



Why stories?

Here are a few reasons we have been using them as our foundation in Christ Central's discipleship

Biblical interpretation involves not the attempt to translate scripture into our categories but the re-description of our experience in the light of the scriptural story (Goldingay, 1987)

1. God used the story of the people of Israel as the foundation to restore all people to himself. In fact, the Bible is 75% story telling (narrative). God consistently asked his people to share scriptures and *stories* with their children and newcomers to the faith. Here are a few examples:
 - a. In Exodus 12:24-27 Moses tells God's people that the Passover celebration will remind them of how God brought them out of Egypt. To this day, Jewish people tell the story of their deliverance from slavery during the Passover festival
 - b. In Deuteronomy 4:9-14 Moses tells God's people to not forget what they have seen, to teach it to their children, and to let it affect their daily actions (see also 6:4-9, 5:12-15, 8:10-18, 26:5-11, 15:12-15, 24:17-18, 24:19-22).
 - c. Joshua says to God's people in Joshua 4:1-9 that the stones in the middle of the Jordan river are there to remind them to tell their children the story of what happened
2. Jesus often used a type of story (parables) when he taught because the everyday concepts in the stories were relevant to his audience. The Bible is still relevant today and full of stories of real people. When we tell these stories people are able to relate to the Bible as a book relevant for them.
3. Peter and Paul often used the redemptive narrative and the fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of the old testament story as the foundation of their sermons and teachings (Acts 2:22-36, Acts 3:18ff, Romans 9-11). Cambridge professor and theologian, Gerard Loughlin, says that Paul's arguments (Pauline thought) has a narrative substructure, and he says, "First, in opposition to a certain kind of cerebral Christianity, it shows that Pauline thought cannot be conveyed as a series of propositions to be believed but only as a story which is 'lived', retold and embodied in the practices of the community which celebrates that story."

What if we really could embody the biblical story in our church community?

4. Neurological research has shown that stories re-connects broken connections and strengthens existing connections between the right and left sides of the brain. Narrative helps us think more holistically.
5. Sociological research shows that narrative experienced in community, strengthens a community's group identity and their relationships within it. Theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas stresses the importance of story in forming identity, community, character and conduct.

Is it possible that the biblical narrative could help form our church community and keep it healthy and strong?

6. Storytelling research shows many benefits of using stories in education, information retention, and deeper understanding of concepts. Professor Pierre Bayard says "We are the sum of perpetually accumulating stories."
 - a. In Letting Stories Breathe, Frank explains how learning groups of stories is important, putting ideas in context and helping people understand, explore, and discover *what* they should think about a subject. Frank says that a good story leads to another...

How often do we truly learn from Scripture in light of its context, and within the larger story, to allow the sum of the entire biblical story to shape us?

- b. Professional storytellers say that someone does not know a story unless they tell it 5 times to someone who has never heard it. They also discovered that people who learn bible stories *and tell them to others* are driven even more to the hard copy of scripture, seeking new stories to tell and checking what they are already telling. This is important for us as Christians; we also want to know our stories well!

What does this say about how much we really understand and know Scripture if we've not told it? Is it possible that God made us this way to ensure that His word multiplies and goes out in power?

If the word of God is living and active, how do we create an environment that allows God's word to flourish in this way?

If the Holy Spirit breathes through His word, how can we integrate the Holy Spirit and His word in our studies better?

Is it possible, that like exercising the prophetic, learning and telling good bible narratives drives us *towards* God and *towards* a desire to live like the bible outlines for us? Is it possible that, like exercising the prophetic, learning and



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telling bible stories may be a bit uncomfortable for us, until we learn to step into it fully? Is it possible that the Holy Spirit can use both words of knowledge, words of encouragement, and his stories from scripture to teach us, exhort us, and walk alongside us?

Why act out stories? Isn't that for children?

- Studies have shown that embodying the story by acting it out helps the brain fully integrate the story into our life. (see bibliography below, Theatre of the Oppressed)
- The kinesthetic nature of acting helps our memory remember the story—even if we don't remember the words, we remember the emotions and the storyline better. The words come easier after that.

For those wanting a more theoretical foundation for why narrative is important, the following books are some of the best. The books with an asterisk are ones that are either written by non-Christian authors or really focus on a secular use of narrative. Those in green are highly recommended, if you can only read one or two!

*Boal, Augusto. (2000). Theatre of the Oppressed. London, Pluto Press.

Dinkins, L. (2006). My Journey into the World of Narrative.

*Frank, Arthur W. (2012). Letting Stories Breathe. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

Frei, H. W. (1974). The eclipse of Biblical narrative : a study in eighteenth and nineteenth century hermeneutics. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.

Goldingay, J. (1987). Models for Scripture. Carlisle, UK, Paternoster Press.

Hauerwas, S. (1981). A community of character : toward a constructive Christian social ethic. Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press.

Loughlin, G. (1996). Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology. Cambridge, CUP.

*MacIntyre, A. C. (2013). After virtue : a study in moral theory. London, Bloomsbury Academic.

*Polkinghorne, D. (1988). Narrative knowing and the human sciences. Albany, State University of New York Press.

*Ricœur, P. (1980). Essays on Biblical interpretation. Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

*Thiele, L. P. (2006). The heart of judgment : practical wisdom, neuroscience, and narrative. Cambridge ; New York, Cambridge University Press.

Vanhoozer, K. J. (2010). Remythologizing theology divine action, passion, and authorship. Cambridge, UK; New York, Cambridge University Press.

Wright, N. T. (1992). The New Testament and the people of God. London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Wright, N. T. (2012). "Israel's Scriptures in Paul's narrative theology." Theology 115(5): 323-329.

*Mollica, Richard F. (2006). Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World. Harcourt, Inc.