

THE TWO JOURNEYS OF Shanti & Jasmine

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Tricia's passion is for all believers to be equipped to effectively share their faith, disciple others, and plant churches using Bible storying. She and her family have lived and ministered in France, Benin, and South Asia for the past 13 years.

Shanti and Jasmine come from very different backgrounds, but both belong to the Information Technology (IT) community in the country where we work. Shanti was a “born Christian” who grew up going to church and whose entire extended family had been going to church for generations. When she was a teenager, Shanti understood what it meant to choose to follow Jesus instead of being “born into” the faith, and she made a conscious decision to follow him wholeheartedly.

Jasmine, on the other hand, was born a Hindu and grew up going to Hindu temples with her extended family. This had been the family practice for generations. As a teenager, several people helped Jasmine come to believe that there was only one God, and that his name was Jesus. Jasmine now follows only Jesus, but the rest of her family has not yet made that decision.

Both Jasmine and Shanti are highly educated IT professionals and fluent in English.

When I met Jasmine and Shanti, they were friends who loved Jesus and wanted to serve him. They knew Jesus had commanded them to tell people about him, but they weren't sure how to do it. So they hit the streets of our city, passing out tracts and talking to people in parks and major shopping areas. What wonderful intentions and beautiful hearts! Unfortunately, it didn't work for them.

A NEW WAY OF SHARING THE GOSPEL

They decided they needed help so I facilitated a one-day training in how to tell their stories and how to use the story of the demon-possessed man (see Mark 5:1-20) as an initial hook to sharing the gospel.

They soon realized that sharing stories could be an effective evangelism strategy and began coming regularly to our house for a weekly “satsang,” or “meeting of truth,” where we worship in a culturally-appropriate way and, of course, tell stories.

JASMINE'S JOURNEY

Jasmine began to see that we were systematically telling a set of stories with a theme and purpose for evangelism and discipleship and decided she should begin telling her non-believing family the stories. She deeply appreciated the last question we asked each week: “To whom will you tell this story this week?”

The story set began in a non-threatening way with the story of David: his beautiful relationship with God, how he broke it, and how it was restored after he repented. As Jasmine told a story each week to her mother, father, and brother at home, she began to

see that they were interested; they listened to her in a way they hadn't before. It was as if Jasmine had found a new freedom—she had something valuable to say to her non-believing community.

The story set continued to the stories of Daniel's life. One night, Jasmine shared, "My parents are starting to understand that they should worship only the creator God, and no other. I didn't even have to tell them—they are just getting it from the stories!"

Then another breakthrough came. I told the story from Daniel 7 about the One coming in the clouds who looked like a "son of man," and the Ancient of Days giving him all authority, and all nations bowing before him. Jasmine exclaimed, "I finally got it! The Trinity! I now know how to explain it!" She explained that this proved to her that Jesus was fully God and fully man, because he looked like a man (that's how Daniel recognized him), and he was given authority and the right to be worshiped—a right only given to God himself.

Indeed, the story is a clear picture of two of the three Persons of the Trinity in one place at one time. There are other stories that can be used to explain the Trinity, but this is the one with which Jasmine identified.

I would never have chosen this story to teach this concept, but thankfully I wasn't trying to control her learning experience. If I had been, I might have paraded past her many stories that meant nothing to her, frustrating both of us. Instead, she had experienced the power of a special story which opened up a new world of understanding for her.

She soon found new freedom to share not only with her parents, but also with her colleagues and friends. She began to systematically tell the stories to a friend, and in the cab on the way to her office in the mornings. One day, she traveled three hours one way to a temple with her friend just so she could tell her the stories!

Jasmine occasionally still calls me late at night to practice a story before she tells it to her two aunts—her newest storying group—who own salons. One morning each week, Jasmine gathers the families together and tells them a story.

SHANTI'S JOURNEY

Shanti hasn't been so easy to convince; in fact, I'm not sure that she will use stories for the rest of her life. However, even Shanti would say that stories have opened her eyes to new concepts and have helped her to study her Bible better. Stories have even challenged some of her long-held misconceptions.

Shanti first came to the Sunday night storying group thinking that she already knew too much about the Bible to actually glean anything from a simple story. She was convinced she would be bored. However, she continued attending and took part in the training on how to tell her own story and pair it with the story of the demon-possessed man.

Shanti thought it was a good idea to use simple, non-churchy words in the stories. For example, when she heard that she could say "having a right/good relationship with God" in place of "righteous," she came to a deeper understanding of the meanings of these words that she had heard all her life. She also began to understand that some words like "baptism," were actually understood differently in her culture

than the way they were meant to be understood in the Bible. For the first time she began using other terms to accurately portray what really happens when someone is baptized.

But Shanti still hesitated to tell other people stories. Then her turn came to teach children's Sunday school at church. She was presenting on the Holy Spirit and decided to tell the story of Pentecost.

She practiced her story with me and the seven simple questions that came after. When she told the story, the children loved it so much that many shared it with their parents. Because the children seemed to really grasp the concept of the Holy Spirit, Shanti felt she perhaps could tell stories! She began bringing friends to the storying group who she thought would benefit from the non-traditional church setting.

Then the crisis came. I told her the story in John 9 of the man born blind. I asked the normal questions, but at the second question—"What bothered you about this story?"—she began to giggle nervously. She answered, "This story has always bothered me. It doesn't fit my theology."

As we talked, it became clear that she believed that all

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physical ailments and bad things that happened to a person are the direct result of sin and unbelief. This story, however, was clear that this man's blindness was not the result of sin, but so that "the power of God could be seen in him." The story, questions, and resulting discussion forced her to face a problem in her theology that she had never before been forced to confront.

Her thinking didn't change that night; however, she did go home considering what we had discussed. In the following weeks she heard other stories that also confronted her belief (e.g., David and Bathsheba's baby dying even after they were forgiven; Daniel's persecution). These weren't new stories to her, but she was experiencing them in a new way as she learned to tell and discuss them. Each time, however, she avoided discussing her questionable theology.

She was soon, however, forced to live out the story. Even though she felt like she had been obeying God, something "bad" happened to her. How had this happened, she wondered. I reminded her of John 9.

A few weeks later, we told the story again in the larger storying group. During the discussion, Shanti said, "This story used to bother me, because I didn't agree with it. But now, after what happened to me, I'm changing my beliefs about why bad things happen to people." It took a year and a half of story after story for Shanti to come to this conclusion. Some people say that's too long. The fact is, Shanti's entire worldview is changing, and it will take time as she experiences life alongside the stories taking root in her heart. Today, every time she's tempted to go back to her old way of thinking, a story will pop into her head that will remind her of Truth.

Shanti and I continue to meet every week. Recently, studying the Bible had become a little difficult for her, and she found herself falling asleep while reading. I suggested she craft a story for each section she reads as part of her quiet time, and then tell that story to herself throughout the week. At first, this seemed silly to her. Now, she is coming every week with a new story that she has crafted. Shanti has finally incorporated storying into her life.

EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE

I remember someone snickering three years ago when we said we were moving to the IT part of town to story with IT professionals. People would comment, "Why them? They're literate. They want answers, studies, an in-depth study on the original languages, and tables and charts." This was true about some people. Some did want a study that gave them all the answers. Some wanted to go back to the original Hebrew and Greek text. Some wanted fill-in-the-blank

worksheets and textbooks.

But some wanted freedom to experience and live out the story themselves without getting all the answers in one sitting. They wanted to live it out until the answers came through the experiences themselves. Those who were willing to try storying received something they never could have received through a workbook.

I'm reminded of the story of the blind man in the Gospel of John. The man was asked to explain how it came to be that he was healed of the blindness he had from birth. He didn't know; all he had was his experience: "All I know is that once I was blind, but now I see." Rejected from his place of worship, Jesus found him and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The Son of Man was a story the blind man had heard all his life, and now he wanted to experience it. "Show him to me," he said. Jesus replied, "I AM he," and the man fell down and worshiped him.

Once the blind man met the Son of Man, an entirely new depth of worship was revealed to him. As Jasmine and Shanti met with Jesus through these stories, they've begun to experience him in new ways as well. Slowly but steadily, their worldviews have been expanding and deepening as they apply each story to their own lives.

I am amazed at how far they have come and the things they are now willing to do.

I'm amazed at the ease in which they retell stories after hearing them only once.

I'm amazed at the deep truths and personal doubts that they're willing to explore during the discussion times.

I'm amazed at how sometimes they both speak up at the same time when asked who will tell the story the following week.

I'm amazed at the friends they've known for so long, with whom they've only shared superficially until they began telling stories.

The theology they have learned along the way is what the Holy Spirit has deemed necessary for them to learn at this time in their lives. They are now capable of learning a story and asking the Holy Spirit to teach them through the story. So even better than them learning a set of theological principles, they've learned how to extract good theology from the word of God, and to live it out.

My relationship with these two women is changing. Soon, I will move to another country. But I'm confident that they have the tools to continue on this journey to a deeper relationship with Jesus. 