

Discovery Studies Effectively Reach Oral Learners

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:24-27 NIV)

What if, instead of relying upon sermons as our mode of instruction, we focused on discussing the Bible, everyone interacting over a passage, in small groups? Thousands of small churches in one Asian nation today are doing exactly that. The people meet in homes, listen to a Bible story together, and then each person takes part in answering profound, simple questions about the story. Here is a recent testimony of how this approach is helping followers of Jesus grow in their faith, no matter their level of literacy.

A woman named Diya lives in “K. Village,” which is far from any town. Residents there cannot travel or leave their village very often because it is so remote. No traffic reaches their area for them to hitch a ride, and they, of course, own no means of transport themselves. This isolation really bothered them. They wondered how they would ever learn more about God. Once, they heard a man talk about Jesus, that He is great and able to do miracles. But without a vehicle or anything more than a footpath out of their village, they wondered if they would ever hear more about Him.

One day, several disciple makers met in the home of a church leader who lives in that general area. The leader put this question to the disciple makers: “What do we do about people with whom we’ve been able to share a little bit about Jesus, but they need to know more? How can we follow up with people who live so far away that it’s hard for us to reach them?” This question touched JP, one of the disciple makers.

He thought, “I have a bicycle. I could go visit with people who live in remote villages.” This is how JP ended up in Diya’s village. He met with her and her whole family and they talked about Jesus. He told them about Matthew 28, that we who are His disciples are commanded to go and make other disciples. He told her how she and her family could also obey Jesus’ commands and that as they applied Jesus’ instructions to their lives, their faith would grow. Diya and her whole family were so happy that someone from “the outside” had come all the way to their village to meet with them to talk about Jesus!

JP had a speaker with Bible stories on it. He pulled it out of his bag and gave it to her, saying, “Sister, here is a simple way you can worship Jesus together in your home. I, too, am illiterate. I am not wise. I was never trained in an official pastor training program. But I have this speaker here with many Bible stories on it.” JP told Diya how she and her family could use the speaker to study God’s Word. He left it with her, and worship to Jesus began in that village for the first time.

One day, a neighbour family came to Diya’s house to join them in their Bible study. However as soon as Diya hit “play” on the speaker and they heard the voice start to narrate the Scripture, the 19-year-old daughter in the neighbor’s family began to cry out – truly wailing. Priya had a demon in her, and everyone was very afraid.

What would happen? None of them were pastors. What were they supposed to do? What would the demon do? No one knew. So they all just kept listening to the story. The narration went on while Priya kept wailing and everyone else present was secretly, silently asking God to please do a miracle. Finally, the story ended, and the voice on the speaker asked the first question to facilitate the group discussion. Finally, someone was brave enough to say, "Let's pray!" So they all prayed for Priya and she was freed of the demon! And that's not all. She also had been ill for a long time, and during that meeting, God not only freed her of the demon but also healed her illness. After witnessing these two miracles, both families declared that they wanted to be followers of Jesus! Priya's family has now also started hosting a Bible study group in their own home.

Diya and Priya have since visited 14 different villages for the purpose of spreading Jesus' story! In those 14 villages, 28 Discovery Bible studies are taking place regularly. These groups are not yet spiritually mature. They are infants in the Lord, but the ladies have faith that many disciples will be made in those places. The main church leader in the area, the one who hosted the meeting that JP attended, has visited these groups himself. He has talked to them about growing mature in Christ, and also about the Lord's Supper and baptism.

This is the power of God's Word and His Spirit, working where there are no seminaries or paid clergy. Just simple people hearing God's words and putting them into practice, like the "wise man" Jesus described in Matt 7. Jesus said that anyone who hears His words and obeys is like a wise man who built his house on rock so that nothing moved it, not rain or even floods. How precious and wonderful to be taught this lesson by people who can't even read!