STS-What & Why:

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STS-What & Why

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Spread of STS
Tom and Dorothy Miller established and operated numerous businesses, including the largest riding school on the West Coast of the United States. The businesses served as platforms for witnessing and regular Bible studies. Questions and discussion style...
teaching involved students in discovery of scriptural truths.

After the couple sold their businesses, Dorothy authored numerous books as well as scripts for Christian videos. A team from Jeremiah Films, on which Dorothy served as script writer, produced a storytelling overview of the Bible, *God's Story: From Creation to Eternity*. This 80-minute film covers Genesis to Revelation.

Then, in 1998, Jeremiah Films asked Dorothy to head up The God's Story Project (TGSP). Through August 2001, God led the way to complete 37 language versions of God's Story.

Then, in September 2001, Lifegiving Resources Inc., a 501 C3 non-profit organization, purchased God's Story. Since that time, TGSP has operated as a non-profit under Lifegiving Resources under Millers' direction.

In 2003, Dorothy attended the first open convention of what would become the International Orality Network. Since that time, many completed the Educational Bible Studies.
During the conference, we were told to gather in the lecture area as Avery Willis was going to be telling a Bible story. So I picked up my Bible, took it with me and selected a seat at one of the tables.

Before Avery began the story, he said, “Now I don’t want you to open your Bibles. I would like you just to listen as I tell the story.”

Well! I thought, Not open my Bible? Whoever heard of such a thing? OK, just to be respectful, I will go along with this, but don’t you try to take my Bible away!

So I listened to Avery tell an Old Testament story, with my Bible, which was my lap and partially hidden by the table, on my lap. Oh! He just made a mistake. So I opened my Bible and turned to the passage.

Oh! He was right, and I was wrong! In my times of reading this story, I had missed several small, but meaningful, details. By just listening to the story with expression, the told story had taught and touched me.

So what I realized at that time was that the telling of Bible stories would be very important for “those people,” for those overseas who could not read.
That realization was the tiny beginning of a large paradigm shift in my understanding.

We did leave that conference realizing how many important ways the Lord had led us in the design of God’s Story, ways that we did not recognize at the time. God’s Story showcases Bible stories. We knew that the content was important. But the one storyteller format, and the stories being left as “story,” intact and not changed to a documentary style, was a vital part of why God’s Story was touching so many lives overseas.

Over time, we gained added invaluable insights from ION about oral communicators and relational learning styles. We came to see that 80% of the world cannot or does not prefer to exchange information through literate methods.

Ah-Ha Moment Under Oak Tree

By April 2005, TGSP completed its 100th language version of God’s Story. That August, TGSP began using MegaVoice solar-powered audio players. And Dorothy sat underneath an oak tree at Miller’s home talking about oral strategies and the importance of story.

"We found that they were no further along than when they had started,"

Our director told Dorothy about a group of church planters in Kenya who had been trained three days a week for a year by a world mission organization.

He said, “I traveled with Eric, who was the East Africa Director of the organization that trained the church planters. We went to the villages to see how much the church planters had gained after a year’s training. We found that they were no further along than when they had started.”

Miller blurted, "Western-minded, literacy-based material!"

He said, “That's right.”

"Enough." Instantly, God told Miller what to do. "We will put recorded Bible stories on the players with God’s Story."
Clearly, if people needed to learn from stories, recorded Bible stories were needed for those who had no Bible translated in their language or who could not read.

The plan came together. After discovering that very few recorded stories were available, TGSP realized that if they wanted recorded Bible stories, they would have to do their own recordings. The plan germinated as Dorothy set out to get stories recorded and to sort out what this new idea would include.

TGSP planned to record Bible stories and format them on MegaVoice solar-powered audio players. At that time they were still thinking of the needs of the non-literate.

They first ran a few tests using eight of their leaders with whom they had partnered on languages of God's Story. Before asking them to record stories, it seemed wise to make certain that pure stories would be recorded. The leaders were assigned a short Bible story to learn and then were asked to tell the story to Miller on the phone. "Remember now," she reminded them, "just tell one story. Do not add anything and do not leave out anything."

Eight of eight failed the test. They told only the high points of the story, they added information from other Bible stories, they embellished and they preached.

She recalled saying to one of those leaders, "I asked you to tell only the story."

The leader responded, "I did, mum. I told the story." This evangelist leader has two doctorates, so he told the Bible story in the style in which he had been taught. He preached, left out, and added other Scripture! So Miller told him the pure story. Afterwards he exclaimed, "Oh! You mean just the story!"

Ah-Ha Moment In India
After seeing the need to teach leaders how to record just the story, a trip was planned. In September 2006, a TGSP team went on the road to train their network of nationals how to record accurate and interesting stories for STS. Armed at first with two written pages of how to tell a story and ask questions, that team struck out to five countries and led 20 trainings.

Very soon, a turning point occurred.

The traveling team taught educated Christian leaders in multiple countries the definition of a pure Bible story and how to record stories. They spent some time showing ways these leaders could show non-literate how to discover and teach treasures from the stories. Soon the two pages of “how to learn and teach by using questions” grew to fourteen pages.

In the minds of the TGSP leaders, this storytelling training would be for the non-illiterates. But an amazing discovery took place.

A question from the founder of Bible schools and a seminary in Kashmir stunned Miller. Dr. Phillips asked, “Can we use this now? We want our staff to study and teach this way.”

"No one they met knew how to use oral methods to learn deeply from the Bible"

The team quickly saw that, although educated theologically, virtually no one they met knew how to use oral methods to learn deeply from the Bible nor how to train others by using oral methods.

All these national leaders had been trained by Western-influenced methods—methods which not only depended on literacy, but which also took apart stories by using analytical and topical systems.

Those Western/literate methods did not give these oral learners “fishing poles”; they gave fish.
Origin of STS

Sadly, these fish—the outlines, definitions and analytical ways to transmit Scripture—were barely understood by those students, nor was the information transferable to those in their villages whom they wished to reach.

And beyond that, even the highly educated began asking for this training—for themselves!

Dorothy, and the TGSP leadership, finally realized then that everyone could benefit by incorporating and using the skills of discovery and discussion in their Christian pursuits and ministries. Simply The Story was born!

Simply The Story (known in many countries now as STS) was launched in September 2006. It is best described as “inductive Bible study, oral style.” Built on the foundation of “storying,” STS teaches the skill of discovery and teaching using questions. STS instructors now impart these skills to both literate and non-literate learners.

STS is seeing great fruit in evangelism and discipleship as it opens up the Word of God to everyone. Users learn how to easily and accurately remember Bible stories, how to discover deep spiritual truths for themselves, and how to help others find those treasures through well-directed questions.

Workshops Born ...and Grow

From September 2006 to December 2007, TGSP instructors produced STS practitioners in 3-day workshops. Miller did most of the teaching, since no staff people existed yet who had the needed skills. The workshops spread to many countries.

Although, from the beginning, stories were studied in small groups, the fledging storytellers stood in front of all of the attendees to tell a story and ask some questions. Then they were evaluated by Miller. As STS was new in design to most people, no one else yet knew how to coach the learners. Practitioners were emerging, but trainers came along slowly.
In the spring and summer of 2007, STS partners completed recording 70 stories in three languages for the solar players. Those were formatted onto solar players along with God's Story and the New Testament. Records were kept of the first 50 players given in each language to non-literate and semi-literate who attended an STS workshop. These statistics proved hard to compile for the Swahili and Nepali workshops as communication and transport to these very rural places was difficult.

India proved the easiest place from which to obtain comprehensive statistics about the impact of STS and these players on the ministries of rural evangelists. Local pastor-hosts obtained the before-STS ministry profiles of the evangelists.

Then, after being trained in STS and receiving the recorded Bible stories on solar audio players, local literate evangelists interviewed these 50 attendees at the one month, three months, six months and one year marks. The interviews showed an exponential leap in evangelism and discipleship results. See report Amazing Results: One Year Report

By January 2008, there were thousands of good practitioners of STS. So, in a workshop in Hemet near the TGSP headquarters, after they did their usual small study groups, Miller experimented by rotating storytellers within four medium-size new groups. The storytellers made their story presentation under the guidance of blossoming instructors.

So, it was during this workshop, that the TGSP leadership realized how to train people more quickly in STS skills and how to teach attendees the way to train others.

Throughout 2008, TGSP continued using a small group rotation system of preparation and presentation to teach STS. They, and the overseas instructing staff, moved to 5-day workshops. The refined workshop style accelerated comprehension in practitioners and caused an increasing number of people to become certified instructors.

Due to the quick growth and fast replication, by mid-year TGSP could no longer keep track of how many STS workshops were being run. At least 300 were held.
In December of 2008, Miller needed to compile information on STS and TCPT for a gathering of CEOs of story training organizations. From this brainstorming session a Matrix of Story Organizations was produced. Dorothy and the staff of TGSP were pleasantly shocked to discover that even using conservative estimates, in just over two years, at least 90,000 were using STS skills in their ministries and STS training was being done in about 40 countries.

For the current extent of STS practitioners and countries using STS, see Spread of STS.

Although STS training produces “practitioners,” we emphasize training instructors. Workshops and STS Oral Bible Schools provide training of instructors. Practitioner Audio Training (PAT) quickly and inexpensively starts people out in the STS oral inductive style of looking deeply into Bible stories. It was added to the STS tools in September 2010. Ask about STS extension classes.

TGSP/STS - Future Projections:

Miller states, “We have never known much ahead of time where God was taking us or what new project He would hand to us. We just try to listen and respond. Well, we respond as quickly as we are able. The certified instructors’ pool is growing, but then, so is the interest!”