

The Importance of Oral Strategies to Reach People in Southern Sudan – Another Friend

Southern Sudan is a very large and diversified land. The vast majority of people (by some estimates upwards of 95%) are functionally illiterate. With hundreds of different tribes and languages represented, having a common unifying curriculum in one language is going to be a long time implementing. A written curriculum will reach only about the upper two percent of the population.

The only practical and feasible alternative is an oral based programme that can cross all the geographical boundaries and be understandable and teachable to most of the ordinary people. It is no secret that orality and its variety of approaches, is fast catching on in the areas of the world where illiteracy is predominant in a population.¹

A commonly used curriculum usually consists of five separate tracks: Evangelism, Discipleship, Church Planting, Spiritual Maturity and Eschatology. The tracks can vary in size, some with as many as forty two stories and some with as few as eight. To go through all five tracks should take about two years of study and practice.

One of the foundational elements in this type of Biblical instruction is knowing the worldview of the people group you are trying to reach. Tribes that live in a desert environment should not be told the same stories that a tribe living alongside of a lake would be. For instance, a people group living along the shores of the Nile should quickly grasp and understand stories about Jesus walking on the water or calming the wind on the lake or “fishing” for men. At the same time a tribe from the deserts of northern Sudan, who may never have seen a large body of water, would have trouble grasping some of the aspects and concepts of

¹ See [Making Disciples of Oral Learners](#) (Lima, New York: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and International Orality Network) 1995. (Originally the Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54, from Pattya, Thailand, 2004).

those same stories. For this reason each set of stories should be uniquely put together by the researchers and leaders for that particular people group. This can be a lengthy process, but it will be extremely beneficial to that people longer term.

It is common in southern Sudanese communities to tell stories around the fires in the evenings. This is one way that their rich cultural traditions are passed on from generation to generation. What a wonderful opportunity we have as Christ followers when we can join those times and share stories of truth and life with those who are gathered. One need not be literate to pass along these stories and precepts. Women share with other women the next day around the water wells. Youth and children exchange the stories they heard while out tending the goats or cattle. And the elders share the same truths while sitting under the shade of the Lulu or Mahogany trees throughout the day. Not a written word is needed.

We have even begun other oral practices, with the help of modern technology, to more rapidly spread the Good News. One such technique uses MP3 players² that have an entire story set in a specific tribal dialect recorded on them. The church leaders that have these players walk around all day, or listen to them in their tukels at night. They quickly memorise the Bible stories that they will pass along during their daily ministries. Some even have small speakers that can be attached to the players to enable larger groups to listen.

Another practice is using personally, and distributing to the local FM radio stations, CDs³ with story sets recorded on them. Stations play them over the air each day. This latter practice greatly increases the number of people hearing the Good News. Many, many families have radios which are a primary source of information gathering from the outside world.

² An MP3 is a computer programme that is used for sending music by email, or the part of a computer that can play these files.

³ Hard plastic Compact Discs with music or computer information stored on them.

There are several groups in the south that are using oral methodologies and most are eager and willing to share their knowledge and training abilities with all who desire to use them. If you have access to the Internet you will be able to pull up a multitude of sites that can also be helpful to you in understanding the importance of orality in today's cultures.⁴

This is not a silver bullet – not the answer to everything – but rather *another* strategy to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is one that is “close to home” for the majority of African cultures for whom the transmission of information is by oral methods.

There is opposition to this method in some circles with cries of, “you just don't want us educated”, or, “why are you trying to keep us down?” But I assure you that we who are ambassadors for Christ have no such intentions. We have been called by the Master to be faithful in delivering His message to all peoples of all nations, and finding out the best way to do that is our heart's desire.

There are many ways to present Christ to the nations. We must look at the most effective ways to reach the highest numbers of people while being the best stewards of time, money and opportunity that we can be. Orality must be considered as one of these ways when we look at the facts before us.

The fact that Christ used mainly parables and stories to teach while He was on this planet should give us a hint as to the importance of this strategy. We must have oral strategies for reaching Sudanese. And we must use them well.

⁴ For example: www.ChronologicalBibleStorying.com ; www.Fjseries.org ; www.EpicPartners.org ; www.OralBible.com ; www.ion2008ning.com ; www.Communication-Strategy.net.

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. Why do you think Jesus told so many parables – human stories with a deeper Christian lesson?

See, for example, Matthew 6: 19-24; Matthew 13; Matthew 18:10-14.

2. How do you understand *together* Acts 16:14, “The Lord opened her heart to respond”, with Luke 8:10,

“...to others I speak in parables, so that, though ... hearing they may not understand”.

Let one verse comment on the other, and vice-versa.

3. Consider a people group you know of where oral story telling would be a good idea:

Which Bible stories would be especially good for them? Why?

Are there any you would not use, or would need to explain very carefully first? Why?

How can you ensure you get the true “Gospel of Jesus Christ” across?

4. List the advantages of *speaking* the Gospel to some people, compared to distributing the written Word.

Are there any disadvantages? What are they? How may they be overcome?

5. Mark 12:37 says of Jesus, “The crowd listened to Him with delight”, (N.I.V.), “the common people heard

him gladly”, (K.J.V.). Think of ways you can help the common people of Sudan hear Jesus today.