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*Simply The Story (STS)*

Oral Bible Schools (OBS):

- Need
- Design
- Starting
- Brief Results
- Audio Interviews
Need for Oral Bible Schools

Question: If someone becomes a believer in Jesus and is not literate, where could that person go to Bible school? Right! Nowhere!

Actually, there is some help available. Dotted around the globe, there are schools that do teach students Bible stories and encourage the telling of those stories to others. The STS-OBS also teach Bible stories and encourage the telling of stories to others, but in addition, these schools teach how to glean information from the stories and how to teach others deeply from them.

STS-OBS began in July 2009, all because a Filipino Christian touched by STS workshop training felt the call to start an STS-OBS. But this Christian’s idea prompted us to set up some pilot STS-OBS whose curriculum was to teach only Bible stories and encourage the telling of stories to others. More schools followed, each STS leader learning from what their co-workers in other countries were discovering.

Now …. praise God, Simply The Story Oral Bible Schools are springing up in various nations.

Design of STS Oral Bible Schools

Twelve students, hosted locally, shepherded by national STS instructors, learn Bible stories and study them oral style. No faculty—no campus—locally supported.

The students, who are a mixture of non-literate, semi-literate and preferred oral learners, learn how to dig deeply into the stories to discover treasures and how to teach others through discussion.

After trying different models, we settled on one that saw the most success. The students attend two weeks of school, then two weeks back home. This schedule allows the students to learn about 15-20 stories in that two-week period, and then they go back to school. This time home allows students to keep tending their ministries, homes and fields, making the school time away from their villages much less of a hardship.

As well, this time home allows students to keep tending their ministries, homes and fields, making the school time away from their villages much less of a hardship.
Oral Bible Schools

Then the students come back to their schools and learn more stories.

Most graduates know close to 200 stories, which they then carry everywhere in their heart pockets. The STS oral schools are producing dynamic church planters and teachers.

Starting an STS-OBS

Local pastors and Christians who have seen the value of STS arrange for a school in their region. After finding a home, the STS headquarters in USA helps in the following ways:

The selected students, their church, family or village provide the students’ food.

As possible, STS headquarters in USA endeavors to pay for solar players with recorded Bible stories, God’s Story and a New Testament (as available). When recorded stories are not available, headquarters assists in the recording of the stories.

The school begins when local STS instructors lead a 5-day STS workshop in which they teach the twelve students 20 stories and presentation skills. After that, STS instructors visit monthly to encourage the students and to assist if needed.

The believers who host, often pastors, serve as spiritual guides and problem solvers. For the schools which are run in the villages and have many stories, two literate students are selected as their literacy skill is needed to read the Bible stories to the other students.

Although we originally anticipated that most students would be single, young and non-literate, the population of the schools so far has been two-thirds married, two-thirds semi-literate and an average age of 37 years old!

During each of the two-week sessions of school, weekends are generally used for practical use of story in local outreaches and churches.

Brief Results of STS Oral Bible Schools

In-depth reports found on OBS Results.

India (One School) This pilot school ran for six months straight. Students learned an average of 40 stories and worshiped and prayed a lot. The students used stories in practicals as part of their school experience and by God’s grace led hundreds to Jesus.

Learning of stories was not dominant, and the leadership who oversaw them was not highly skilled in STS.

Kenya (Seven schools initially) The school of seven schools was started by Simon. Students from April 2011 and the observers did graduation celebration.

To give a glimpse, they learned 120 stories in four months!

Nepal (One School) Tamang people. Of twelve students who started, eleven stayed in school the whole time. Their four months of actual time at the school took six months to complete due to strikes, holidays and farming needs.

As a result of telling their stories and people saved, the Tamang students planted six churches near the school and seventeen churches back in their villages.
A local Nepali pastor who had been involved for 19 years in trying to disciple the Tamang said, “Never did I think they could know deep things in the Bible like this.”

Philippines  (Two Schools) As explained, the first try at a school saw poor results due to the school’s providing job training. As the work evolved, the staff learned to provide quality Bible teaching and better job training. Again, the students felt the freedom to share. Their graduation is due at the end of November. An outside team is traveling there to examine the results. See Philippines Results for most current posted report.

Zambia  (One School) “We managed to bring the oral school to the end with the total of ten students completing the training. AMAZING.”

My Best Day Ever!

A missionary in Uganda who uses STS, traveled to Kenya to investigate the Oral Bible Schools. He, and one of his African leaders, met our Kenyan leader. Together they traveled to a village that hosts two schools.

With only these three sitting and talking to some of the Oral Bible School students, the students felt the freedom to share some amazing personal stories. Our leader reported, “Of all I have seen so far in Simply The Story, I call this ‘my best day ever!’”

Five of the many stories told to the visitors by the students:

A lady said, “My sister died this morning. The family is there, but I had to make a decision. My sister is with Jesus.”

Another female student shared, “None of the other students knew about me when we all started the school. I didn’t let anything get in my way of learning Bible stories. Last June, I separated from my husband for two years. We split very angry. We tore apart everything we owned as we left each other. “But the stories. Oh, the stories. So many stories we learned and discussed showed us about love and forgiveness. That was the day and that moment God called me, just like that! Well, I am happy to say that we met and talked and the anger is gone and we have reconciled.”

Yet another student told this. “I am a single mother. To take care of my children, I do any jobs I can find, field work, house work─whatever is available. “Well, I was invited to come learn some Bible stories. Taking off a day of work would be hard for me, but I decided it was worth it. “Then again I was shocked. I came to find out that these five days were the beginning of a two weeks on and two weeks off. “Let me tell you what is happening. I now go to school for two weeks and keep learning more and more stories. And when I go home, plenty of good work is waiting for me and I am making enough to easily pay my bills and take care of my children.”

Our leader told us, “While we talked with the various ladies in this school, the husband of one of the women students was there. “The husband said, “I just wanted to come see what was happening here that is having such a wonderful effect on my wife!”

One of the students in the men’s school told a story to the visitors that meant a great deal to them. “No one knew when I was going to call my name. My grandfather died. I went to claim my inheritance. But my relatives said, ‘You don’t get anything. You’re not a son.’”

“Well, I got mad and I fought them and that’s when I got hit on the head with the machete.”

The student spoke with intensity. “Now one of the stories we did was about the children of Israel after they had victory over their enemies. That story convicted me. I was like that. I was trying to take by force what I thought was mine. God was not in that plan!”

“So I went back again to my village, but people didn’t trust me─well not at first. They said, ‘You’re coming back to fight us again!’ But I went before them and I told them the stories. You know what I am doing now? I’ve been going back and using my grandfather’s house to tell Bible stories to everyone!”
Fruit Bearing, First OBS Graduation in Africa

As God told us in His Word, there is a time to plant and a time to reap. The celebration of the first STS Oral Bible School (OBS) graduation in Africa proved to be a time of reaping!

We are transcribing some of the many heartwarming testimonies told to us at this Kenya celebration and hope soon to start posting them on our web site. For now, do enjoy the video testimony Ann Kavuo.

Ann Kavuo.

Any day when this plucky five-foot, 65 year-old widow can’t get a ride to school, she walks 10 kilometers to get there. (In non-literate areas, people often carry Bibles and put pens in their pockets so they look “educated” and can gain credibility.)

Ann’s comment may reveal even more. Could it be that her perceived "need" to carry her Bible to give her credibility has given her a reason to be at school. Perhaps it is the Bible that has become the real need in her heart.

Keep looking on our “What’s New” corner on the web site for more OBS audio and video testimonies.

Seventeen leaders from outside Kenya, representing eight countries, came to observe this celebration and to listen to the testimonies. Seventeen leaders from outside Kenya, representing eight countries, came to observe this celebration.

Some of these students had never been out of their villages, so the fellowship of these believers and joy echoed loudly through their singing. Their praise melted our hearts.

How Schools Operate

The OBSs have been in session in Kenya for two months to one year. The students from Vihiga, the first school to complete the full year, made up the graduating class. Most students are men; a few schools are mixed and one trains all women.

The schools scattered throughout the southern part of Kenya operate two weeks on and two weeks off. Some students commute from villages one hour away, while others live in the town and attend five days a week. During the twelve student per school per week, the students learn Bible stories and passages and discuss them STS style.

About two-thirds of the students actively serve as pastors or on a church staff. Nearly half of the students have been to secondary school. Of the 120 students who began attending these OBSs only four have dropped out! One student was dismissed after the first week of school by his pastor because he was not able to spend six hours a day studying. One left because of sickness.

So far, leaders in Kenya and other African nations of Ethiopia, Sudan, Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Mozambique have been discussing what they are seeing in Kenya to see how they can utilize the Kenya model to set up OBSs in their countries.

Because these schools are largely student-supported, only people hungry to learn Bible in an understandable and practical way are able to attend. Commitment to arrange for a school, and the self-support of the students create ownership and fosters responsibility.

None of the instructors are paid STS staff, and as rural pastors, they live on meager incomes. But, when TGSP (the ministry that developed Simply The Story) covers the cost of sending the overseers to the schools and he usually does an STS vision casting (sharing STS with new people) while traveling to maximize the use of funds.

During the students’ year of learning stories, they study together for two weeks. Then they go back to their villages and homes for two weeks, to help with the harvest and to spend time with their families. Two weeks at home also enable students to tend their fields and flocks or maintain whatever means of income they have.
Interaction With The Graduates

We sat and talked with ten of the twelve members from Vihiga, the village that hosted this first graduating class.

The other absent student was on a month-long suspension. His classmates, all who serve as pastors, decided that with the suspension, he would not be able to complete the training. They hope and pray that the suspended student will repent, complete his training and graduate with another school.

A new crop of students has already started a second OBS in Vihiga.

One of the challenges the men named was the distance some of them had to travel to attend school and another was that there were not enough schools for everyone. “Why don’t you make the schools larger so more can attend?”

“Humm,” I mused, “Good questions. I am wondering why Jesus didn’t think to have more than twelve disciples?”

“But if there were a lot more students than twelve in a school, what would happen to accountability among your ranks? And how do you deal with that one erring student? What you’re learning in the stories is lived out among you.” The graduates agreed.

I wanted the students to solve the problems of schools being too far away and the need for schools to accommodate more people. “You live in different villages, and stepped out of the boat to see if the OBS was really from God. Those in the boat were all blessed when Peter and Jesus came to that boat and only then did the contrary wind stop.

I suggested, “You live in different villages, and stepped out of the boat to see if the OBS was really from God. Those in the boat were all blessed when Peter and Jesus came to that boat and only then did the contrary wind stop.

All ten graduates stated that they wanted to start assisting in workshops so they could become certified instructors and then move on to become overseers. “We want to help lead a school like the one we have just experienced.”

Future Plans, “We Want to Go There!”

The majority of the students in all ten schools expressed their interest in learning to teach and in becoming STS instructors! Then TGSP can use available funds to send the Nairobi supervisors to new regions to set up schools.

When the Kenyan STS instructors met before this graduation celebration, they looked at the map being prepared for STS-OBS in Session.

So as you will see on the STS-OBS map of Kenya, the instructors mapped out places in the northern part of Kenya where they plan to travel.

We first met instructor “A” in Nairobi in 2008. He works in the north. His testimony shows the difficult ways that he has to travel every time he comes to Nairobi which is in the developed Southern part of the country.

Hopefully, prayerfully, by God’s grace these motivated instructors, who are willing to make to make these hard treks to the north, will be able to establish more schools. Already school number eleven in Kenya is about to begin!

More Results of OBS and listing of OBS in Session