, time, and money. As an answer to the constant search for ways to improve, the orality movement precisely takes these concerns into account.

Hence, since we have an abundance of resources and an open access to the powerful tools of orality, may nothing ever hinder us from using oral means to reach the world with the good news of God's salvation. For orality truly is a God-given gift - purposefully designed in His creation. Thus, if we are living our Christian lives dedicated to the service of our Savior, why would we fail to intentionally use methods that have proven themselves effective? 66,000 people die every day without having any access to the life-giving Gospel. 6,619 die every hour. 110 every minute. 1.64 every *second*.⁷⁰ There is absolutely no time for apathy. This is a state of emergency. So go reach people.

⁶⁹ At our own Naperville Christian Academy, the classical methods we use greatly value and apply oral techniques, even if we are not directly attune to it. For instance, the Grammar School's heavy emphasis on memorization and recitation is a strongly oral approach that they use daily. In the students' younger, more developmental years, the use of orality is notably prioritized to instill strong core doctrines and truths - from factual data to spiritual lessons. As the students get older and transition from Logic to Rhetoric school, they become more able to rely on literate methods since they have matured into a position where they can discover truth for themselves. But even in the Upper School, oral recitation in the forms of speech, debate, and discussion is still greatly utilized. In the same way, oral methods are a primary device for cultures new to the gospel. And likewise, as the people develop in their understanding, the insertion of literate methods is also important. But complete and entire separation from oral methods is a poor use of the resources and information that we have gleaned due to God's grace to us on this earth.

⁷⁰ "Education." Education. <http://oneworldmissions.com/site.cfm?PageID=5521>.

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