

# Biblical Storytelling in the Old Stone Chapel

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Pastor Daniel had gone out to his neighbors and not just a few and gathered vessels to be filled with a sweet honey. What are these vessels, what honey? They are the women of the Sub-Division of Belo in the North West Region of Cameroon. They have seen their sisters and brothers making disciples for Christ. They wanted to learn how they could make disciples for Christ.

The women are farmers. If they don't plant, cultivate, and harvest their families will not eat this next year. Today is a workday. Today the farm should be tended, weeds pulled and fertilizer worked into the soil. It's growing season. The season started just about eight short weeks ago.

But today the women have come to the old stone chapel on the grounds of the Baptist Comprehensive High School in the village of Njinikejem to learn about the discipline of biblical storytelling. They want to learn how they can eat the scrolls like Ezekiel ate; they want to go out and speak the words like Ezekiel did and taste the honey

Since April 2012 the word has been spreading in Cameroon about this thing called biblical storytelling. A seed was planted in the little Cameroon Baptist Convention Njinikejem church perched high on a hill in the Boyo Division of the North West region. At a biblical storytelling workshop that was part of a weeklong spiritual retreat held in that quarter of the town April 2012. Members of that church as well as others from surrounding churches even some non-church members came out for one week to partake in the activities of the spiritual retreat, the likes they had never witnessed before I'm told. It was the vision of Pastor Daniel Aseh, the pastor of the CBC Njinikejem church.

In the morning a health screening took place with student nurses and their professor from the College of the Ozarks, Branson, Mo, and then a worship service with songs of praise and thanksgiving, prayers and a message. After the worship service groups formed of men, women, youth, children, and young adults, topics were discussed relevant to the individual groups. Time flew by before we knew it was lunch time where we gathered together to eat local cuisine like: corn chaff or jama jama and fufu corn.

The afternoons were full of singing practice, a battle of the choirs was to take place on Thursday; games were played each day. The men wanted to show off their athletic skills to show they still had it. The women weren't going to be outshined by the Pa's so they had a sporting event. Well if those old folks can do sports you know how the young people, youth and children felt so the competition was on with a lot of vigor. We did art project with items donated by a group of students and their Chaplain from the College of the Ozarks, in Branson, MO.

I had been working in the village for about one year by this time; my ministry is holistic community development. I use biblical storytelling as my tool to reach the people I'm working with. One hour weekly group meetings were held. Half their time was devoted to prayer, bible study and biblical storytelling; the other half was on the business of addressing the felt need of the community.

A few people were learning about biblical storytelling but only a few. Pastor Daniel Aseh, wanted a workshop to be held so more could learn about the discipline of biblical storytelling. He had told other pastors and even his Field Pastor how some of his members were using this tool to evangelize in the community.

I called on my friend and fellow biblical storyteller Pastor George Vimensi Minang to help me facilitate the workshop on that Wednesday afternoon. About 40 people were in attendance at the workshop. That was a huge number for this small village in the Boyo region of Cameroon.

From that workshop Pastor Daniel started a Scripture by Heart group with about 10 people, today that number is 22 members. They meet at 6 AM once a week to learn a story that may be used in an upcoming sermon or going out in the community to evangelize and as part of Sunday school and weekly Bible studies.

The workshop opened with a song of praise. Then a visiting pastor read from *2 Timothy 2:15-17* *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.*

This group of farmers gathered in that stone chapel because they wanted to be approved workers not ashamed of the word of truth, they wanted to avoid godless chatter. Pastor Daniel reminded them that they are a people of storytellers, it's their culture. They agreed enthusiastically that it is their culture. They laughed when he reminded them of the story of the snake and the fly or the tortoise and the pig.

The passage of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 was studied verse by verse. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

The custom before villages had electricity was after the evening meal the mothers would gather a little of the cooking fire wood and the family would gather around a fire either sitting or laying in their beds and listen to stories. When a baby is just able to stand and before walking a bangle is placed on his wrist; The rosary is an object with beads with each bead representing a prayer to be said; the door post of many homes today have scripture verses written on them. Pastor Daniel was painting the picture of

Deuteronomy to the audience they could see it, they could feel it, it was and is a part of their customs and culture.

He went on and asked how we feel today about people that can't read or write, not so well came a reply. But our ancestors did not read or write and they taught the Bible he reminded them. What form did they teach Bible lessons? They shouted, "Stories!" Yes, stories, so not just a pastor or minister or a priest or someone that has gone to school can teach the Bible.

The Bible is full of stories who can name a story they know Pastor asked? Just about every hand in the place shot up and Pastor pointed to one then another and they answered:

- The women with the issue of blood
- The good Samaritan
- The rich man and Lazarus
- The prodigal son
- The Lord said to Peter come and I will make fishermen of men
- The conversion of Saul
- The tax collector Zacchaeus
- Ananias and Sapphira

On and on they gave a story they knew, so you know the stories of the Bible now we will teach you how to be a labor of the Lord's to tell Bible stories no matter where you go you will be able to carry the Bible in your heart.

We broke up into groups so each person present could learn in a language they felt comfortable learning in. It was fairly easy to break up since all the people are from the Kom tribe they speak English, Pidgin or their dialect. At first we didn't have a group that wanted to learn in English this left me with my "funny" accent to be the photographer but before I could snap all the groups pictures, a small group wanted to learn in English. I happily thought, "Whoopie! I get to teach a group today!"

Each group leader could pick his or her own story to teach. I picked 2 Kings: 4:1-7 about the widow with the oil. I love to tell that story to people who tell me they have little the Lord hasn't blessed them with much. I love to tell it because I like to use the gestures of pour the oil, shutting the door and pleading to Elisha.

I learned to use those gestures at the 2013 Gathering in Ashville in a workshop. Here people didn't use gestures much and I had never seen them used until Ron Coughlin, president of Network of Biblical Storytellers, International came to Cameroon in March of 2013 and demonstrated to the people here in Cameroon. He showed us how our bodies will remember the gestures when our mind doesn't; our body will prompt our mind if we learn gestures. Taking a class at the 2013 Gathering in Ashville allowed me to hone my storytelling skills.

One of the women in my group personalized the story. She said, "A widow like me whose husband had died." Yes you have personalized the story; you have put that story in your heart. Wonderful!

Some of Ron's students from Cameroon are now the teacher of biblical storytelling here. Three from the Scripture by Heart Group at the CBC Njinikejem church and one from the Catholic Church in Babanki Tungo were present at the workshop yesterday. Two pulled out Ron's autographed, dog eared book and used it to teach their group. All of the DVD's in the back of the book have never been used. They don't have the Power Point program. But that doesn't matter, they have the book. They are showing the love they have for sharing biblical storytelling.

It was time to gather back together and share our stories with others. Each group sent a teller to tell the story. When it was my group's turn our teller stood and told the story in Pidgin. I was so moved that this group of women had allowed me to teach them in English, my heart language, but they told it in their heart language. They had made me their sister I was a part of them in the teaching—not a mere bystander. What a blessing.

Little did I know when I took Berth Galbreath's online class in biblical storytelling that I would meet a storyteller in the very region of the country I would be working and the discipline would spread the way it has.

Little did I know that the biblical storytelling in Cameroon would catch the attention of the Founder of Network of biblical Storyteller International and his wife and the executive officers of Network of Biblical Storytellers, International and they would come to Cameroon just weeks before my two year time was up here and hold a festival in Cameroon.

Little did I know that from the seeds planted in the workshop in the little village on the hill that 22 members would be tellers and teachers.

Little did I know that from that one Scripture by Heart group in the region of Boyo in the sub-division of Belo now there are groups in Fundong, Wombong, Acha and Tinifoinbi. Three new groups were represented at the workshop yesterday, so biblical storytelling is spreading to Njiningwa, Saidiang and Babanki Tungo.

It's not by my action and deeds; it's the Lord's. He asked for laborers and George, Daniel, David, Magnus and the other NBST Cameroon and I are willing laborers who are teaching others to be laborers in the Lord's vineyard by telling His stories.

Peace and Blessings  
Sharon Davis