

# FBC TODAY

U N L E A S H I N G   T H E   G O S P E L

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# FBC

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
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- ▶ **MAIN SERVICE**  
| Physical & Youtube |  
Sundays 8:45am / 11:15am
- YOUTH SERVICE**  
| Physical |  
Sundays 9:00am
- SUNDAY SCHOOL**  
For Ages 3 to 12  
(Preschool to std 6)  
Physical Classes  
8:45am / 11:15am

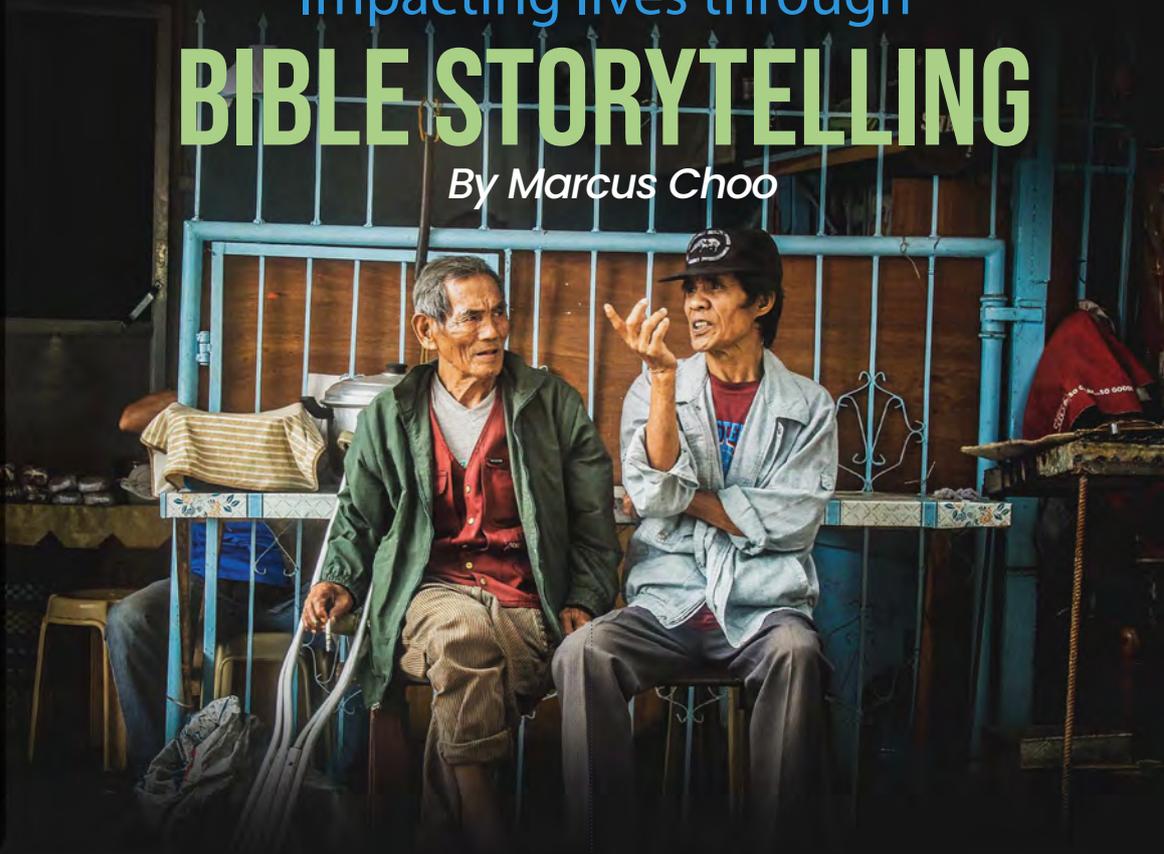


# Wycliffe Today

Impacting lives through

## BIBLE STORYTELLING

By Marcus Choo



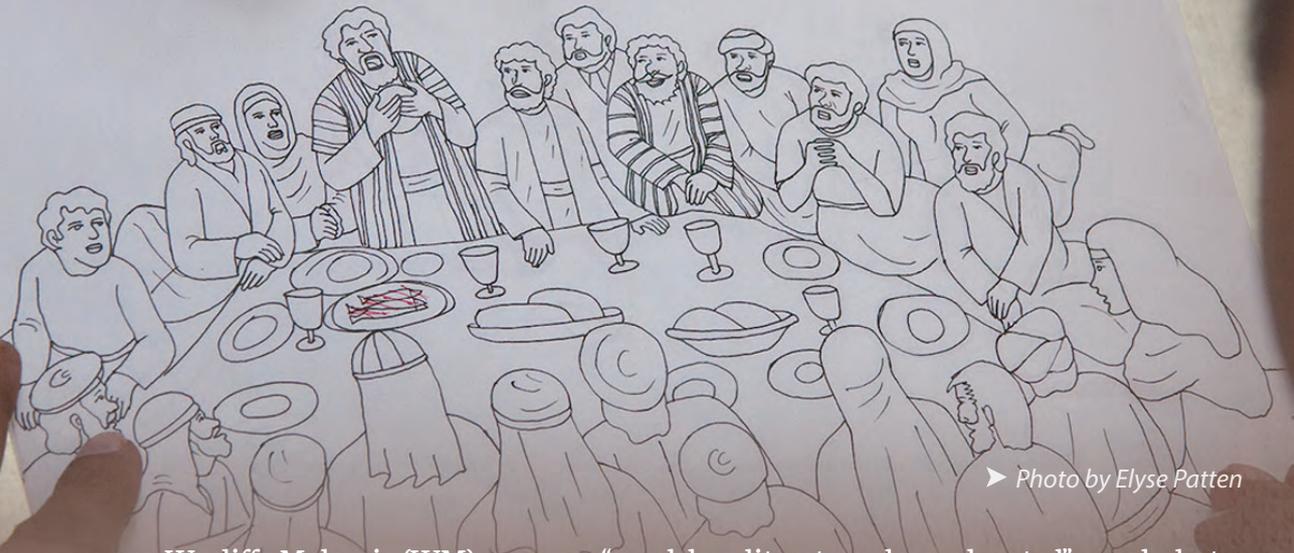
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► Photo by Elyse Patten

Around five years ago, Wycliffe Malaysia (WM) published an article exploring the world of Orality and Bible Storytelling. Since then, stories continue to be told and retold – both old and new. Stories live on; and this article is simply the next chapter in a story started five years ago.

Over the past few years, WM has led or participated in a number of orality-based projects making Scripture accessible to various communities in West Malaysia. These include crafting oral Bible stories, translating Oral Bibles, and producing voicing and audio in local indigenous languages for Scripture media. As these materials were produced, people – individuals and communities alike – were trained to engage Scripture as narrative, lead Oral Bible Study groups, and even craft Bible stories themselves.

Oral Bible Storytelling and Storycrafting activities are growing not just in WM, but also elsewhere all over the world. Today, most missions-based organisations, movements, and groups incorporate some form of Oral Storytelling in their programs and activities. Oral Storytelling has proven to be quite effective and useful in Scripture Engagement, Church Planting, Evangelism and Discipleship, and even Church Leadership Training. Remarkably, storytelling is gaining popularity and traction not just among

“rural, low-literate, or less-educated” people, but also among urban dwellers and the younger generation whom we might associate with high-literacy, formal education, and proposition-driven modes of learning and communication.

So, what’s going on?

In our present day and age, we live in a deluge of information that is accessible within a few mouse clicks or screen swipes. Information in the form of new data is created at an exponential rate such that the unit of measurement is in *zettabytes*<sup>1</sup> (1 zettabyte equals a trillion gigabytes or a billion terabytes if you can get your head around that!). Apparently in 2018, so much information was produced that “*over the last two years [from 2018] alone 90 percent of the data in the world was generated*”<sup>2</sup>.

With such huge volumes of information available, competition is inevitable. There is so much data and information on offer that it’s almost impossible to filter out what’s good or bad (Is coffee good for you? What about palm oil?) and what is true or false (Is he guilty or innocent? Are they winning or losing the war?). “Facts” or “raw data” alone seem insufficient to sway opinions. Instead, people are turning to storytelling as a means of persuasion. Consider the following

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/871513/worldwide-data-created/>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2018/05/21/how-much-data-do-we-create-every-day-the-mind-blowing-stats-everyone-should-read/?sh=6583076160ba>

apothegms:

*“Whoever tells the best story, wins”, Annette Simmons, author of book with said title.*

*“You can’t really change the heart without telling a story”, Martha Nussbaum, philosopher.*

*“Storytellers will be the most valued workers in the 21st century. All professionals, including advertisers, teachers, entrepreneurs, politicians, athletes, and religious leaders, will be valued for their ability to create stories that will captivate their audiences”, Rolf Jensen, Danish futurist.*

*“The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller. The storyteller sets the vision, values and agenda of an entire generation that is to come”, Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple, and Pixar.*

If you’re a data-oriented person though, you may be wondering how far the above ring true.

In 2007, oceanographer-turned-storyteller Kendall Haven wrote a book<sup>3</sup> detailing his experience convincing NASA to adopt narrative storytelling as a means to communicate their research findings to the public. Haven reviewed 350 separate studies from across 15 science-related domains and this is what he had to say:

*“Incredibly, every one of those studies, as well as every other study they cite – every one – agrees that stories are an effective and efficient vehicle for teaching, for motivating, and for the general communication of factual information, concepts, and tacit information. Not one doubted or questioned the effectiveness of stories!”*

The exclamation mark at the end of his quote? That’s his, not mine...

So, here’s the crux of the matter: Storytelling is serious business. The world at large is wise to its potential and power. What about us? What does

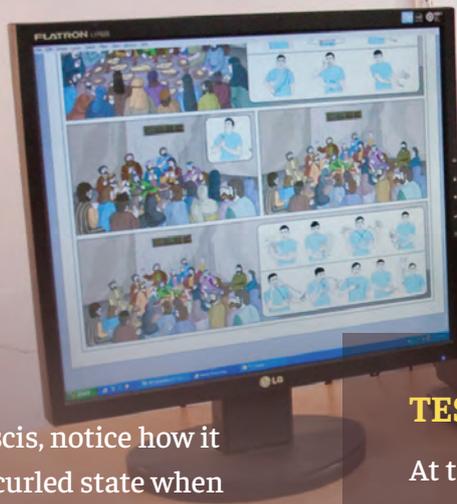
this mean not just for WM; but for us as the wider Church?

Within the framework of Scripture, I think we first need to start engaging with the Bible as a narrative. Not simply as an anthology of stories separate from one another; but as one interconnected story in and of itself with a main thread running through the myriad of those smaller stories. Jesus calming the storm as he and his disciples cross the Sea of Galilee isn’t just a standalone historical account displaying his divine power for information’s sake. As a chapter within the larger Biblical narrative, it hearkens back to earlier stories about One who has absolute power over the Waters – God bringing life to the lifeless deep, God commanding a global flood to come and go at will, God moving and manipulating the Red Sea to save and to kill. And so, when the disciples – who surely grew up hearing those stories – see their Teacher effortlessly subdue the seething sea after a power nap, they must have wondered if they were within a glance of mortal death. Every story has its place within the meta-narrative. Some cannot be fully understood or appreciated until juxtaposed or recalled alongside other parts in Scripture.

Having a fuller appreciation and understanding of Scripture in narrative form, better positions us to act upon the second, more outward-looking aspect of our identity as Jesus followers. Outreach. Evangelism. Sharing the Good News. Call it what you may; and as clichéd as it sounds, the best way to communicate Scripture as a story, is to tell it as a story. This contrasts with the common practice of presenting a predefined package of processed information that tell people “what is sin”, “why did Jesus come”, “how to be saved”, etc.

If we want to tell someone what a butterfly is, we could pull a butterfly apart into neat, separate segments and say, “this is the butterfly’s wings that help it fly, notice the veins maintain the wing’s rigid structure, etc.” or “this is the butterfly’s

<sup>3</sup> Story Proof, by Kendall Haven, published 2007



► Photo by Elyse Patten

mouth, or proboscis, notice how it unfurls from its curled state when probing for nectar, etc.” and so on and so forth.

Or we could bring that person into the butterfly’s natural habitat to observe and experience the full, unfettered, natural life of this beautiful creature to truly understand how it lives, where it goes, what it seeks, and so on and so forth. True, it takes time and you have less control as a teacher; but it is in this place that learners make their best and most lasting discoveries.

Too often, we treat the Bible as a divided and categorised repository of information, both in our engagement of it for personal learning; and our dispensation of it for public teaching. We need to rediscover the art of storytelling, which – according to some research at least – is our biological and natural (and thus God-created) – way of communicating and learning.

Know this: If we’re not telling the Bible Story to the world, you can bet the world is making up its own story to challenge ours. And here’s the irony: We don’t have to make up a story as the rest of the world is doing. We already have THE story. But what good is a story, if we don’t have storytellers...

## TESTIMONY

At the last Storycrafting project I worked in, one of the teams comprised members who were relatively young in their faith - most were believers for only around one year. They had little to no Bible knowledge. Their leader was not even a mother-tongue speaker, but had married into their community. When we began, they struggled with the foreign-imposed discipline of crafting "x" number of stories in "x" weeks. They also struggled with our meagre efforts trying to exegete and explain Bible contexts and key words. Not all were bilingual enough to understand the language used at the workshop. But despite these disadvantages, this group persisted through two and a half years of crafting stories. They eventually turned out to be the most productive team. They crafted the most stories. They brought their enthusiasm in storytelling back to their home church and started doing Bible Storying Fellowship Group's. At their own initiative, these Storying Fellowship Group's evolved into Storycrafting teams. They went to other villages to tell their crafted stories in their outreach. During the pandemic, they continued to craft stories and met regularly with the facilitators to check those stories. Bible storytelling seemed to unlock a previously unseen potential in them. It gave them the platform to learn, grow, and share their faith with others. What they went on to do outside the Storycrafting program was beyond my expectation. Storytelling was almost "Spirit-like" in the way it took on life within that language community and began bearing fruit on its own. I think about this team often and imagine sometimes as if God chuckled and said, "Alright guys, you all have done your part... Now stand back and watch Me do Mine."



## **Prayer is taken from day 40 : 15 September NECF 40 Days Prayer and Fast 2023**

- Lord Jesus, enable us to see the eternal reward so that we would not hesitate to give ourselves to You as we confront the light afflictions which are but a moment. Teach us to carry our crosses each day as we follow You so that we would serve You faithfully unto death in this world that is full of choices and temptations. Amen.
- Pray for retreat centers that are open for retreats and meetings for the Christian communities. Thank God for their generosity and hospitality, and pray that God would provide for them so that they can continue to function at their full capacity to bless the churches and Christian organizations at large.
- Pray for greater cooperation and collaboration between the federal and the state governments, especially among states that are far below the overall development level of the country. Pray that sufficient funds would be allocated to these states so that better infrastructure can be built to mitigate development hurdles.