

Resonate

ISSUE 35

PART ONE
The
Stories
Issue





Hello...

from the editor

Stories just make sense, right? From childhood we get stories. It's almost unnecessary to go into why stories are powerful or how they impact us because we innately know that they are and they do. From our earliest years we connect with and through stories. As we age we might let go of the cardboard crowns and backyard plays, but stories become no less immersive or important.

They're so human. Every culture uses stories. Stories unite people, break down walls, build empathy and keep traditions alive. Yes, telling stories, engaging with other people's stories, using stories to make people think is all so human.

Is there more to it? Does our fascination with stories not so much show our humanity, but that we, and stories, are God-breathed? Are they yet another way in which we are reflecting our creator? On Earth, Jesus told stories, He listened to stories (especially from those who weren't valued in society) and used stories to transform hearts.

This is part one of a two part Resonate series on stories. In this edition we focus on the power of stories and next time we'll dig deeper into what this means for us as we seek to share God's stories among the least-reached and in our own backyards.

As I write this, at work but at home, my newsfeed is full of Covid-19. It's full-on, everchanging and sometimes scary. But you already know that, and this edition of Resonate isn't going to add to the Covid-19 noise. Give yourself permission to switch off from it all and enter another world through the following pages.

Let's dive in!

Teagan

So. Many. Stories.

Our website is jam packed with new digital resources for May Mission Month and beyond.

In Step

www.globalinteraction.org.au/MMMvideos

A powerful short film sharing the stories of three Yawo believers in Malawi, and how God is using the Global Interaction team as part of their stories.

Resonate Videos

www.globalinteraction.org.au/ResonateVideos

Two 3 minute videos of people responding to the same prompt from their own unique perspective. Perfect to slip into your church's livestream!

Podcast

www.globalinteraction.org.au/Podcast

Four episodes exploring the key themes of *In Step* through stories from all over the world. Read all about it on pages 7 - 8 of this edition of Resonate.

Cross-Cultural Worker Update Videos

www.globalinteraction.org.au/WorkerVideos

Ministry updates and stories straight from the workers you partner with. So encouraging!

One confusing conversation later and Kim is reminded of the difference one word can make!



Sitting with my neighbour as we harvested cotton and picked the white fluffy balls from the seeds, we chatted. It's one of those tasks that is like shelling peas, it doesn't take much thought, but is a good time to sit and talk while our hands are busy.

She was telling me stories about ghosts, well at least that's what I thought we were talking about!

Khmer people seem to love ghost stories in all their forms. They can be horrifying stories told to bring fear, sad stories of past loves that have returned, dramatic stories that stir up emotions of family connections and respect of elders, or they can be funny. Ghost stories in Cambodia are everywhere! At the local cinema there are usually at least three ghost movies showing and when we go for other movies, our kids are often freaked out a bit by the advertising posters!

For our Khmer neighbours, ghosts are a very real part of life. Most people will have at least one story of an experience with a ghost. A long vacant plot of land can signify that the land may be cursed because of supernatural beings encountered there. A tree may have a ghost story attached to it, or a whole region may have its origins rooted in a story of spiritual activity.

Ghosts are also entwined in family life. Beliefs are held around deceased relatives and whether their spirits have gone somewhere else or whether they hang around the family home to either bless, cause mischief or strife.

Ghost stories can also be told as a way of deterring people from immoral behaviour. One such story tells of an unfaithful husband who had a mistress in a different village. One night after visiting her he woke to find it wasn't a woman at all, but actually a ghost. He was so frightened he returned to his wife and remained faithful.

So there I was sitting with my neighbour, harvesting cotton, thinking that we were having a conversation about ghosts (she has talked to me about them before). The conversation went something like this...

"I had a ghost once."

"Really, were you scared of it?"

"No."

"Where was it?"

"In my bedroom."

"Really? Perhaps you shouldn't watch so many stories at night."

"But night-time is the best time for it."

"Perhaps it's better during the day-time?"

"But I need it at night to sleep."

Turns out she wasn't using the word for ghost, 'Kmaoij', but the word 'Knaoi' which means pillow!

Stories can have a big impact on our lives, but it only takes us misunderstanding even one key word and the meaning can be completely changed. Stepping into another culture, it can take us hearing stories over and over to be able to begin to grasp some of the meanings behind them. **Here in Cambodia, we ask people to tell us stories so that we can learn and grow, and hopefully gain enough cultural understanding that we can share stories of Jesus without being misunderstood.**

ADVENTURES WITH THE **BARNES**

Episode
N^o 5



someone else's shoes

That's the power of story... we can step into someone else's shoes and come out understanding ourselves better. Pastor and storyteller Christine Redwood explores why stories matter.



When I was a teenager, I remember leaving the cinema, my face stained with tears and thinking stories are powerful. I had that same feeling recently when I watched a performance called *Black Ties*. It's a play that explores the tensions and joys of bringing two families together from different cultural backgrounds as a Maori woman and an Aboriginal man plan to marry. In the second act, the hall is transformed into a wedding reception. We were invited to sit at one of the tables as if we were a guest at this make-believe wedding. Some of the actors joined us at the tables and together we celebrated. The lines blurred between what was real and what was imagined. Yet in the end, this immersive way of telling the story created a space for us to experience the joy and power of reconciliation with a depth we couldn't have had from just hearing the facts.

I was once again reminded of how compelling stories are, and why they matter. They speak to us in a language beyond facts or abstract concepts, for instance about reconciliation, and invite us to enter someone else's world. I think we know this instinctively. How often do we share stories in conversation with friends or reminisce about our shared stories from the past? It is often through story that we can make sense of our lives. Seeing ourselves on screen or in books helps us to understand, navigate or validate our experience.

Stories can grow empathy and compassion in us for others. After my cinema experience as a teenager, I was inspired to be able to tell stories that made people think and feel and maybe even change the way they acted. So, every chance I got I told stories. I acted, I tried to write novels and plays, I made short films with my friends, I went to University and studied communication.

At Uni I watched even more movies. Some of which have stayed with me. I remember watching films about the Holocaust and seeing injustice and suffering on the screen taught me more about sin than anything else had. In class we also learned the mechanics of storytelling. We broke down plots, learning how stories move somewhere. We saw how plots move like an arc from a situation of relative stability to tension or destabilisation which resolves into a new situation of relative stability. We created characters and, in the process, started to pay attention to the people around us. A good storyteller is an observer. We tried writing dialogue and capturing how people talked. We examined the role of the narrator and debated their reliability... why were they telling this story? We wrote essays on themes and how they are conveyed in a story. And then we had a go. Reading our stories in class and filming our scripts we saw how others responded to our stories, and through this, learned to consider our audience.

I didn't think too much about where God might be in all this. It took me many years to realise that God loves stories too. Theologians have rediscovered this over the last few decades speaking about the narrative of the Bible. Our scriptures tell us a complex and massive story about God told by multiple voices across different cultures and over a long period. It is a story that doesn't just move people but can transform them. It is a story which God entered into when He became one of us. Jesus loved to tell stories. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Spirit comes. We were called to continue in God's story until God wraps it up.

I am called to be one of God's storytellers.

Aren't we all? One of the primary ways I get to tell God's story is through preaching. But you don't have to be a preacher. We need more novelists, artists, filmmakers, poets and bloggers sharing good stories that bring life and point people to Jesus. We need more people just being willing to share their stories with their neighbours and friends of how God has been at work in their lives. We could go even one step further and not just speak, but embody God's story. Like the play I saw, we could invite people over for a meal and by doing so we would be immersing them in the story of God's love, creating a space for them to experience the joy and power of reconciliation not just with one another but also with God.



BOOK LIST

Want to dig deeper?

The Art of Biblical Narrative
- Robert Alter

Telling the Old, Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching
- David L Larsen

Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation
- John W Wright





Hearing OR Hearing?

Understanding the words is one thing, but understanding the meaning can be a different story entirely! Candidate Mike reflects on this in light of Jesus' parables.

I stared at the elderly Malaysian gentleman in front of me, unsure of what to do next. He looked back at me eagerly, as if expecting me to respond. His name was Uncle Lai and over the past few months we had developed quite a solid friendship. Since moving into a house a few doors up from Uncle Lai's, I would often drop in unannounced and we would share in coffee and conversation. Usually we would chat about his family (his children now lived in New Zealand), his hobbies (he had recently taken up cycling) or his church involvement (Uncle Lai loved visiting remote jungle churches and encouraging their members). On this visit, however, Uncle Lai had told me a story about an unfortunate circumstance that happened to him many years ago. Now this story didn't directly involve me, and yet as we sat at his kitchen table in a sustained silence, I couldn't help feeling like I was expected to do something with this story he had just told me.

Uncle Lai's story was designed to function in a similar way to the parables that Jesus told in the Bible. For the sake of clarity, I am defining biblical parables as stories with specific meanings that are designed to elicit a certain response from those who hear them. Hearers of parables haven't truly 'heard' until they have responded in the way that the teller of the parable intended. This is what Jesus was alluding to when He said, "... seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear." (Matt. 13:13) Jesus had just finished telling a parable about a person sowing seeds. (Matt. 13:3-9) In the parable, some seeds were sown in poor soil and died off. Others, however, were sown in good soil and bore much fruit.

If someone had truly 'heard' this parable, there would be evidence of this by Christ-like fruit being produced in their lives. For someone to claim that they had heard and yet remain unchanged would reveal a spiritual deafness. Jesus told parables to everyone who would listen, He wasn't hiding His message from anyone. And yet there were those for whom the Gospel seemed a mystery because they weren't ready to truly hear Jesus' message in a way that would lead to a transformed life.

I recently visited one of the locations in which Global Interaction teams are seeking to share the Good News in ways that are culturally understandable. One of the big takeaways from my visit was this: people are wanting to hear. There are many who are religiously praying, fasting and reading their holy scriptures in an attempt to know God. But are they truly hearing? When they hear the Good News of Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God will they respond by receiving Jesus as their true Saviour? Or will they look on blankly like I did with Uncle Lai?

I want to encourage you to pray. Global Interaction teams around the world are seeking to share stories about Jesus in ways that people will truly hear and understand. And yet our telling is not enough. Pray that the ears of seekers will be ready to truly hear and respond to the Good News by receiving Jesus as their Saviour.

Jesus used the language of his audience. He spoke of fields, seeds, the harvest, fishing nets, sheep and servants... all culturally understandable parts of life for the people He was speaking to. What will make sense to people in your context?

Your Story My Story

Candidates **Ryan and Suzie** are preparing to serve in South Asia... something that teenage Ryan thought God understood wasn't an option! Here, Ryan looks back at the journey God has taken him on and the impact that walking with others has had on his own story.

"I'll go anywhere you call me Lord... except India!" So went my passionate (if not naive) response to the missionary call before me. As a 16-year-old country boy who had never travelled but had seen pictures on the TV, this was the one place in the world that scared the life out of me. Accustomed to my space, everything about the subcontinent kind of freaked me out. So at this mission meeting and this line-in-the-sand moment in my life, "Anywhere but India," was my compromise. But it's ok to have boundaries isn't it?

Fast forward almost 20 years, as the new pastor in a country church at my first deacon's meeting, an interesting proposal came before us. The missionary committee, with some extra finance in their budget, were seeking approval to support some cross-cultural workers heading to South Asia with Global Interaction. (Not quite my 'off the table' location, but in the same region.)

Off to pioneer a new fish farming project, Anthony and Jacqueline (former Global Interaction workers) seemed a good, down-to-earth young couple our church might connect with. "Our only hesitation," said Joy from the missionary committee, "is that no-one in our church actually knows them."

What our church was unaware of at this point, is the part that Anthony and Jacqueline had already played in the lives of my wife, Suzie and I. Only a few years earlier we'd met Anthony and Jacqueline at Bible College. Then both single (although not fixed on that status!), 'Ant' and 'Jac' had impressed us both from the outset. A big-hearted, 6ft 4 larrikin with a unique turn of phrase, Ant had come across to Melbourne from Tasmania. Having been challenged to use his aquaculture qualification to serve God, Ant was one of only a few who knew his pathway post Bible College - his focus was on South Asia! Jac, on the other hand, had come to college from Western Australia. Just a tad over 5ft and much gentler in personality than Ant, Jac's desire to serve God in a cross-cultural context was no less resolved. From the moment they met, their pathways converged. Ant and 'Sparkie', as Ant called her (because sparks flew!) would go to

South Asia together.

Over the next few years at college, we became close friends with Ant and Jac. Although sensing a different path for our lives at this time, we were inspired by their journey and prayed with them often, not realising how God would shape our hearts through their journey.

Just a few years after that deacon's meeting and with a partnership between Kyneton Baptist Church and the Global Interaction team in South Asia well established, Suzie and I visited Ant and Jac to see the work first-hand. We were amazed by what we saw God doing, and deeply moved by the need for Jesus in this least-reached region of the world.

Over the next few years, we returned to South Asia numerous times. What has unfolded in us is a deep love for the people of this place and, despite my earlier 'boundaries', a belief that God is now calling us to serve Him there! **I'll admit it, this part of the world still freaks me out a little at times. But it's incredible how God can change our hearts. Because mostly we're excited by the prospect of serving God amongst this people group. And actually, now there's probably no place we'd rather go!**



We



have



a



It's official. Global Interaction has launched a podcast!

Missioning is Global Interaction's newly launched podcast. The possibilities for sharing stories and grappling with the big issues through a podcast are so broad and we are excited to connect with you through this medium.

Our first ever podcast series is available now and ready for exploration throughout May Mission Month and beyond. So, as you reach for the dusty jigsaw puzzle you've been hanging onto for years (a sure sign you've been quarantining too long!), why not throw on our podcast and enter into the stories and conversations.

Listen to the podcast through Apple Podcasts, Spotify or at www.globalinteraction.org/Podcast.

In Step

Missioning Podcast Series One

This four episode series explores the four key themes of our short film, *In Step*. This film tracks the stories of three Yawo believers in Malawi who are connected with the Global Interaction team. If you haven't seen the film, then go be inspired, encouraged and challenged by watching it at: www.globalinteraction.org.au/InStep_ShortFilm

Throughout the series, our amazing host Sulari Nielsen (VIC/TAS Young Adults Consultant) chats with people across the Global Interaction family who share stories from all over the world.

Episode 1

(Don't forget to watch *In Step* beforehand here: www.globalinteraction.org.au/MMMvideos)

Theme:

Faith not Religion is Central

Guest:

Christoph Ziegenhardt, *In Step* filmmaker

Story:

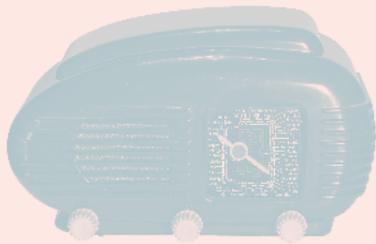
Christoph shares about the experience of creating the film, being in Malawi and his personal reflections on Babba W, Babba T and Mamma M's stories (the three believers featured in the film).

Quote:

"His [Babba T's] life is filled with the Holy Spirit. He's moved, he's engaged in his community, but his culture is not a Christian culture in what is understood to be a Christian culture. His heart is very much shaped by Christ... [but] he doesn't necessarily say, 'I am a Christian.'" - *Christoph*



Podcast!



Episode 2

Theme:

In Step with Jesus

Guest:

Ben, cross-cultural worker in Mozambique

Story:

Ben shares the stories of the Bible study groups he regularly meets with. These Yawo men are all at different stages of their walk with Jesus, but they have one thing in common... they all want to know more!

Quote:

“Faith in Jesus should be about the whole person, not just some sort of mask or some sort of surface identity. We believe that Jesus has the power to change people. But that change happens from within a person in their heart, dealing with the things that God needs to deal with there and that then shapes what they look like on the outside.” - Ben

Episode 3

Theme:

In Step with Others

Guest:

Villy, cross-cultural worker in Thailand

Story:

Villy has nearly 20 years of stories from Thailand but manages to narrow it down to one story! Her and her husband Muana's genuine care and love for their neighbours opened opportunities for conversations about Jesus that otherwise wouldn't have happened (and that's just the start!).

Quote:

“We (the cross-cultural workers) discover God in just amazing ways as well. I often like to compare God to a diamond which has different facets... so you see God from different angles and it's really humbling. My picture of God has really broadened. I was like, 'Oooh, just put Him a box,' in the past but He is beyond that!” - Villy

Episode 4

Theme:

In Step with God's Mission

Guests:

Kate, preparing to serve in South East Asia

Alice, student discerning God's leading

Story:

God is continually inviting us to partner with Him in His mission and Kate and Alice share their stories of call, discernment and partnering with God to explore this.

Quote:

“This is a partnership between God and myself and people in Australia and people in South East Asia. It's this whole big team effort and I cannot do it alone, there's no way that I could possible to this by myself.” - Kate

Keen to hear the stories?!

You can find the podcast at www.globalinteraction.org/Podcast, through Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

What Our Stories Tell Us

David Turnbull, SA/NT State Director and intercultural studies expert (he has a Doctorate in it!), investigates how the stories of our culture shape us.

Have you ever lived in a place where TV is not available? For the first sixteen years of my life TV was a novelty. Apart from sport, my spare time outside school centred around engaging with stories via books and storytellers. This was especially true during our six years in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. At the kitchen table or in the lounge room we listened to guests share stories of their adventures in remote parts of the country or to my mother relaying stories to us of people she had met or times she had seen God at work. These stories became embedded into our family life.

But speaking more broadly, how do stories shape communities and reflect cultures? I see three main ways.

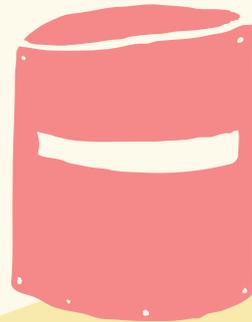
First, stories are a medium in which communities reinforce the core cultural values and principles underpinning them. Stories are a way of consolidating tradition and ensuring the key elements are passed down from one generation to the next. We can see this in the Aboriginal Dreaming accounts which communicate laws, define relationships and explain existence.

Second, the shared stories within a social group or community build unity and shape identity. The role of unity is significant in ensuring the life of the community into the future. These shared stories often feature in rituals and ceremonies. Think of ANZAC day recounts of the Gallipoli story and the way they build our identity around the concept of mateship and being the underdog.

Third, stories can be used to challenge perceptions and cultural practices in a non-confrontational manner and introduce new ideas. Where direct speaking can alienate and build walls, stories can cut through, be heard and transform. Jesus in Palestine provides an excellent model through His use of parables to bring difficult to accept truths to those listening.

Whether in an Australian neighborhood or among a least-reached people group, when engaging with people of other cultural backgrounds, ask yourself three questions:

1. What are stories of my own culture that have shaped me and my values?
2. What are stories of my friend's culture that have shaped them and their values?
3. How do God's stories connect with or contrast to their cultural stories and values?



Thanks David! Ok, let's give it try. To keep it level one, we'll go for an Australian cultural context.

Celebrated Cultural Story: Ned Kelly

Cultural Values Highlighted:

- Anti-authoritarian (somehow he's seen as the underdog)
- Individualism (part of a gang but he's the enduring figure)
- Innovation (that armour!)
- Traditional masculinity (strong, wild and free)
- Male stories (pulling out and seeing Ned in the context of Australia's history of celebrated heroes... where are the females?)

Points of Connection:

- Stories of Jesus challenging the authority of the day (flipping the tables at the temple etc)
- God is our creative creator God who created us to be innovative!

Points of Contrast:

- Jesus honours the authority of God and we are to honour His authority (and the authority of our worldly leaders where this doesn't conflict with Him)
- Godly men are humble, compassionate and servant-hearted
- Jesus elevates women and listens to their stories



How Did I Get Here?

Sam tracks the key steps in her journey from WA to Mozambique.

1

In 2008 I met my husband Ben while on a short-term mission trip to Mozambique and Malawi. During my time there I felt God calling me to join the team in Mozambique to work among the Yawo. I didn't understand how or why, and I had no professional skills to offer, but I could see the need and I was prepared to offer what I did have.

2

After that trip I attended every Global Interaction event hosted in WA and Ben and I talked and imagined what our future might look like serving cross-culturally.

3

Ben and I were accepted by Global Interaction to join the Mozambique team in March 2010. This was a huge confirmation for us. We had believed this was where God was leading and we were encouraged to hear others also believed God was leading us there.

4

In January 2011 we moved to a small country town and Ben began to pastor a local church. We loved our time there and it would have been so easy to stay. We learnt a lot about community and some of the challenges that are faced in ministry. During this time we had to remind ourselves that this placement was only for a season, and not our future.

8

In December 2014 we drove into Mozambique with much celebration as the waiting was done! (So much has happened since then, but that's another story...)

7

We waited in Malawi for 14 months, learning language and culture, but never certain what God was doing or if he was closing the door to Mozambique.

6

In October 2013 we finally flew into Malawi, prepared to drive into Mozambique, only to get to the border and have our entry denied. We were forced to turn around and come back into Malawi. We struggled to understand what God was doing and how this was a part of the plan.

5

As April 2013 approached we were sure we would be heading to Mozambique, however, problems there with visas meant we had to wait. The team were fighting for their ability to stay in the country, and didn't think they would be able to get us in.



empowering communities to develop their
own distinctive ways of following Jesus

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