

On Mission 2019

*The State of the Global Gospel:
Present and Future Trends*

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Lessons from the Orality Movement

I'm Jerry Wiles. I serve with the leadership team of the International Orality Network, also as President Emeritus of Living Water International, and have the privilege of serving with the advisory group of the Missio Nexus for Orality Methods and Strategy.

So, I want to share a little bit about the lessons we're learning on this journey. The orality movement has emerged over the past forty years as a very significant cutting-edge transformation on development in terms of reaching unreached people groups. We know now that most unreached, unengaged people groups are primarily in world cultures. And while the statistics in the past and the studies have shown us that 70 to 80% of the people in the world are literate, every country had their own way of measuring, and reporting, and defining this aspect of literacy. So, it's true that probably 70 to 80% of the people in the world can read something. But comprehension is the important thing. Can they read and comprehend it, process it and reproduce it? So, with better statistics and better understanding now, we know that what it's going to take to complete the Great Commission is, making it more oral-learner friendly.

So, I want to give you some examples of how that's working out with us in our journey with Living Water International over the past decade and my personal journey over the past three decades plus. So, we're recognizing and discovering the multiple aspects of the concepts and principles and practices of orality. Still, there are many people hear about it, they think this is just storytelling. Or maybe it's just some other method of using technology or recording devices. So now that we know there are many aspects to it, we promote the idea that we should use all means available, the tools of the age, and the tools of the ages. So, now with technology, and recording devices, radio and TV and other digital recording and technology, many great blessings we have now that we didn't have even just a few years ago, but also the tools of the age, which would be the simple, basic methods that people have used to learn and communicate from the beginning of time. Of course, our best example for -as a Communicator, Trainer, Disciple-maker and as a Leader is the Lord Jesus Himself. So, we're looking at the lessons we can learn and recognizing that orality, really is the most effective ways that people have learned and communicated from the beginning of time. So, stories, narrative, song and dance, and drama, poetry and other aspects of that.

So, on the journey, and we're recognizing that the -as we got feedback- for example, one leader from a Southern African country. We were in Johannesburg last -a few months ago and got a report that this gentleman that we trained together about 6 years ago, has now trained more than 4,000 pastors and leaders. And according to the records, those 4,000 have trained more than 400,000. So, we know it's spreading, we know that it's reproducible. So, we focus on making sure it's biblical, understandable and reproducible. So, the reproducibility part, which has a multiplying impact is so powerful.

In Central America, for example, we're getting reports of how they're using the stories, and the narratives and the orality methods in community development integral mission. Some places where we've done training, for example, in East Africa, the communities come together. So, pastors and leaders from a community of churches. And they're seeing how the barriers come down, they build bridges that build relationships and they build unity, so there's more cooperative initiatives when people go through the training. They get to know each other; they pray for each other and its having impact that way.

Here in the United States, we are doing more training here because churches' pastors and mission leaders hear about it, they want to receive the training in preparation for short term mission trips. But once they go through the training, they see how it works here, so working with international students, with refugee population, immigrant population. Here in the Houston area, there's an initiative that's planting churches in prisons.

So, we realize now that the orality is not just about people who can't read and write. It's not about people's intelligence - superior or inferior intelligence or academic training. It's really about worldview. It's about culture. It's about preferences in terms of learning and communication. So, we are on a major learning journey and we're recognizing because of the feedback we're getting, is really accelerating church planting, disciple-making movements, working with networks and associations of relief and development.

So, the many different aspects are theme for our most recent North America Regional ION Conference was Many Applications-One Mandate. Of course, the one mandate is the Great Commission. So, we think about how we're going to complete the Great Commission - Bible Translation work, Literacy programs are important. And where we're connecting with people in those areas, they're seeing, we're seeing how thus that will accelerate Bible Translation efforts, Literacy programs. But it gives us a jump start. Some people in the orality movement sometimes give people the impression that we're talking about oral only or storytelling and minimizing the importance of the written text and text-based methodology. We're really not minimizing anything. We say that orality is just another tool for your ministry toolbox. But most of the places where would do the training, they say this is better than what we've been doing. So, we want to communicate truth. We want to instruct, make disciples by all means available.

Now another level where we're in now, and we've been doing this for a while, is doing Leadership Development for Oral Cultures. So, we're doing Leadership Orality, Leadership Workshops - training leaders primarily focused on character development. Skill and knowledge is important. But the main thing, the important thing about leadership is the leader, the

character of the leader. So, we have this strategy were seeing worked out now. And we have a leadership development collaboration group in this area, so we're gleaning from the best at practices and the impact stories in our journey, learning from all sources and also looking at historically and biblically what are the best lessons we have available to us. There's no shortage of information, of course. But how do we make it appropriate to the people who need it the most?

So we want to make it appropriate for those in the bush in West Africa, those in the Central Asia and remote areas and when we've done the training there, we see how people can learn stories, they can ask questions, they can process it in community and reproduce it. So, we often say, we're on this amazing, learning journey and we would invite you to join the journey.