

# Voices: The effect of Bible Storying in Central America

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Central America is exhibiting more receptivity to the gospel message than ever before in its history.

Daniel Sillman, in his March 2023 *Christianity Today* article "[Evangelicals Outgrow Catholics in Central America](#)," states: "Evangelicalism is now the largest religious demographic in Central America, according to a poll of about 4,000 people in five countries."

"More than a third of people from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica," he continued, "told [researchers](#) from M&R Consultants that they are evangelical, while another 29 percent said they are *creyente sin denominación* (nondenominational believers)."

There is spiritual hunger in the hearts of Central Americans. Evangelical Christians in Central America living the Christian life and sharing the gospel message are rejoicing at the number of people accepting Jesus as their personal savior. The majority of evangelical growth in Central America is the result of indigenous pastors.

It has been my privilege to teach Bible Storying courses with my colleague J.O. Terry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for 10 years. A while back, I was invited to train pastors of the Kekchi tribe in Guatemala.

Aware of their animistic background, I shared stories of Jesus calming the storm, healing Bartimaeus, liberating the demon-possessed Gadarene and raising Lazarus from the dead. In so doing, I focused on the power of Jesus over nature, illness, evil spirits and death. This is an example of how Bible stories can be used to communicate biblical truths that lead to salvation.

# The Bible Storying strategy

The high illiteracy rates among unreached people groups has motivated missionaries to design strategies to share the truths from God's word in the form of stories.

J.O. Terry, a pioneer in Bible storying defines the term in *Basic Bible Storying* as the *intentional and uninterrupted sharing* of God's word primarily as stories (emphasis mine).

As he further explains, these stories usually are supplemented with culturally appropriate and listener-sensitive learning exercises. Many stories may be told together as part of a strategy leading to an invitation to believe, or one may tell only a few stories during an evangelistic encounter or a ministry opportunity.

Keith Stamps, an International Mission Board missionary in Central America, shared the following account with me. It appears in *Bible Storying for Church Planting*.

"Some areas are seeing rapid church planting. The Miskito work is using [Chronological Bible Storying] as a primary strategy and is seeing rapid church planting.

"Closer to home, we have been training and encouraging a church plant in Villa Nueva, just outside Guatemala City. As we have worked with them on Storying, they have made their own adaptations. Besides the growth of their own congregation, they are beginning works in rural El Salvador and encouraging multiple church plants in the Ixil triangle of Guatemala.

"I believe this potentially rapidly multiplying group is growing because of several factors:

1. "Visionary leadership. They want rapid multiplication and are committed

to the task.

2. “The goal that their church be an instrument of community transformation. Their mission statement [is] *Ser una Iglesia de Influencia Transformadora en nuestra comunidad* (To be a church with a transforming influence in our community). This means they are reaching out to alcoholics, minorities, prostitutes, abused ... but they also have police, teachers, businessmen, students, families [and] single parents.

3. “They have a teaching model they can all aspire to use rather than be limited to a select few. When we introduced them to Bible Storying, they took it up and have all been learning to tell stories from the Bible. This multiplies their potential and makes for more natural opportunities to witness and counsel in both urban and rural environments” (p. xvi-xvii).

## **Example of Bible Storying**

Donnie Barger is another missionary who has been very effective in the utilization of Bible Storying. He has utilized Bible Storying to evangelize, disciple and start churches. His approach to Bible Storying is very similar to Stamps.

A distinguishing characteristic is, after Barger has led people to the Lord through Bible Storying, he enables them to form congregations. This is explained further in *Bible Storying for Church Planting*.

The worship service has a unique characteristic. The sermon consists of Barger telling a Bible story, then taking the time for the people to practice telling the story to each other. He concludes the worship service by instructing them to tell the story to people who need to hear the gospel message.

The following Sunday, he starts off by asking the church members to share

testimonies of the experiences they had in sharing the story to people who need to hear the gospel message. After this, he tells them a Bible story and again instructs them to share the story with people who need to accept Christ.

We should all celebrate how people across Central America are coming to know and accept Jesus Christ through Bible Storying.

*Daniel R. Sanchez has served as a church planter, pastor, mission administrator and mission's professor and has lectured in more than 60 countries. The views expressed are those of the author.*