

*Note: This document summarizes several research articles about oral learners to give you an idea of who they are and how to serve them. It's part introduction and part a reference you can use later.*

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**80% of your community doesn't read**

**Either because they can't read or don't like to read**

**If the Gospel Story is going to be understood, remembered and shared it must be communicated in a way that people already use to share important news.**

Or else....

The truth can be missed or misunderstood

Transformation will be shallow

Reproducibility will be severely limited

and we might assume people are not interested who would have shown interest if the Scripture had been communicated in a way that made sense to them

*Who are the Oral Majority?*

Oral Learners are the majority in every country - no matter the country, education level or background. An oral learner is someone who learns through relationship, stories and other non-written forms of communication. When oral learners want to find out something, they prefer to turn to someone they can talk to rather than books. They google YouTube videos rather than blog posts. They usually get the

news from friends or TV rather than written newspapers. When they want to learn about past events, they go to people they trust instead of a library. They get the main points by listening to a story instead of by looking at an outline or Powerpoint.

Oral Learners also learn very differently, and they think and make decisions differently. So the way ideas are communicated are just as important as the words that are used.

Creating for and with oral learners will help you make something that is easily understood and shared by most people in your community. Based on our research and experience here are some things to consider as you work to serve oral learners....

## Without context there is either no meaning or wrong meaning

Because stories and relationships are a big part of how oral learners understand their world and new ideas, new information without context leaves an oral learner unable to understand the main ideas

- **Set the Stage and Make a Scene**

Oral learners visualize a story as scenes. They enter a story and live it in the present tense - seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and feeling what the people in the story are experiencing. In a scene, they look for context clues to help them determine the dynamics of the story as they get more engaged and are able to enter the story and then think about the meaning and implications for them today.

Think of each main event as a scene. The stage is set for the scene by giving the place and time. As the scene plays out there are props and speech bubbles. The props are the people and the

objects and the speech bubbles are the main parts of the conversations exchanged between the characters.

Therefore, while crafting a story, try to limit it into four scenes. This makes it much easier to remember and gives your audience the chance to visualize it and keep track of the main conversations and characters. You might have to use more tracks and shorter stories. In our experience, we have usually regretted making stories long, but seldom hear, “That was too short!”

### *Our Approach*

Later on, you’ll see examples of how we set the stage and introduced people like the tax collectors and Pharisees in a way that helped the listener feel the tension in the scene and wonder what Jesus would do next.

- **Titles and explanations for people and places**

Each person and place in a story is important. If the person or place is not known to the audience they will get distracted and wonder about those and will not be able to hear the main parts of the story. This is because oral learners believe that knowing each person’s background, position and relationship to others is essential in order to make judgments and learn lessons from the story.

### *Our Approach*

Later on you’ll see examples of how we added titles or short explanations to people and places in the retelling of the passage in Spoken Arabic.

## Craft a Story that is Remembered and Shared

- **Use the spoken local language of the listeners**  
Using the language that people speak in the home enhances their ability to understand and relate to the story. When a good story is well told in the spoken language, it goes straight to the heart and eventually leads to transformation of worldview. Stories in the spoken languages are easier to remember and are quickly shared with others.
- **Start with the event with the most energy**  
Oral learners start wherever the most energy is - whether it is the beginning, middle, or end. Try to hook the audience and don't worry about chronology. This grabs the listener's attention so that they pay attention and can learn more from the story.
- **End the story with a cliffhanger**  
Ending with an exciting event makes the listeners want to know what's going to happen next. This way, they'll want to keep going and listen to the next track soon.
- **Select more eventful passages**  
In general, oral learners like drama and not documentaries. While crafting stories, look for a way for the listeners to remain engaged and teach through drama. This will enable the audience to remember it, share it and want to come back for more.
- **Make stories easy to be retold**  
by eliminating unnecessary details and applying the guidelines mentioned above. It's also essential to make the story short and precise because it is hard for people to remember all the details. Unnecessary details cause confusion or encourage listeners to zone out before they get to the important part of the story. Keep the essence of the story - the essence is what will make a difference in people's lives.
  - **Ideal story length**

If the story is over 25 verses, you may want to tell the story in 2 parts. If the passage is not a story, it might need to be even shorter or perhaps told in the context of a larger story.

- **Avoid ambiguity**

Oral learners think and analyze the different factors affecting the dynamics in a story - they rarely let things fly over the head. If something is not clear enough, they'd pause and think about it to find an explanation that makes sense to them and not listen to the rest of the track.

- **Fill in the gaps**

Many stories are built on information in the stories that preceded them and therefore a chronological order is important. If stories are skipped, it is best to do an introduction to the next story to make the connection smooth. Even when you do not skip any stories, at times, it is wise to prepare listeners for the story you are about to tell by giving a reminder of the previous story you told.

## Embracing, Challenging and Changing Worldview

- **Start with the preexisting worldview**

Worldview is simply the way a person views his or her world. It's a composite of the core beliefs, values, cultural views, and practical lifestyle habits that characterize a person within a specific ethnolinguistic people group. This perspective affects how an oral learner receives any message, teaching, or story.

A "storying" approach to ministry involves selecting and crafting stories that convey the essential biblical message in a way that is sensitive to the worldview of the receptor society. This both builds bridges of understanding and confronts barriers to the

gospel message. You could consider doing a worldview survey in order to help pick your story sets.

- **Include Bible stories that involve points of similarity between a culture's worldview and a biblical worldview**

These bridges seem to be especially helpful at the beginning of story sets to show the listeners and their community that this is not a completely new and foreign idea. Remember oral learners are very relational and always think about the truth as it relates to their important relationships. If a story jumps out as too foreign or new it will inhibit how much it is shared and received.

- **Include passages that challenge cultural values**  
As you're selecting passages and crafting stories, make sure to pick out stories with Biblical values which challenge cultural values. Stories are an indirect way to not just challenge but change worldviews. It takes multiple stories over time for the more compelling story of the Bible to replace the stories we tell ourselves.

## Working with Oral Learners and Getting Feedback

- **Engage your target audience in the crafting process**  
While designing a product for your target group, getting their feedback on it is essential. Even beyond feedback, see and treat those from the target group as stakeholders with you and give them some decision making power. We can't make something helpful without them!

It's essential to have the community participate in the crafting process so that, together, you can create a product which serves

the purpose you want to accomplish in a way that is best for them.

A summarization of the storying approach from the CD series, *Following Jesus: Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, specifies a ten-step process toward making disciples of primary oral learners with reproducibility as the important culminating step:

1. Identify the biblical principle that you want to communicate simply and clearly.
2. Evaluate the worldview issues of the chosen people group.
3. Consider worldview - the bridges, barriers, and gaps.
4. Select the biblical stories that are needed to communicate the biblical principle.
5. Plan (craft) the story and plan the dialogue that is going to follow the story, focusing on the task to be accomplished.
6. Communicate the story in a culturally appropriate way, using narrative, song, dance, object lessons, and other forms.
7. Apply the principle by facilitating dialogue with the group, helping them to discover the meaning and application of the story to their own lives.
8. Obey the discovered principle by implementation steps to be taken by the individuals.
9. Accountability - establish accountability between group members by mutual and reciprocal commitments to implement the biblical principle in the conduct of their personal lives between members of the group, their families and other personal relationships.
10. Reproduce - encourage the group to reproduce the biblical principle, first by demonstrating the principle in their own "witness of life" then in sharing the principle with others.

