

7 REASONS

— TO USE —

STORY

IN YOUR MINISTRY



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Mission Media U (www.MissionMediaU.org)



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7 Reasons to Use Story in Your Ministry

One Night in the Middle East

Carlos moved to the Middle East because of his heart for the people there. He wants them to experience the joy he has in following Jesus. He shared this story with me recently.

On a late July afternoon in 2017, I was walking and praying through my adopted city of four million people. The Lord prompted me to go to an area where a group of migrant workers lives in tents in an abandoned lot. I dismissed the prompting and later felt I disobeyed God. The next day I decided to go to that area and saw a guy leaving the encampment. I cut across the street and asked him in Arabic, "Are you from this area?" This began a deep and eternal friendship.

Rashid is 29 year-old Muslim. He is married with three children under the age of 7. He salvages metal scraps from garbage to make \$4 a day. As I visited regularly, I shared stories about the life of Jesus with Rashid and his family. On one visit, I loaned him a Wi-Fi router that contained the JESUS film which took two evenings to view on his phone because he had to charge it with an old car battery. At the end of the film, tears rolled down his cheek as he said, "If I was in the crowd during Jesus' time, I would have followed him."



A month later, Hussein, the vendor who paid Rashid for metal scraps, did not come for two days in a row. Rashid had nothing for his children, not even bread. His soul was crushed as his children cried themselves to sleep from hunger for a second night in a row. As he lay in the darkness, he remembered the scene in the movie where Jesus fed a crowd with fish and bread. So Rashid got up, went outside and prayed under the stars. "God, I believe you fed the crowd. Would you please feed my family? I ask in Jesus' name."

Not 30 minutes later, his phone glowed with an incoming call. Ali, a small grocery store manager, hadn't called for a month. "Rashid," Ali asked, "I need help with a delivery tonight. Can you come now?" "Ali, I would gladly help, but I

don't have money for a bus or taxi." "Don't worry Rashid, I'll meet you with the store van."

Rashid helped Ali load the van with boxes for the delivery. Ali insisted that Rashid drive the van while Ali gave directions. Ali had them stop at an all-night bakery to pick up a large order of bread. Rashid secretly hoped some of the bread would be payment for his labor. Ali then directed Rashid to drive back to the encampment. Upon arriving, Ali jumped down from the passenger seat, swung open the back doors of the van and began to unload the boxes.

"Ali, I-I don't understand," stammered Rashid, "I thought we were making a night delivery." "Rashid," said Ali, "this IS the delivery. I felt I should give you the bread and these boxes as a gift." Ali began to open the boxes under the night sky. Every box was the same...filled with fish packed in ice. Each fish was nearly the length of a man's arm. There were more than 100 fish in all!

Immediately, Rashid remembered the story about Jesus and the fish and bread. He thanked Ali, worshiped God, then joyfully woke his family and all the people in the encampment. Everyone ate until they were full. And yes, there were still "loaves and fish" leftover!

Today, Rashid is a passionate follower of Jesus. He understands God's abundant love and Jesus' sacrifice for him. Now it is Rashid who shares stories of Jesus in the camp. Several other men follow Jesus too.

Why You Can't Ignore Story

Carlos understood story and used its power to help Rashid discover new life in Jesus. He not only told stories from the Bible but showed them through the *JESUS* film. When Carlos shared this with me, I was nearly in tears.

For the past 34 years, I have worked in ministry on three different continents. In 2008, I co-founded the Visual Story Network (VSN). We equip the church worldwide through media, story and innovation to reach and disciple the nations. In our first five years, we emphasized media training. We then realized, without a good story, media is largely ineffective. Media without story is like notes without a melody, like a computer without software, like a vehicle without fuel.

In the last few years I've become a "story evangelist." I want all God's people to be as enthusiastic about story as I am. I hope you will join me by taking a big step in that direction.

I used to say, "*He who **has** the best story wins.*" But I've come to realize, "*he who **tells** the best story wins.*" That storyteller wins our attention, our interest and our loyalty. As Christ-followers, we already have the "Greatest Story Ever Told." Yet we do not always tell it well. We don't do a good job telling stories that capture the heart and imagination and don't let go until the story is finished.



"He who tells the best story wins."

Whether your story is oral, written or visual (video, film, drama), this creates problems. When we don't use story well...

1. We don't reveal the fullness of God's glory.
2. We conceal the life-changing message of the kingdom of God from those who are in desperate need.
3. Others will tell our story for us...and it probably won't be very flattering.

For the sake of the Great Commission, we must learn the art of story as it relates to evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. My prayer is that you will learn story, love story, live story and give story. This applies to you as a parent with your children, as a pastor with your people, as a disciple-maker with your disciples, as a teacher with your students and as a missionary with your donors. So, let's look at the reasons you should regularly use story in your ministry.

Seven Reasons to Use Story in Your Ministry

1. Story is the key to a resistant heart

If you want to reach my head, give me information. If you want to reach my heart, tell me a story. You see this clearly with children. Most children are cautious when meeting someone new. If you tell them a story that relates to something in their world, their defenses drop quickly.

If you are sharing the gospel with someone whose heart appears cold, tell them a story. Your testimony is a great place to begin. Or tell a story about how God revealed himself in your life or how you struggled with something that God overcame. This is more human and relatable than presenting points about the Gospel. Best of all, learn how to story the Gospel. See my version at www.visualstory.org/storythegospel.

2. Story is universal

“There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.” (Ursula LeGuin, American novelist)

Story is one of the most ancient of the arts. Ever since humans could communicate we have told stories. I have yet to hear of a culture that does not communicate through story. God designed us to know and love story. I see this most often when I travel by airplane. What are most people doing if they are not sleeping? They are reading or watching a story.



3. Story sticks

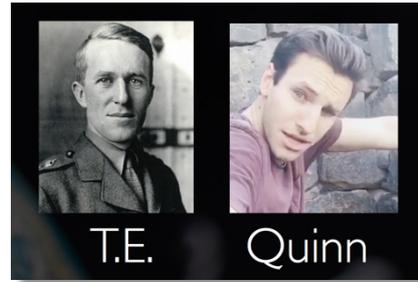
Our brains store information somewhat like a computer. A good story goes onto the “hard drive” of our brain and stays long-term. Normal information goes into your short-term memory, like the RAM on a computer. My laptop has 16 GB of RAM, but my hard drive has 1000 GB. The hard drive has much more capacity than the RAM. Our brains are like this, with a greater capacity to retain story over facts and information.

Can you remember what you had for dinner last night or the four points from the sermon on Sunday? Now consider the time several weeks ago when the guest pastor told the moving story about adopting his three children. You may not recall the children’s names, you will no doubt remember the feeling, inspiration and the lesson the story left you with.

4. Story inspires

Our son Quinn loves the movie “Lawrence of Arabia” about T.E. Lawrence. Lawrence was a British archeologist, diplomat, and writer who lived in the Middle East and learned Arabic in the early 20th century.

By age 24, Quinn spent several years in Middle East as a missionary, studied Arabic and traveled to 44 countries. He sees his story deeply intertwined with the Middle East for the rest of his life. Quinn has had other influences, but he would tell you that the movie created in him a deep curiosity and passion for travel, Arabic, and the Middle East.



Quinn is at the Qasr Al Azraq desert castle in East Jordan where T.E. Lawrence lived 100 years before.

5. Story is cinematic

All good stories are cinematic, or visual. That is because they imprint images in the mind. This is obviously true for acted or filmed stories where the image is before the viewer. It is equally true for oral and written stories because they foster images in the mind of the reader or listener. This is one of the reasons stories “stick.”

6. Story gives meaning to our lives

We are story creatures. We are not only designed by God to love a good story, but we are designed by Him to live out of stories. There are different levels of narratives that inform and shape our daily lives.

- a. There is a high-level narrative (metanarrative) that overshadows all other stories. This is the faith-narrative that addresses the big questions of life's origin, meaning and destination.
- b. There are middle-level narratives of the family, tribe or nation. These traditions serve as scripts that inform values and provide direction in daily choices.
- c. There are low-level narratives that amuse and entertain. These are wide ranging such as identification with a sports team, a relationship, a brand, a television show or famous person.

You only truly begin to understand someone when you understand the narratives that inform and shape their lives. You learn someone's narratives by listening to what they talk about. What are recurring themes? What do they talk about the most? What content do they post most often on social media?

There is a global epidemic of story malnutrition. Billions of people live out of middle-level or low-level narratives, stories that are too small. As Christ followers, we have the

amazing privilege of inviting people into the Great Redemption Story revealed in the Bible.

7. God has modeled story for us

Consider the way God has communicated with us. He has given us both the written word and the Living Word, Jesus. Two thirds of Scripture is narrative. Other than the wisdom literature (Psalms, Proverbs), most of the Old Testament is narrative. In the New Testament, the Gospels, Acts and Revelation are narrative. Jesus, the Living Word, often taught in story and acted out story in the miracles he performed.



The Bible itself is one great story arc. That is why history is “His Story.” You can divide the Bible into different acts, or chapters. Here are mine...

1. The Three in One: The triune God exists before time.
2. Rebellion in the Heavenlies: Lucifer, an angel, wanted the glory and position that belonged to the Creator. As a result, Lucifer and his followers are cast out of heaven. The conflict between good and evil is begun.
3. Creation & Perfection: The triune God initiates the creation of the universe. He chooses to create life on one planet. He creates the first couple, Adam and Eve, to live forever. They live in perfect harmony with one another and their Creator.
4. Rebellion & Exile: The rebel Lucifer tempts the couple to break the one rule that God gave them. The perfect relationship with God is now broken. They are exiled from the garden.
5. Israel Called Out: God chooses a particular people to receive his commands, promises and blessings so they could be a light to all nations. Sadly, they reflect the patterns of the nations around them more than the light of the God who chose them.
6. Kingdom comes through Messiah: Jesus comes to earth to perfectly reveal the kind of world where the ways of heaven prevail. This is called the kingdom of heaven on earth. Jesus is the promised Messiah foretold since the exile from the Garden.
7. A new people: Messiah’s followers are a new people who follow the ways of the kingdom of heaven on earth. They continue to multiply to this day.

8. New Heaven and Earth: When the fullness of time has come, all those who have followed Messiah will experience the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Conclusion

Today, Rashid is experiencing new life because he encountered the glory of God's kingdom through story. A powerful way to see your fruit increase in ministry is to understand and apply the power of story as Carlos did.

Carlos understood that story is the key to a resistant heart. Even though Rashid was from a different culture from his own, he understood that story is universal. Carlos knew that stories would stay in Rashid's mind and come back in a time of need. Trusting that the stories of the kingdom would inspire Rashid, Carlos knew that Rashid's life would be changed if he embraced the narrative of Messiah Jesus. In the end, Carlos followed the example of God himself by using story well.

If you integrate story into every part of your ministry you will better reveal the glory of God, you will show that your message is compelling, you will tell your own story (rather than have someone else tell it for you), and you will see greater fruit in your ministry. Through Mission Media U, we offer a five-week course on "Using Story in Ministry." www.missionmediau.org/courses/story-in-ministry/

Lord Jesus, I pray that everyone who reads this will learn story, love story, live story and give story.

Clyde Taber

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www.visualstory.org/connect