

WE HAVE THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD. LET'S USE IT.



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Steve was a house painter from England vacationing at a beach in the Philippines with his family. A Bible teacher named Christine happened to be staying at the same resort. One day during a conversation that began to turn toward spiritual things, Steve said to Christine, "I've talked with numerous religious leaders but they've never been able to answer my questions satisfactorily. So I've given up on religion. I am trying to live a good life."

"What were your questions?"

Christine asked.

"The main one is, why the world is so unfair? Why is there pain and suffering and why doesn't God, if there is a God, do something about it?"

"Could I have a go at sharing something I've learned about these things using a story from the Bible? Christine asked.

"I don't believe the Bible," said Steve.

"That's no problem. I hope you will find the story helpful anyway."

Christine started with Genesis 1 and God's intentions for his world. She explained how God said, "Let us make people in our image," and how God made man and woman to rule over the earth and to multiply and fill the earth. Soon Steve's two children and his son's girlfriend casually drifted over to listen to the conversation. She filled them in on the story so far and continued by explaining the beginning of pain and trouble in the world from Genesis 3.

She continued on through the stories of Abraham, the exodus and on through the Old Testament. Each story set up the one that followed it so her audience would understand the nature of the human problem and how desperately we needed a Savior. Her listeners peppered her with questions and they discussed them one by one. Most often Christine asked them a question in return, and they found themselves answering their own questions based on what they had already learned.

Finally, after about an hour, they reached the end of the

Old Testament. "Come on," they begged. "Don't leave us in suspense. Tell us how Jesus saves!"

Outside our open-air dining room, the beach beckoned. It was a perfect day for snorkeling, and this family had come from winter-bound England to play in the sun. Their holiday was almost finished, but today the beach might as well not have existed.

They continued through Jesus' birth and ministry. Finally, they reached his death and resurrection. "Do you remember what the temple curtain in the Old Testament symbolized?" Christine asked.

"The separation between God and his people," said one.

"What was the only way people could be forgiven and continue to be friends with God?"

"A representative had to prepare himself carefully and then kill a perfect sacrifice and take its blood through the curtain," another responded.

"So what did it mean when the temple curtain split from top to bottom just when Jesus died?"

They started hesitantly, saying, "I guess it means... that because Jesus died... the barrier between us and God has been dealt with." Then they concluded in a rush, "So we can once again be friends with God."

"So Jesus was like that perfect sacrifice," one said.

"Yes, but he was also the representative," chimed in another.

At last Christine called an end to the storying before they'd exhausted themselves and lost the joy of discovery. Two days later as the family was departing, Steve said, "I am going home to find my Bible. If those religious experts had told me such relevant stories, I would have happily gone to their church and wouldn't have given up searching."¹

DO WE KNOW HOW TO TELL THE STORY OF GOD?

Everyone loves a great story. And we have the greatest story ever told. But I am afraid that few inside the church understand the whole story of God well enough, or are trained well enough, to tell this story to someone who needs Jesus as Christine did in the story above.

There is an untapped hunger for the story of God. In fact,

just this year *The Bible* mini-series featuring various stories from the Bible, garnered record setting ratings for the History Channel over several weeks with 100 million people tuning in.² This series, however, only presented various Bible stories but not the *story* of the Bible. Do you understand the difference? In the story above, Christine used a series of Bible stories to tell the redemption story of

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God in a way that made it clear what the plan and purposes of God are and how the spiritual world works. Her story tied the loose pieces together so the overall picture made sense.

Most people, even believers, see the Bible as a disjointed collection of books, verses and teachings but they do not understand the overall story of God that is presented from Genesis

to Revelation and how they fit into it. When reaching out to the lost, we cannot assume that anyone in our world today knows any Bible stories or understands how they fit together. We must be prepared to do that for them.

There is a central theme that runs through Scripture that ties all of history together. Every believer should be trained to tell that story of God from Creation to Christ so that every person can find their place in the unfolding story of God in history to bring access to the gospel to every person, tribe and tongue. Most believers think the gospel is just about God saving them when in reality it is also about what God wants to do in the world through them. As a result most Jesus followers never get plugged into the mission of God on earth.

OUR CULTURE IS CHANGING AND SO MUST WE

How the world receives and interacts with information is changing at a dizzying pace. From YouTube to Facebook, we are relating to each other in ways that are unique in the history of the world. In previous generations since the time of Gutenberg and his press first arrived, the focus has been on using literate means to communicate the gospel. But now we find our world moving increasingly toward using oral means to communicate. It is not that most cannot read but that there is an increasing preference for non-literate means of communicating. Samuel Chiang refers to this in his article starting on page 10. As the world changes in the way it prefers to use and process information, we must also change the way we communicate the gospel. The priority must be to communicate in such a way that

people will listen and understand the gospel.

WHY USE STORYTELLING?

Throughout history, storytelling has been the most powerful means of communication of truly important ideas and values from one generation to another. It was the primary means that Jesus used to communicate with the people during his time on earth. Our culture is increasingly oral in nature, motivated by great stories told by way of movies, television and the Internet. We literally spend billions of dollars every year to listen to and watch great stories created by professional storytellers. This is in addition to the thousands of peoples around the world who are primarily oral in nature and must be reached using oral strategies that resonate with their existing culture. See the article by Dr. Pam Arlund, starting on page 12, which features some enlightening case studies of how to develop Church Planting Movements within oral cultures.

Because storytelling is so powerful, many have used it to lead people astray and to manipulate them for their own purposes—religious, political, economic and otherwise. Satan has been very successful in using the power of storytelling to deceive people in our culture. If the church is wise we will take back the tool of storytelling from the devil and use it to build God's kingdom in every people. 

¹ Dillon, Christine, *Telling the Gospel Through Story*, adapted from the Introduction, Copyright 2012. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515. www.ivpress.com

² McKay, Hollie, “*The Bible*” *Creator Talks Series Success*, Published September 24, 2013, FoxNews.com