

## The Storytelling Approach to Reaching Muslims

By Paul Parks

Everyone loves a good story. Children learn to love stories by listening to their parents or teachers. John, the Gospel writer, believed that his was the greatest story, when he said, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30). The four Gospels record the stories and teachings of Jesus. We might say God chose to reveal His will to us through His Son who told stories. God chose this method instead of lectures about theological truths. Sharing truth using stories is not very common in the West but remains a powerful witnessing tool in the rest of the world. Most people still learn by listening to the concrete images provided in stories, as opposed to abstract or propositional concepts. When starting a friendship with a Muslim friend, why not start with a story like Jesus did? Remember the gospel is the greatest *story* ever told.

John gives seven stories of the supernatural acts of Jesus. The first miracle was when He turned water into wine (John 2). A happy wedding feast resulted, but more importantly, His disciples “believed in him.” The last miracle was Lazarus returning to life after four days. These stories, I believe, are

important for Muslims to hear. Through this article, I want to encourage you to use stories to help Muslims understand who Jesus is.

### Why Use Stories?

Why use stories when speaking with Muslims? Whether a college student, new immigrant, or someone in between, they likely have a different culture or worldview than you. They prefer learning by listening rather than by reading. They prefer new information from a person they know, instead of a stranger who has written a book. Consider the following reasons people love hearing stories, even in our new digital age.

Everyone loves a good story. Whether around the dinner table, in a movie theater, or in a courtroom, stories communicate to everyone. Today, with more cell phones than people on the planet, we all can tell our story—anywhere and at any time.

Stories enable us to connect with both our imagination and emotions. Lists of numbers and facts are important in the workplace, but we long for people who help us understand



# Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

**Mark Brink**

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The hymn, “Tell Me the Story of Jesus” by Frances Crosby, rings true today and has been stirring in my heart as I think of the mission of Global Initiative. Here are two verses from this beautiful hymn:

*Tell me the story of Jesus, Write on my heart every word; Tell me the story most precious, Sweetest that ever was heard. Tell how the angels in chorus, Sang as they welcomed His birth, “Glory to God in the highest! Peace and good tidings to earth.”*

*Tell of the cross where they nailed Him, Writhing in anguish and pain; Tell of the grave where they laid Him, Tell how He liveth again. Love in that story so tender, Clearer than ever I see; Stay, let me weep while you whisper, “Love paid the ransom for me.”*

The reality of 1.8 billion Muslims without Christ motivates us at Global Initiative to engage in gospel proclamation. Over 15 million Muslims die every year in their sins without awareness of the peace that the story of Jesus brings.

In this edition of the *Intercede*, Paul Parks validates the use of storytelling as a wonderful avenue for sharing the gospel with Muslims. You can share two specific stories with your Muslims friends: (1) the scriptural stories about Jesus and the ransom He paid for our sins, and (2) the story of how the Good News of Jesus Christ has transformed your life. You could say, there are five Gospels rather than four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and YOU. You are an ambassador of the Good News of Jesus Christ to Muslims and the immediacy of the task must prioritize our days on this earth.

Let the passion of Christ rise with within you to not only hear the story again yourself, but to share it with those whose hearts and minds are veiled. “Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:15-17). Tell the story of Jesus everywhere you go so more Muslims can experience the removal of the veil and freedom in Christ!



# Muslim World News



## **Mozambique: Jihad Violence, 670,000 Displaced**

Brutal jihadist violence forced people to flee their homes, but now hunger has driven some in Mozambique to risk their lives by sneaking back to their old residences to gather food—or even resume farming. Nearly 670,000 people have been displaced by an extremist insurgency that has raged for three years in northern Mozambique. Some have moved in with host families, some are living in temporary shelters, while others have resettled in newly-created safe villages, but a critical lack of food has led to a few returning to their old homes to forage for whatever they can.—*Africa News*

## **Nigeria: Church Elder Murdered**

Fulani herdsmen killed a church elder and abducted three other Christians in northwest Nigeria on February 16, sources said. Muslim Fulani herdsmen shot dead Mati Sani, a 65-year-old elder with the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), in an attack in the village of Kadabuki Dan-Marabu, Kankara County, Katsina state at about 1 a.m., said his son, the Rev. Ali Mati. “Fulani bandits” also abducted Ibrahim Lawal, Mamar Rahila, and Hafsat Yusuf, besides shooting and wounding Danjuma Sani Mati, who was receiving treatment in the city of Katsina. The victims are all Christians who are related to each other.

Nigeria was the country with the most Christians killed for their faith last year (November 2019-October 2020), at 3,530, up from 1,350 in 2019, according to Christian support organization Open Doors’ 2021 World Watch List. In overall violence, Nigeria was second only to Pakistan, and it trailed

only China in the number of churches attacked or closed, 270, according to the list.—*Morning Star News*

## **Iran: Cartoon Characters Must Wear Hijab**

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a *fatwa* stating women in cartoons and animated features must be depicted wearing a *hijab*, according to *al-Arabiya*, citing Iran’s Tasnim news agency. “Although wearing *hijab* in such a hypothetical situation is not required per se, observing *hijab* in animation is required due to the consequences of not wearing *hijab*.” Since Iran’s Islamic Revolution 40 years ago, women have been forced to cover their hair. Violators are publicly admonished, fined, or arrested. They are also harassed and targeted by Iran’s “morality police,” also known as the “*Gasht-e Ershad*.”—*Jerusalem Post*

## **Pakistan: “Blasphemy” Convict Gets Bail**

The Lahore High Court has released a 20-year-old Christian two years after his conviction under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws for allegedly posting a sacrilegious photograph on social media. Incarcerated since his 2016 arrest, Nabeel Masih became the youngest person to be charged with blasphemy in Pakistan at age 16, when a Muslim friend accused him of “sharing” and “liking” on Facebook an allegedly blasphemous photo of the Kaaba, Islam’s holiest site in Mecca. In 2018, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Masih’s sentence is now suspended and he remains free until a ruling on his appeal. If the verdict is upheld, he’ll be sent back to prison to complete his sentence.—*Morning Star News*

# The Storytelling Approach

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life. In a story, we can see ourselves in the lives of the characters. Often, we can imagine ourselves in other's stories and find solutions to life problems. Stories help us experience both our sorrows and joys.

About 75% of the Bible was written in a narrative or story form. We are told today that about 70% of people are oral learners. This means that whether they can read or not, they prefer to learn by listening.

Some folks avoid sharing stories with Muslims, preferring instead to share great theological truths. They may believe stories are only for entertainment or for children. Others believe you need to tell stories only to people who cannot read. Some believe they cannot tell stories as well as those trained for the job.

The *best reason* to use stories in ministry to Muslims is because Jesus did. My experience says that most Muslim seekers will not initially read the Bible, but they will listen to the passion in our voices for the Story we love.

## Chronological Bible Storytelling

Now, you may ask, "Which story should be told first?" We are accustomed to our pastor choosing a different Bible passage each Sunday. This does not work well for someone who does not know the Bible's message. Chronological Bible Storying encourages the telling of Bible stories in the order in which the events happened. This means beginning with Genesis, not John. Muslims especially need to hear the true stories of their prophets like Abraham, Noah, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. They need to see the Bible as one interconnected story from heaven. To assist in your preparation to use the narrative (story telling) approach, note the resource list at the end of this article.

### An Example: The Story of Creation

We begin, then, with Genesis, especially chapters one through three. Initially, Muslims need to hear God's solution to our human problem of sin. A suggested script below contains the highlights. You may add other details.

In the beginning, God created the universe. The Spirit of God was present. In six days, God created everything through His spoken word. At the end of six days, God called it all "very good." Humans were God's last creation, and He placed them in a perfect garden and told them to "fill the earth and subdue it." God created us because He wanted children who would choose to love Him and fellowship



with Him. God created a test which required Adam and his wife to obey just one command, to make the correct moral choice. God created this test because He wanted them to freely choose to obey Him. He forces no one to obey Him.

As you probably know, they both failed the test. They listened to Satan and not to God. After their act of disobedience, they feared meeting with God and tried to hide, because they knew they were naked. Their sin or disobedience had separated them from fellowship with God. He knew this would happen, and He already had a plan. To cover the man and woman's nakedness, God killed an animal to make them clothing. This established the principle that sin can be covered only when blood is shed. God then cursed Satan, who had appeared in the form of a serpent during the temptation. Forced out of the garden to make a life for themselves, Adam and Eve were separated from God their Father. Their new and difficult life ended in physical death. Their bodies decayed and became dust again. But God promised all people final victory over Satan, when, in the future, the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent and destroy him. Christians believe that this foretold the coming of Jesus. He alone can set people free from Satan's power

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because He shed His blood, died, and rose again proving He is the promised Messiah.

The rest of the book tells how God has and will deliver people from Satan's power. The first part of the Bible, called the Old Covenant, tells how God chose Abraham and his descendants to be the earthly family of the Messiah. The second part, the New Covenant, tells how Jesus, the Messiah, lived and pointed people to their heavenly Father.

Most Muslims have never heard the correct version of this first Bible story. In response to this story, they may explain why Christians are wrong. Don't be offended, just offer to tell another story, perhaps at your next meeting. Since Muslims look up to Abraham as a spiritual giant, offer to tell one of his stories, perhaps Genesis 16 or 22, that reveal his challenges and walk of faith. When your Muslim friend appears ready, tell one of the great parables of Jesus. Ask the Spirit to lead you, but consider using stories about lost people, like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the Pharisee and Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14), or the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). If your friend needs healing or deliverance from demonic oppression, find a story

that shows that Jesus can and will meet both those needs. Offer to pray for his or her needs.

### Three Testimonies Regarding the Use of Storytelling

Let me share three testimonies of people who used biblical storytelling in their relationship with Muslims. These workers discovered that God's story became real to Muslims. A growing personal relationship with the person seeking truth opened doors for them, and will also open doors for you to share the story of Jesus.

#### Fulani Relate to the Shepherding Theme

As a young woman, Ann went to northern Nigeria to teach English as a second language. While eating with her Muslim students, she read and discussed Bible stories in English. One Fulani student introduced Ann to his extended family. Winning the respect of community leaders, she answered their questions about the Bible and Jesus. She used their own folk tales as bridges for discussing many Scriptures. Ann gained access to the women, who helped her improve her language ability and understand their way of life.

The Fulani move in clans, constantly searching for good pasture for their cattle. Few have accepted Christianity. As Ann learned more about the people, she found ways to show the cattle herders that they are special to God. She shared the many stories where shepherds played special roles in Bible history. Ann was able to improve the health of the animals with medicines. Caring for their cattle, she found, was the way to the Fulani heart. When she gave medicine to his cows, one elder said, "Now I know you *really* love us."

At the end of a conference called especially for the Fulani, a chief said that he wanted his people to become a part of the Christian community. He had heard the stories from their holy book and had seen their care for his people. After all, some of their greatest prophets were cattle-herders, too.<sup>1</sup>

Ann took time to learn about the local people and their stories. In this way, she could connect their stories with God's story. Connecting their story to Abraham's story in the Bible helped transform the people's worldview.

#### The Audio Box

Years ago, a Swiss missionary couple discovered a unique method to reach illiterate Tuareg nomads in the desert of Africa. The answer was a box-shaped audio device with recorded stories of the life of Jesus—in the Tamashek language. The device came with a handle; turn the handle and

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the box would talk! The young couple discreetly distributed the devices and regularly followed up to see what the results might be. One day a bedraggled Tuareg rode his camel into the remote village where the couple lived. The missionaries noticed a worn audio box hanging from the horn of the camel saddle, missing the handle. When they asked the old man if he had listened to the stories, he said, “Yes, and I liked the story about Jesus, but the handle broke off and I have never heard the rest of the story. Could you tell me whatever happened to Jesus?” And of course, they did!

## Storytelling in America

Recently, Joy shared the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000, and then of Peter walking on the water, both in Matthew 14, with her friend \*Fatima. She is a Muslim from south Asia who now teaches physics at a small Midwestern university. She recently married an American who is an atheist. After asking Fatima’s permission, she chose this story to emphasize that when we look to Jesus, He can rescue us. Joy has known Fatima for years and has already shared her testimony with her. Fatima had obviously never heard this story; she had no questions. She did learn about the power of Jesus over nature. Joy will continue to tell more stories and give God time to work in Fatima’s heart. This illustrates the hard part about reaching Muslims—it takes time and wisdom. I am waiting to hear about their next meeting.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

For Muslims to change their view of Jesus usually requires hearing, understanding, and believing a new set of stories. The stories of the Bible reveal the power of God’s love to transform lives. We can all help them understand this love by *telling* the stories of Jesus, which never grow old.

\*Pseudonym

## Sources for Chronological Bible Storying

[www.olbi.world](http://www.olbi.world)

Access *Resources/Courses/Bible*. Current courses available: Old Testament 1 & 2, The Gospels 1 & 2, and Acts. It includes 190 lessons with their supporting Bible stories in chronological order.

[www.teachusthebible.com/LessonChooser.php](http://www.teachusthebible.com/LessonChooser.php)

A total of 96 chronological Bible stories from the entire Bible.

<sup>1</sup> Ann Croft and the Fulani, *The Zwemer Institute Newsletter*, Spring 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with author 1/16/2021

## Prayer Profile: *Java Pesisir Lor*

Location: Indonesia

Population: 37 million

Religion: 97% Islam



Nearly all the Pesisir Lor people profess the Sunni Islamic faith, but Sufi mystical beliefs are widely practiced. Most orthodox Javanese seek to practice the nine guidelines laid down by Sunan Jafar and Sunan Kalijaga, two of the nine original Islamic missionaries who brought Islam to the north coast of Java and whose graves are venerated to this day. Pray for:

- the Indonesian Church to lead the way and demonstrate the compassion of Christ toward the Pesisir Lor.
- wide distribution of the “The Hope Video.”
- dreams and visions for seeking Pesisir Lor.
- more downloads of the Audio Bible.
- radio programs aimed at the Pesisir Lor to penetrate hearts.

\*For additional information about the Java Pesisir Lor, please visit: [www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net).



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[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

## **Friday, May 7, 2021. Please pray for**

*...the worldwide Muslim community as it ends the 30-day fasting month of Ramadan on May 12. Ask the Lord to create spiritual hunger in their hearts that will lead to the truth about Jesus.*

*...the city of Sharjah, a city of 1.4 million within the United Arab Emirates. Pray for Christians there who are finding creative ways to “proclaim the gospel.”*

*...the courts to grant justice for young girls in Pakistan who are the victims of child abuse and the pressure to convert to Islam. A 12-year old Christian girl, Farah, was recently abducted and forcibly married to a 45-year old Muslim man.*

## **Friday, May 14, 2021. Please pray for**

*...Bwanbale in Uganda, who viewed the “Jesus Film” and responded by accepting Christ. He requests, “Pray for me. My Muslim father claims I am demon-possessed and has now kicked me out of our home. He vows to kill me if I return.”*

*...tens of thousands of Lebanese, both Christians and Muslims, who continue to be displaced after the Beirut port explosion last August. Workers are seeking to be God’s hands and feet during this difficult time.*

*...Arabic-speaking Muslims who are accessing online Arabic resources provided by a Christian library service. In a short period, over a thousand Arabic digital books have been downloaded.*

## **Friday, May 21, 2021. Please pray for**

*...more than 500 Muslim background Chinese Uyghurs who have decided to follow Christ. More than a million Uyghurs have been detained by the Chinese government and placed in “re-education” camps.*

*...recently converted Afghan and Iranian refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos. All of these new followers of Christ came to faith in the “receiving camp” on Lesbos island.*

*...the dissolution of supply lines to the Islamic terror groups active in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Relentless massacres against civilians, many of whom are Christians, terrorized the eastern part of the DRC.*

## **Friday, May 28, 2021. Please pray for**

*...for workers in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan who are setting up a “community development” project, whose purpose is to bring the Good News to these predominately Muslim countries, with a combined population of 34 million.*

*...a team in Tunisia that is working on a website project to create Christian music videos and testimonies in an Arabic dialect aimed at Muslims of North Africa.*

*...the people at the Bible Society in Syria who work primarily out of three centers in Aleppo, Tartous, and Damascus. Their aim is to deliver Scripture to remote areas. Due to instability in the country, threats and violence are daily obstacles.*

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and  
thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*



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[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

## **Friday, June 4, 2021. Please pray for**

...*Muslim Urdu-speakers*, especially in Pakistan, who are accessing Al Massira (The Path) resources. Al-Massira places strong emphasis on the person and deity of Christ—precisely the area where Muslims need the truth.

...*the few Christians in the Russian Republic of Chechnya* who desire to be salt and light to their Muslim neighbors. Of the 1.7 million Chechens, almost all are Muslim.

...*safety for recording technicians in Indonesia* as they make and distribute gospel recordings in many languages in this nation of over 13,000 islands. Of Indonesia's population of 278 million, 82% are Muslim.

## **Friday, June 11, 2021. Please pray for**

...*the Oasis ministry team in Madrid, Spain*. Oasis is shining the light of Christ to Muslim immigrant communities in urban Madrid. Of Spain's population of 47 million, 4% are Muslim.

...*a Christian ministry responding to this request from Afghanistan*: "I am a believer. Others in this area are now believers. It would help us to have more Bibles."

...*the ministry of "The Institute"* in a 95% Muslim city in the Middle East. The Institute provides English as a second language classes to mostly Muslim students who are preparing for higher education.

## **Friday, June 18, 2021. Please pray for**

...*continuing favor for churches in Jordan* that have been working among Iraqi and Syrian refugees for years. Their report states: "The responses to the gospel have been encouraging, especially among the Muslims."

...*Christians from a Muslim background in Libya* who have come to faith over this last decade of conflict—that they would be able to gather for discipleship and encouragement. Of Libya's population of 7 million, 97% are Muslim.

...*evangelism plans that are being put together for the soccer World Cup* to be held in Doha, Qatar in 2022. Pray that believers can share their faith with the athletes and other visitors. Of Qatar's population of 2.8 million, 88% are Muslim.

## **Friday, June 25, 2021. Please pray for**

...*continued access for Christian workers* at 17 Kurdistan refugee camps housing thousands of Yazidis who escaped from Sinjar in 2014 when ISIS overran the area. Yazidis integrate Islamic beliefs with elements of Zoroastrianism.

...*Albania, where Islam is attempting to re-evangelize the country* by sending missionaries, supplying financial aid, and building mosques. Of Albania's population of 2.8 million, 55% are Muslim.

...*ministry teams in Thailand* evangelizing Muslims. Of Thailand's population of 70 million, 3 million are Muslims.

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