

Storytelling

- a key to reaching Muslims



MECO's teams seek to communicate in meaningful ways, and are seeing firsthand how important storytelling is both for discipleship and outreach.

Kalia*, a MECO worker in the Middle East, shares how important stories are.

* Picture disguised and name changed for security.

In this predominantly oral society, a good story and storyteller always has an audience. Having lived in the Middle East for several years, we have come to learn how important stories are to this culture.

Attitudes, beliefs and worldview are largely formed and informed by stories heard, rather than by abstract principles or argument. Our desire is to meaningfully reach out to Muslim believers, introducing them to Jesus and His message of grace, so the challenge we face in MECO is to learn how to communicate in ways they can identify with.

Learning Bible stories together
One group that MECO is working with is going through a series on the book of Acts. About a dozen people gather each week and while some are confident reading;

others are not, but they all want to learn from the Bible. They tend to arrive at slightly different times, and one of the earlier arrivals will usually read aloud the week's passage in the Bible. On this particular occasion, they had reached Acts 16, with the slave girl in Philippi and Paul and Silas' imprisonment.

"Some shared from their own prison experiences"

After others arrived, one of the early comers retold the story to the others from his memory. Next, one of the group who knew the passage well, led them through the story with a series of simple factual questions. Then, in pairs and later as a whole group, they tried to retell the story to each other, correcting each other when necessary. After this multiple hearing of the story, they acted out the passage with a narrator - drama comes easy to many here. Alongside the laughter, the reality of that episode in the early life of the church was sinking deep. Some shared from their own prison experiences.

The group spent time wondering at Paul and Silas's prison praise - they marvelled. The passage had become real

- it was living in them and touching their life experiences. They now had another part of the Bible internalised and ready to be passed on and lived out. For some, it could be in prison ... and they won't be able to read their Bible there.

The value of remembering stories

In 2002, 70% of the world's population was estimated to be illiterate or functionally illiterate. For them, knowledge and teaching is communicated through spoken words, especially proverbs, poetry or stories, all of which are designed to be understood, remembered and reproduced. So, consider the significance that at least two-thirds of the Bible is written in a narrative format and much of the rest, whether psalms or epistles, can be rooted in the biblical narrative.

The ultimate example of a biblical foundation for storying is Jesus - Jesus taught using parables or stories as a focus of the message (Matthew 13:34). Scholars suggest that the Palestine of His day had literacy levels of no more than 12%. And yet, despite not having ready access to written scriptures, this is the place where Christianity grew. These believers knew the gospel and repeated these stories of Jesus to others - orally. The vast majority of believers got their faith by hearing.

Please pray with us that believers in the Middle East would be encouraged as they learn more about Jesus through this method of communication. Pray too that many Muslims would come to love Jesus as they are introduced to Him in a meaningful way. ☒

"The ultimate example of a biblical foundation for storying is Jesus."

