

checkpoint.

WINTER 2022

CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY MAGAZINE

BIBLE STORYTELLING

In this edition: Telling stories, opening hearts
Can I tell you a story? | Faithful in translation

From the Editor

You only need to skim the first pages of the Bible to see that it is a book of stories: the story of creation, the story of our fall into sin, the story of a God who speaks and promises and who ultimately rescues through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and who will one day bring restoration.

As the story of the Bible unfolds, we discover who God is, and how he draws us into relationship with him through the atoning work of Christ. It is this big story that CMS missionaries are sharing in many ways around the world.

In this *Checkpoint*, we hear from CMS missionaries about the many strengths, opportunities and occasional difficulties, of using Bible storytelling to communicate the gospel. David Williams' lead article will show how Bible storytelling is not just about memorising a story from a Bible translation then retelling it. Nor is storytelling simply a concession to cultures that don't major on written communication. Rather, Bible storytelling is a powerful way of communicating God's truth to those who may be closed to hearing his word.

You will read also how missionaries use Bible storytelling to bring God's truth to a variety of contexts, including non-literate or primarily oral cultures. Read Ian Wood's article to witness the enthusiasm of Aboriginal Christians to tell of God's salvation revealed in the story of Ruth. Joel Atwood describes how he worked with local Vanuatu expert 'Uncle Edgar' to use bwatiuli patterns (sand drawings) to help communicate key salvation themes—sin, forgiveness, reconciliation and rule—from the gospel of Mark.

We pray that the storytelling resources and ideas (see p. 21) will help you explore the opportunities of this tool further, as we continue to partner together to see a world that knows Jesus.

Thanks to Naomi Jones and Sarah Barnett for extra help in editing many of the articles in this edition.



Gordon Cheng

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CMS is a fellowship of Christian people and churches committed to global mission. We work together to set apart long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our vision is for a world that knows Jesus. We aim to do this by:

- Reaching gospel-poor peoples for Christ
- Equipping Christian leaders for church and society
- Engaging churches in cross-cultural mission



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We don't have the space to cover all the wonderful stories that CMS has to tell within the pages of this *Checkpoint*. If you want to read more, scan the QR code or go to: cms.org.au/checkpoint

Help share the hope of Jesus throughout the world

LASTING
hope
APPEAL
2022

Many Christian leaders in Cambodia have limited understanding of the Bible. When young couple Leak and Byeal studied at Elim Bible College in Kampong Cham, in rural Cambodia, they discovered the hope found in a personal faith in Jesus, and were equipped to be Christian leaders who know and love God's word and can teach it to others.

CMS missionaries Maurice and Amanda Jacobson will soon begin teaching at Elim Bible College to equip the next generation of Christian leaders for the Cambodian church.

Leak says:

"In Matthew 28:19, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples. Elim Bible College is so important for the future of new believers in Cambodia. It's a place where disciples can go and understand the word of God."

Our CMS Lasting Hope Appeal during May and June will provide vital support to missionaries like Maurice and Amanda, so that more people like Leak and Byeal would know Jesus through his word, and be equipped to disciple others. Will you give to the Appeal today and help people in Cambodia and around the world know lasting hope through Jesus?



Image: Maurice, Leak, Byeal and Amanda.

Give today lastinghope.cms.org.au
30 JUNE DEADLINE



Telling stories, OPENING HEARTS



David Williams is the Director of Training and Development at St Andrew's Hall in Melbourne, where all CMS missionaries receive special training in mission and culture. Here he talks about the role that Bible storytelling can play in breaking through to those who are closed to the gospel.

A friend volunteered to help with an international student ministry in Melbourne. She was nervous about serving in a role that was outside of her experience. With a degree of trepidation, she arrived for the first time. As she walked through the door, a young student approached her. "Are you a Christian?" the student asked. "Good, then please tell me about Jesus and how I can become a Christian too."

Sometimes Christian ministry is easy, as my friend discovered. Sometimes people are open to the gospel. It was easy for my friend to read the Bible with this student and introduce her to the Lord Jesus.

Telling Bible stories in this kind of way brings the narrative and the drama of Scripture into people's lives. It opens up the possibility of asking and answering questions. It often leaves the door open to telling more gospel stories in the future.

When people are closed to the Bible

In many parts of the world, including much of secular Australia, Christian ministry is not so easy. People are often closed to hearing about Jesus and the Christian faith. A person is closed when they are sure they don't want to become a Christian, and don't want to know anything about the Bible.

They might be closed because they are already committed to a worldview that precludes belief in the Lord Jesus. Perhaps they are committed Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists. They have a well-formed belief system that has closed out the possibility of following Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They might be closed because their belief system has convinced them the Bible is coercive or oppressive. Perhaps they have a

family member who has been abused by the church. In many faculties of Australian universities, staff and students might be closed because they think that metanarratives (overarching stories that give meaning to a culture) are fundamentally untrustworthy and destructive, especially the Christian metanarrative. If you approach someone who is closed and ask them if they want to study the Bible with you, they will simply say "no."

At CMS, we believe that God changes our hearts by his word and through his Spirit. For people to come to know Jesus, we need to hear God's word and believe it. For people to grow as disciples, we need to hear and obey God as he speaks to us through the Scriptures.

How will they hear?

But how will people ever hear God's word if they are closed; if they are certain that the Bible has nothing to say to them and they hope never to read it?

Os Guinness describes a range of strategies that we can use to reach people who are closed.¹ His strategies include using questions, stories and drama. These approaches engage people's imaginations and emotions. Although he calls them subversive strategies this does not mean that they are deceitful. Rather, the aim is to subvert a closed worldview, not by crashing into it head-on but by questioning its assumptions.

Bible storytelling ties a number of these strategies together. It enables us to bring people's imaginations and emotions into contact with God's revelation of himself in his word.

So, what is Bible storytelling? It is not reading out a story from the Bible to someone. It is not memorising a Bible story from the NIV, word for word and repeating it to someone. It is to learn the content, form and meaning of a Bible story so that I can share it in a way that is simple, accurate and memorable. People who have been trained in Bible storytelling can tell a Bible story in a way that is spontaneous and engaging, while retaining the full meaning of the text.

1. Guinness, Os. 2015. *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*. Downers Grove IL: IVP Books.



The value of storytelling

If we compare Bible storytelling with Bible translation, then Bible storytelling is a little bit like a ‘dynamic equivalence’ Bible translation where the relationship between text and translation is somewhat looser and less ‘literal’ (one example of this might be the New Living Translation, as compared to the ESV). Or if we compare Bible storytelling with preaching, it is like taking a Bible story and making it accessible and immediate for people. John Chapman used to do this all the time—his re-telling of the story of the Rich Fool (Luke 12) was electrifying. When ‘Chappo’ (as he was affectionately known) told it, the rich fool was congratulating himself for his great wealth when suddenly “there was a searing pain in his chest, and he was dead before they got him to intensive care.”

Bible storytelling brings together several of Os Guinness’s strategies for reaching people who are closed to the gospel. Imagine a gospel worker chatting with a Muslim friend. The friend has recently had a baby and is lamenting that she is considered unclean for forty days after the birth. The gospel worker might say, “That sounds really hard. Can I share a story that Jesus told?” At worst, the Muslim friend can simply say “I’d rather you didn’t.” Or she might agree to hear a story, perhaps from Mark 5 (the story of the ‘unclean’ woman with the flow of blood whom Jesus heals) or John 4 (the shunned woman of Samaria who is accepted by Jesus). After telling the story, the gospel worker might move on to different areas of conversation, leaving the mustard seed of God’s word to do its work. Or she might ask, “What did you like about that story?” and see how the conversation develops.

Telling Bible stories in this kind of way brings the narrative and the drama of Scripture into people’s lives. It opens the possibility of asking and answering questions. It often leaves the door open to telling more gospel stories in the future.

From closed to open

All human beings live in a story. We create purpose and direction for ourselves by telling ourselves a story about how the world is and where we fit in it. World religions and cultures shape those stories in radically different ways, but they all tell a story. As film director Shekhar Kapur says, “we are the stories we tell ourselves.”²

Through Christian conversion and discipleship, God invites people to discover his big story for our world—to rewrite their story. Bible storytelling can aid this process considerably. We can use approaches that unpack a chronological set of Bible stories to help people build a biblical theology. Christine Dillon, who teaches Bible storytelling at St Andrew’s Hall, talks about a time when she had been using chronological Bible stories in Taiwan. One day she began to tell the story of the angel appearing to Mary, announcing the birth of Jesus. One of Christine’s listeners interrupted to ask: “Could this be the one who has come to crush the serpent’s head?”³

At St Andrew’s Hall, where CMS trains our long-term missionaries, we find that all our new trainees arrive with a wealth of experience and resources for teaching the Bible. Their toolbox of Bible teaching skills is well stocked. However, most of those resources make a massive assumption. They assume that you can sit down with someone, open the Bible with them and study it together. Our trainees don’t have so many resources at their fingertips for the times when you can’t open a Bible and read it with another person. However, in many contexts around the world, CMS missionaries work with people who are closed, not open. They have no desire to open the Bible and read it. If they are Muslims, they might think that the Bible is a corrupted and unreliable text. If they are secular Europeans, they might think the Bible is oppressive and patriarchal. But everyone loves a good story.

I wonder what you expected this article would be about when you started reading? Perhaps you have reached the end and are a little surprised. So far, I have not mentioned literacy. Bible storytelling is a powerful tool for sharing the gospel with people who cannot read or write. But it is far, far more than that. Do you also have friends who are closed to reading the Bible? Perhaps you might share a Bible story with them.

pray



Pray that God opens the hearts of many who are closed to the gospel through skilled and truthful Bible storytelling.



2. Kapur, Shekhar. 2009. *We are the stories we tell ourselves*. TEDIndia available at <https://bit.ly/3KZpLeF>

3. Dillon, Christine. 2012. *Telling the Gospel through Story: Evangelism That Keeps Hearers Wanting More*. Downers Grove IL: IVP Books. (The reference is to God’s promise in Genesis 3:15).

PREPARE TO SHARE



CMS worker J is preparing for ministry in South East Asia. She has used Bible storytelling in various ministry contexts, at church and on university campuses, with adults and children. She shares how God has been at work through this method of witness.

One of the great joys of cross-cultural ministry, whether in Australia or elsewhere, is the stunning realisation that God speaks to the deepest parts of humanity, regardless of who we are and where we're from. Communicating the gospel across culture and language can be challenging though. This is why I love storytelling the Bible, and I'm learning that every step of the 'story' is precious.

Whenever we take God's words upon our lips, he reveals himself more deeply to us, together. In doing so he demonstrates how his gospel crosses every human barrier of comprehension.

The process of preparation

The process of preparing to tell a story requires delving into the nuance of language and emotion within the text. I want to examine every Bible translation and language available to me, in order to select the spoken phrase and tone that will be most simple yet accurate to God's written word.

Then comes the practice of telling a Bible story. I try it out on myself first. I draw it, I voice-record it, I use my hands and facial expressions in whatever way feels most genuine. I'm particular about getting it just right, so I try to make mistakes early and learn from them. But this is just the beginning.

The Spirit at work

The next step is to tell the story to someone else. Unless I'm prepared to share the story with another person, even as a rehearsal, I'll never really be ready. And that's when I notice the work of the Holy Spirit. Because nobody sees or hears the same things in a Bible story. What I may have taken from the story is often different to what resonates with others hearing the story. Yet by listening to God together, what they see can

be added to my understanding of who God is and what he has done for us in Christ Jesus. I find my own appreciation of God enriched by their perspective.

Let me share an example.

I once had the chance to join a group who were sharing chronological Bible stories over a university semester with international students. Two students from South East Asia came almost every week to hear the next instalment of God's story. We had talked our way through Adam and Eve, Abraham and Moses, laws of blessing, curses, and words of promise. We were up to David when the reaction of one student surprised me. I had told the story of God confronting David with his sin through the prophet Nathan telling him a parable (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

Connie*, a self-proclaimed atheist, reflected on this story and declared: "There's just no-one who is really clean, is there?"

When I think about sin, I often use words like right and wrong, guilty and innocent, condemnation, justification. Connie used different words. In fact, she used David's own vocabulary without knowing it. She saw that sin means we need God's cleansing.

"Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." (Psalm 51:2)

I believe God made the truth of sin real for her in that moment.

There is great power in storytelling the Bible within our own culture and across cultures, for both you and me. Whenever we take God's words upon our lips, he reveals himself more deeply to us, together. In doing so he demonstrates how his gospel crosses every human barrier of comprehension.

* Name changed for privacy reasons.



Ask God to be at work through his Spirit as CMS workers, like J, share the Bible through storytelling.



Can I tell you a story?



Lauren Dale is a former CMS missionary who teaches and mentors students at St Andrew's Hall. Here he shares about how God is working in the lives of people he has befriended in his local community.

Sharing hope

One day as I was watering our front garden, I noticed a person walking with his greyhound.

"Nice dog!" I shouted across the street.

"Would you like to meet her?" Bryan* brought his greyhound across.

Being an avid greyhound owner myself, I soon introduced my own dog to these new friends. Over several walks together, the dogs sniffing the local trails, Bryan and I chatted.

Gradually we have shared more of our lives—stories of trauma, heartbreak, hopes and fears. Woven through it all have been the stories of Jesus. He listened carefully as I shared the story of the sinful woman anointing Jesus' feet (Luke 7), one of my favourites. We considered the idea that Jesus challenges how we see people and turns our preconceived ideas upside down.

Another day I listened as Bryan confessed many of his woes.

"Can I tell you a story of hope about Jesus?" I said. I shared the story (from Luke 19) of how Jesus had sought out Zacchaeus and turned his life upside down.

Bryan is happy for me to pray for him in his struggles. Recently, after I prayed, he also prayed for me, and for my wife as her health declines. It was deeply moving to listen as he prayed, perhaps for the first time.

Seeking truth

When our Muslim friends were celebrating their Eid, I took the opportunity to catch up with my friend Nabil*. Like Bryan, I also met Nabil when he walked past our place.

"Where are you off to?" I had asked after initial introductions.

He replied, "I'm off to greet my cousin. She's having a baby boy and they're calling him Yacoub (Jacob)."

"Do you know the story of Jacob?" I inquired.

"No, please tell me," he replied.

I began the story of Jacob and this flowed into sharing Joseph's story.

When we met up again, Nabil was keen to hear the rest of Joseph's story. He had been reading the Qur'an and traditions about Joseph, which we agreed was a bit like looking through opaque glass. We agreed that the stories in the Torah (Old Testament) were clearer and fresher. We then discussed the story of Moses, and I stopped with Moses having killed an Egyptian and fleeing into the desert.

"But he's a prophet, right?" Nabil asked.

"Well that depends on how you define prophet. For Muslim friends, all the patriarchs are prophets, whereas in the Torah and Injil (New Testament), it's a different story!"

Often as our friends from Muslim backgrounds hear true stories from the Old and New Testaments (or the Torah and Injil, as they know them), these gradually supplant those they have inherited, and their worldview likewise shifts to point to the Messiah.

Nabil has a genuinely open heart, and he wants to explore the truth and see where it takes him. When he shared his struggle with getting a job, he appreciated my prayers, and we rejoiced together when he found work at last.

Jesus didn't hesitate to use stories to challenge listeners and help them understand the Kingdom of God. May God help us to do likewise.

** Names changed for privacy reasons.*

pray



Pray for Lauren's friends Bryan and Nabil, that God will continue to direct their conversations and open their hearts to know Jesus. Pray for opportunities to share God's story of hope and redemption with people in your own life.

THE Word ON THE WINDOWS



Mavis Payne coordinates and trains volunteers in the window storytelling ministry at St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne, which is a partnership between CMS Victoria and St Paul's. In this article she shares some of her experience telling Bible stories.

Learning Bible stories to share with others is a discipline which allows storytellers themselves to meet Jesus in a deep way. Bible storytelling involves stepping into the narrative of God's story, and capturing a specific story in a simple, accurate and memorable form which can be shared in mission, across cultures, in discipleship and with friends.

The stained-glass windows in St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne each tell a Bible story about Jesus or Paul the Apostle. In the tradition of ancient and medieval cathedrals, these windows were included so that those who didn't own a Bible, or were unable to read, could engage with Bible stories in visual form. Most visitors to the cathedral do not own a Bible, and many belong to cultures which are visual and oral. Window Bible storytelling is an opportunity to 'open the Bible' with them.

Seeing ourselves in the story

Trained window storytellers welcome visitors to the cathedral and invite them to hear a window story about Jesus. Recently I shared the story of the woman at the well (John 4) with an international student.

I asked her, "What do you notice in this story?"

Her response: "I am that woman".

She had stepped into the story and identified with the Samaritan woman and her transformation after meeting Jesus. The student told me her story and her desire for a fresh start. Hearing the story of the Samaritan woman had connected with this woman's own desire to be transformed by Jesus. I gave her a postcard of the window and the questions

we had used to explore it further. She downloaded a Bible App and told me she knew of a church close to where she lived in Sydney. I prayed for her and committed her to God's ongoing care in her journey towards knowing Jesus.

For me, through learning and sharing this Bible story, I step into the story and identify with the woman, and receive afresh the honour that Jesus bestows on me. In the story, Jesus doesn't judge or reject the woman; but invites her to come closer and know him. Like the woman, my identity is not tied to ethnicity, successes or failures, but who Jesus says I am. Learning Bible stories can be transformative for the storyteller, so we can share our own story of faith and embed it within a Bible story. The bigger story we are telling is of Jesus; and we can invite our listeners to meet Jesus in his story.

Bible storytelling as encouragement

Bible stories also speak into pastoral situations. A friend related the difficulties he faced as a Christian leader through the long COVID lockdowns. "It sounds like you're in a storm," I commented.

After sharing the story of Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4), I asked what he noticed about the disciples' response to the storm: "Jesus, don't you care?" And then how Jesus spoke with them: "After being with me all this time, will you not trust me?" As my friend stepped into the story and heard the invitation to trust, he cried out to Jesus. If we have Bible stories in our lives, they will naturally enter our conversations.

Discover more online...



Listen to some of the Window Storytellers from St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne.

go



Is there a Bible story that connects to your story of faith which you could learn and share with others? Pray and seek God's leading and see our resources section on page 21 for tips on learning to tell Bible stories.



THE BIBLE ON THE WALL



CMS missionaries Jess and Simon Cowell work with the GBU (Gruppi Biblici Universitari) in the south of Italy. Jess had a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel inspired by a fresco (wall painting) in a museum.

Siena is a city filled with art—much of it inspired by stories from the Bible. In our first year in Italy, I was taking Italian lessons and one day visited a local museum, Santa Maria della Scala, with a class of students. This museum was once a hospital, and is incredibly rich in history and artefacts. As we walked around the huge chapel, built in the 13th century, I noticed that the painting on the front wall depicted a story about Jesus. The fresco illustrated the healing of the disabled man at the Bethesda pool by the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem.

As we circled the room, I quickly looked up the Bible reference, found it in John 5, and read the story, trying to remember the action point by point. During our missionary training at St Andrew's Hall, we had been encouraged to try drawing the story frame by frame, like a comic, to help us remember it. It was time to try doing this on the fly—I remember how fast my heart was beating! After a few minutes, as we were still in the chapel passing once more in front of the painting, I said to the young Irani and Turkish women who I was walking with, "Would you like to hear the story from the Bible that the painting is about?"



They both agreed enthusiastically. So, I took a deep breath and proceeded, in my then very basic Italian, to tell the story of Jesus' mercy on the man and his power to heal him.

I still remember the exchange with my Muslim Turkish friend afterwards. She was fascinated by the healing and asked, "I wonder if the pool still exists?"

I replied that I didn't know, but wasn't

it amazing that the story showed us that Jesus was able to heal without the pool—he was more powerful than that! "You're right!" She replied eagerly.

One of these women still contacts me every now and then. I am glad I had the opportunity to share with them about the Lord Jesus, from the Bible, in a situation where we wouldn't even have been able to sit down together!

pray



Thank God for the spur towards Bible storytelling that St Andrew's Hall training provides, and pray that CMS missionaries will find opportunities to use it for sharing the gospel.



FAITHFUL IN TRANSLATION



CMS missionaries **Chris and Grace Adams** work with the Presbyterian Church and Scripture Union in Timor-Leste. In this article, Grace explains how access to a faithful translation of the Bible is essential for authentic Bible storytelling.

Beauty in Timorese storytelling

When we first came to Timor-Leste and began engaging in language and culture learning, we were stunned by the beauty of, and mastery over storytelling by some Timorese people. Our language helper, Aaron*, is such a person. He tells stories in such a vivid and mesmerising way that hearing him tell a story is better than watching a movie! Storytelling is in the DNA of Timorese culture. People love to sit together, tell stories and chat, often sipping coffee and tea, for hours at a time. It's part of the rhythm of life.

As we observed the way Timorese people tell stories, we were surprised by their unique style of delivery; they do not normally use actions or gestures. Stories are generally told in a calm and steady way with a limited show of emotions. The power of their storytelling lies in their vivid descriptions and crafting of plot that draws the listener into the story.

Storytelling is in the DNA of Timorese culture. People love to sit together, tell stories and chat, often sipping coffee and tea, for hours at a time. It's part of the rhythm of life.

Storytelling and culture

Listening to stories has been a core element of our language-learning and it continues to be an important means of loving the Timorese people. We had been accustomed to a certain style of Bible storytelling in Australia, but over time, as our thinking has shifted, we have learned to tell stories, and subsequently Bible stories, in the Timorese way.

My ethnic background is Korean, and stories are traditionally told in different ways yet again—through songs, alongside narration and drama. During our time in Timor, we have seen the value of learning and using different styles of storytelling according to culture, as we seek to communicate the gospel in an engaging way.

The danger of storytelling without accountability

Our language helper, Aaron, is a brilliant storyteller, but we noticed a profound weakness when it came to his Bible storytelling. Here is his 'biblical' account of creation.

"In the beginning, there were lots of plants. God made a farm/agricultural field called Eden and planted lots of plants. There were lots of animals and fruit but there was no one to look after the farm. So, God took some dirt from the ground and shaped it into a person. Then he put spirit into the person. So, God created a woman.

But the woman was worried. 'I'm all alone. Who can help me to look after the crops and animals?' So, God took some flesh from the woman's side, put spirit in him and made a man. God said, 'I sent a man to you to be your good friend. He will help you look after the land. You will live as husband and wife and have children as many as stars and sand in the sea in the generations to come.'"

Can you notice some deviations from the Bible in Aaron's creation account? Can you see how his life setting and worldview may be reflected in this story? As we heard Aaron tell Bible stories, we encountered, first-hand, distortion in the content and message of the Bible when it is orally transmitted without accountability to a written reference. It highlighted to us the urgent need for Bible translation, Bible resources and Bible teaching.



Bible storytelling empowered by books

Alongside work in Bible translation, a significant way that we, as CMS missionaries, can contribute to the mission and maturity of the Church in Timor is through producing written resources which are faithful to the word of God. Accurate, printed Bibles and biblical resources empowers Bible teaching in many forms of communication including storytelling.

God opened doors for us to translate and produce the Tetun (Timorese language) edition of David Helm's *The Big Picture Story Bible* with our Scripture Union team and in partnership with Sparklit. This book presents the grand story line of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The story of God fulfilling his promise through Jesus Christ is told coherently and beautifully with outstanding illustration. Its focus on Jesus Christ, and why he had to die and be raised to life, provides a key to understanding the whole Bible, with an invitation to respond personally to him in faith.

Far-reaching impact of Bible stories

The translation of this Bible has had immediate and extensive results. One parent said, with tears in her eyes, "Mana (sister) Grace, my son has always struggled to read but he learned to read through *The Big Picture Story Bible*. Thank you."

Sandra, who helped translate the book said, "I have read this book many times but I'm still making new discoveries about God's word. This book is a blessing not only for the children but also the adults!"

The publication of *The Big Picture Story Bible* opened new ways for us to engage people with the Bible. Over a period of six months, we had the privilege of producing a weekly radio program for children and families, based on the book.

We also visited a local school to teach Religious Education using the book, which led to the publication of the Bible curriculum set (teacher's guide, activity books, posters, songs on YouTube) for schools and churches accompanied by teacher training workshops. The Bible curriculum is now being taught at four Christian schools and several churches in Dili.

Our vision is to see a new generation of Bible-loving and Bible-literate Christians being raised in Timor-Leste, and a new generation of Bible storytellers emerging who are ready to take the story of God, which is faithful to the written word of God, to many Timorese. We pray that our ministry of Bible teaching and developing Bible resources may contribute to this vision and that many more may respond to God's invitation to enter into the living story of his grace.

* Names changed for privacy reasons.



Your support of CMS enables long-term missionaries like Grace and Chris to equip and resource local Christians, enabling them to share the gospel faithfully. You can give to the Lasting Hope Appeal today to play your part in God's work through CMS.

www.lastinghope.org.au

Read more online...



Read more on the wonderful work that has been done through the Tetun language edition of *The Big Picture Story Bible*.



RE-ENACTING RUTH



CMS missionaries Ian and Jenny Wood serve at Nungalinga Bible College in the Northern Territory. Here Ian explains how retelling the Old Testament story of Ruth created opportunities to discover the Bible's message.

James, Amos and I were running a course at Nungalinga College on 'Our Culture Story' for Certificate III students. The course encourages students to reflect on their culture, broader Australian culture and, in light of that, the cultures and worlds of the Bible.

As part of the course, we were studying the book of Ruth. It was an ideal choice: big biblical ideas about redemption and faithfulness and a tiny insight into Jesus' family tree. At the same time, Ruth opens a unique door into Israelite family life in the time of Israel's Judges. It makes it easy to think about the cultural life of the ancient Israelites and the life of our students—the things that seem similar and the things that seem different.

Many of the students in the course were reading Ruth for the first time. Very few had English as their first language. While the book of Ruth usually gets tackled early on in Bible translation projects, several Indigenous language Bibles don't have it available yet. In any case, most of our students tend to discover new stories by hearing them told, rather than reading it on the page.

Entering into the story of Ruth

We hunted for decent videos, but most of the ones in English wanted to spice up the story or modernise it for an American audience. One video, though, was really good: a version in Kriol made by the Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL) and people at Halls Creek. The upside was that it stuck to the Bible story. The downside was that only a third of our students spoke Kriol—although most students from the Top End could make it out.

We showed the whole Kriol video on the first day of the course, and then sections of it most days, for whatever chapter we were studying.

For each chapter, we divided the students into groups of three or four, and gave each group part of the chapter. They would read their part aloud to each other and discuss it.

Each group then shared their discoveries and told their part of the story to the rest of the class. That way, we worked our way through the book with the students telling the story to each other. Students were free to work out their own way of telling the story, and often they chose to act it out with a narrator, speeches, and improvised props and costumes.

Re-enacting Ruth chapter three led to some culturally interesting moments as students thought about what was happening on the barley heap that night. Acting the story of Ruth became so popular that when our class took their turn to run college chapel, they couldn't resist performing dramatic moments from Ruth for the rest of the college.

Acting, telling the story, watching the video and reading aloud gave students the chance to enter and re-enter the story of Ruth from different angles and think about what the Bible was saying. By the end of the course, overwhelmingly, students talked about taking the great new story that they'd been studying home to their own churches. That was a win! We pray that these students continue to grow in knowing God from understanding the story of Ruth and how it fits in the Bible, and that they will be able to communicate these truths to their churches and communities.

go



There are so many ways to tell a Bible story. Contact your local CMS branch to learn of locations where you might use your storytelling abilities to overcome barriers of literacy and language.

DO YOU HAVE A HEART FOR *Mission?*

Where will it take you?

CMS is taking up new opportunities for mission in Bali and Seychelles. We're sending men and women to serve in parts of Eurasia, the Middle East and Central Asia where we've never served before.

As God shows us new places to serve him, we're asking him to raise up the right people to reach, equip and engage.

Will you go?



CMS is looking for Christians who can share God's grace across cultures.



Where will you serve?
cms.org.au/opportunities

Stories IN THE sand



CMS missionaries Joel and Tiff Atwood have worked in Vanuatu alongside university students for the last five years. They've observed that even university students often prefer to learn by hearing and speaking, rather than by reading. Read on for Joel's explanation of how storytelling can play a role in effective communication.

How do we communicate the great truths of the gospel? In Western cultures we naturally read texts (books, articles, and the like) and use them to communicate information. This includes our reading and understanding of the Bible itself.

Many Ni-Vanuatu communities, however, rely on non-written ways to impart and understand knowledge. Tiff and I work mainly in universities. But even there, we've found that putting a slab of text from the Bible in front of students and asking them to analyse it can be hard work. It may even discourage already study-weary young people! But we still want people to feed on Scripture, to grow in their capacity to reflect on it, and to share it with others. So, we've been playing with three ways to use Bible storytelling in our campus ministry.

Telling stories in Bible study

The most common way we use storytelling is as the initial way of engaging people with the Bible. Before we bring out written passages, we first story-tell and discuss the passage in Bislama, the national creole*. Written texts are also provided. Students can write or ask questions about the printed passage, and have something to compare with the 'told' Bislama version they're hearing. Others, not so comfortable with written material, are still engaging with God's word through story. By providing both story and script (the Bible passage) we're seeking to help everyone. The aim is to encourage all to respond to the Scriptures together, whether as a spoken story or as text.

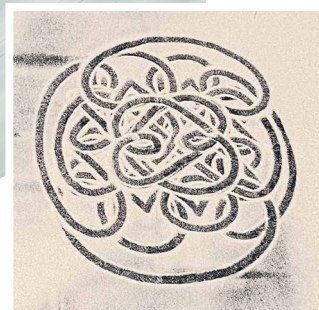
Telling stories in evangelism

The second way we've used Bible storytelling is in evangelism. At Easter, because of cultural expectations, we see students in church who we never see at any other time. We typically choose one of the four gospels to follow through the Easter story. A few years ago, we replaced our Good Friday sermon with a series of spoken stories of the arrest, trial, and death of Christ. The idea was to immerse people in the story of the cross, focusing their attention on Jesus as proclaimed by the Bible. We've found these Good Friday services enriching for the students presenting as they internalise the narrative. The services are moving for all as we hear familiar stories in a new way, and they are evangelistically fruitful.

Telling stories on the ground

The third example is a recent successful experiment. Vanuatu has a sophisticated tradition of *bwatiuli*: making patterns on the ground with the finger (often in sand or other natural elements) to leave messages, pass on information, or tell stories. So, in 2021, we spent a semester reading six stories from Mark's gospel with classmates and friends, and with the help of local expert, 'Uncle Edgar', we developed four new *bwatiuli* patterns that reflected four themes in these key gospel stories: sin, forgiveness, reconciliation and rule. Uncle Edgar presented the four patterns via a story he'd composed (including music on his bamboo pipe) of a relationship breaking down and being restored. As far as Uncle Edgar knows, it's the first time *bwatiuli* has been coupled with the presentation of the gospel, and he wants to bring it to his church next!

The gospel is for all people, including many whose preferred way of communicating and learning is through hearing and speaking. Bible storytelling opens old (yet new) ways of meeting Jesus in his word.



Do you have skills in Bible storytelling or a passion to learn? Speak to your local CMS branch about where and how you might use those gifts.

Image credit—Arima Faye: Uncle Edgar draws a *bwatiuli* pattern in the sand.
*A 'creole' is a new language that is a hybrid between a European language and a local language)

Engaging deeply



**Catherine Puffett
(serving with Colin)
says “France needs the
gospel!” She shares
how Bible storytelling**

**is a core part of their church planting
ministry among the deep thinking,
highly literate French people.**

In France, philosophy is a core year 12 subject, and students are trained in high school and university (as well as through panel television shows, radio and podcasts) to think critically using ‘dialectical reasoning’. ‘Dialectical reasoning’ means putting opposing ideas together and coming to new and perhaps radical conclusions. It appeals to French people, and I’ve seen this play out in both formal and informal settings.

So, how does philosophical reasoning interact with church planting in France?

In preparing to plant our church, the core team met regularly for a year to discuss what church is, and what could reach French people with the gospel. We became convinced that Bible storytelling—the memorisation and presentation of the Bible orally, and then discussion of what we have understood from God’s word—could be a key part of church life.

**In this highly literate context,
telling the story (rather than
simply reading it) is helping
people engage with the gospel.**

The Holy Spirit at work

Starting in September 2021, for three Sundays out of four, we have met in small groups of up to 12 people to hear a story from the Bible, and discuss it with five question cards. We have done a Bible overview series, and are now doing a series on the parables of Jesus. The discussion is rich as God’s word reaps its own results. The Spirit convicts, corrects and affirms what we know of God, and we are challenged—everyone has their own testimony of how God is speaking to them through the story.

But the discussion is most rich when people who haven’t heard these stories before are present. The different religious upbringings (or more commonly a lack of religious upbringing) help us all to see each story in a new light. The search for the pertinence of the story to our lives is not made by a preacher, but by the Spirit and through the discussion (shaped by people’s philosophical training). We each leave with something – an idea to consider, a truth about God, repentance to enact or a new action to complete. In addition, the kids engage with the word of God alongside the adults through these stories. They listen, contribute views, then run off to play or draw ideas from the passage for us to admire later. What a joy!

Bearing fruit

In this highly literate context, telling the story (rather than simply reading it) is helping people engage with the gospel. Those who memorise the narrative dwell deeply on the story as they see the patterns and the way it fits together. William, one of the team members recently had the opportunity to retell the parable of the weeds from Matthew 13 to two of my neighbours.

He said, “It’s amazing that after hearing a story twice, I can then retell it—the stories stick in my head differently when they are told in this format.”

For the listeners, it engages our senses differently: we are present with the storyteller, following the action, being shocked, sensing emotion. As the stories engage our hearts and our heads, we see our confidence in the authority of scripture and the work of the Spirit play out in miraculous ways.

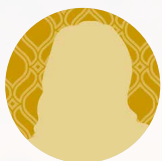
give



Financial giving enables CMS missionaries like Catherine and Colin to bring the amazing truth of the gospel through storytelling and other means, to people in France and beyond. You can give to the Lasting Hope Appeal today to play your part in God’s work through CMS.

www.lastinghope.org.au

Singing GOD'S STORY



CMS worker J is serving in the Middle East. Here she describes how the telling of Bible stories can open pathways to faith for women and their families.

My teammate and I are sitting on mattresses that line the edge of the living room—four refugee women and us. There are five children jostling around me, all talking over one another, each trying to tell their version of what happened when they found a new kitten in the empty block next door. The dialect they speak is rural Syrian Arabic.

Smaller children are finishing the remains of their breakfast in the middle of the room. One mother swoops in to clear away dishes from the mat on the floor between us, while another mother is fending off a child from pushing food into her mouth. The grandmother has rested her head back on the wardrobe behind her, closing her eyes as though it might shield her from the decibels of the children.

Hamida* spends her days in this three-room house with her elderly mother, her two sisters-in-law and the nine children they have between them. Her brothers are out most of the day, but when they come home, the women move quickly into action to feed, mend and obey. Sadly, each of the women at times meet with a fist or a palm when their response doesn't please. Each of them struggles to have hope that their situation might change or that they would find joy in their daily life.

Meeting Jesus through stories

Hamida met Jesus when some women (who were visiting the family as part of a refugee assistance team) began telling stories about Jesus from the Bible. It was the beauty of Jesus' character that drew her in. She saw his gentleness, his love that was willing to give up everything. When the team members explained that we all have a problem with sin that we can't fix ourselves, she was ready to listen.

I met Hamida a year into this journey when we began visiting the home regularly. In a hushed voice when the others left the room she told me, "I was baptised a few months ago. Rana* (her sister-in-law) believes as well, but even she doesn't know that I was baptised."

Unusually, even the unbelievers in this home listen as we share from the Bible. However, they all find it hard to read, and because the Bible's Arabic is harder than Shakespeare, even if we listen to a recording they often don't understand. And yet when we tell the Bible as stories, they are captivated.





Telling the whole story

New believers will often hear these stories we share from an Islamic worldview. They look for, “What good thing did a prophet do in this story that I’m meant to try harder at?” Early on it was clear that while Rana loved Jesus, she didn’t really understand how big our sin problem is. So, we started working through a set of 17 stories that covers the whole Bible story. The first story was based on Genesis 1, and as the children drew the seven days of creation, we asked the mums and kids, “Where are the sad people and the fighting people and the sick people in these pictures?” It was a new discovery for these women that God didn’t make the world with suffering in it.

We continued telling stories each time, knowing that linking the stories together was crucial for them to understand why the world is broken, and that all the Old Testament stories point towards a coming Rescuer—even right from the garden of Eden. Tying them together was challenging. The women would come and go from the room during the story times and miss important parts. The children were loud and distractible.

It was amazing to watch kids with low literacy levels memorise multiple verses of a song.

Connecting through song

A few stories in, we decided to gradually write a song as we went. Each story had its own verse, and the tagline was “Where is the Saviour to crush the head of Satan?” It was amazing to watch kids with low literacy levels memorise multiple verses of a song. And the mums down to the youngest kids enjoyed ‘smashing’ the head of Satan with their fist when we got to that line each time. It still takes repetition and reminding with every new story that the Bible shows us we can’t be good

enough and we need a Saviour. They believe the gospel, but the ‘try harder’ view of scripture is slow to change!

Stories for changed lives

As we move forward with this family, we wonder what change God will work out in them amidst their messy context. How will the mums, who feel poor and powerless, discover the joy of generosity with the little they have? How will the boys learn to use their growing muscles to lift up the weak, rather than beat them down as they see other men doing? How will their confidence in heaven sustain them in the struggles of here and now? And how will they carry the gospel out into their community?

We’re praying that the boys would learn to tell each other stories like handsome, strong Daniel who entrusted himself to God’s rescuing rather than defend himself. We’re praying that their mums would remind each other of the widow whose copper coin drew Jesus’ admiration. We’re praying that they will strengthen each other by describing the eternal city with gates that never shut because there is no evil.

In the Middle East, whether you want to entertain or get a point across, stories are a normal part of adult conversation. Would you pray with us that this family would become storytellers to one another and to those around them, and that as they do, God’s Spirit would bring fruit?

** Names changed for privacy reasons.*



In the Middle East God is shining the hope of the gospel into people’s hearts through stories from the Bible. Is God calling you to serve with CMS in a place like this? Contact your CMS branch to find out more.



UNVEILING THE M



Dr Evelyn Hibbert teaches Intercultural studies at Sydney Missionary and Bible College. Here, she reviews *Hagar's Heritage*, written by **Moyra Dale**, who has had decades of experience in mission to Muslim women, and has been involved with training CMS missionaries at St Andrew's Hall for many years. In *Hagar's Heritage*, Moyra writes about aspects of Islam from a women's perspective, and brings biblical insights to bear on her observations.

Most people, when they think about Islam and women, picture a veiled Muslim woman. Just as her head, and sometimes even her face, is hidden, so her life seems an impenetrable mystery. In many cases, this mystery causes fear which makes us afraid to build relationships with, and can often incline us to be prejudiced against them.

Insights drawn from experience

Moyra Dale's book, *Islam & Women: Hagar's Heritage*, reveals the hidden world of Muslim women for Christian readers. Drawing on her rich experience of decades of living among Muslims, in-depth learning of language and culture, and her research based on being immersed in everyday life, Moyra transports her readers into the world of Muslim women. I am choosing to use Moyra's first name here because the world of women is a relational world. Moyra speaks from her experience and shares as a friend wanting to pass on her life's learning. Although there is much scholarship included in the book, it is continually grounded through many examples from real life and discussion of the practical implications for Christian ministry.

Moyra integrates personal experience, the study of Islam, research among and about Muslim women, anthropological perspectives and Christian responses. She introduces what the Qur'an and other Islamic texts teach, explaining how these affect women. Helpfully, Moyra also presents Muslim women's perspectives on these teachings.

Gendered spaces key for Muslim women

It is hard for Western Christians to appreciate the gender divide in Islamic cultures. This is largely because practically all books for Christians about Islam are written by men. Westerners tend not to be comfortable with the concept of gendered space as we do not physically separate women and men. We tend to assume that separation of genders automatically results in the oppression of women and an absence of any significant activity apart from caring for their families. Moyra, in contrast, opens our eyes to how Muslim women live, work and thrive in gendered space. She helps us to understand why, and how, women are essential for reaching out to Muslim women.

This is not a book that you can easily sit down and read in one sitting. The content is too rich for this! It is more a book that every Christian should have on their shelves to pick up and read a chapter of whenever they encounter an issue. For example, suppose you come across a teenage Muslim girl who is preparing for marriage. Moyra has a chapter on marriage. You may notice that many shops, cars, women and children have blue beads or stylised eyes hung on them. Moyra's chapter on power will help you to understand this and respond in a Christian way. Perhaps a Muslim family has invited you over for a meal. It would be good to read Moyra's chapter on hospitality. Maybe your neighbour or work colleague is sick, and you would like to pray for her. Moyra has a chapter on prayer.

MYSTERY

Essential reading for ministering to Muslim women

If you are involved in ministry with Muslim women, this book should be compulsory study for you. All women who are planning to go into full-time ministry among Muslims anywhere in the world should study this book in preparation and keep it with them for continual reference.

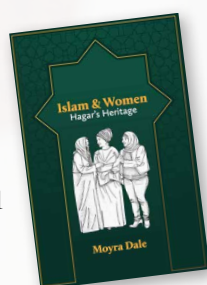
But this book is not exclusively for women. It is important for men who are in ministry with Muslims to appreciate that their experience of the Muslim world is less than half the story. This book will help Christian men understand what is happening in the gendered space that they have no exposure to. This is important because the men they are relating to have wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and many female relatives who they are continually relating to, care for deeply and who exert significant influence over them.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who interacts with Muslims or would like to understand Muslims better.



Islam and Women: Hagar's Heritage

Moyra Dale
Regnum Books 2021



Read more online...



To see Moyra Dale's video introductions to each chapter of her book, go to the Hagar's Heritage website, www.hagarsheritage.com/whats-inside

STORYTELLING RESOURCES

Here is a selection of resources recommended by some of the contributors to this *Checkpoint*.

Training courses:



'Story the Bible Online Comprehensive Course' from Wycliffe Australia.



'Storying the scriptures' from Christine Dillon's book (see below) *Telling the Gospel through Story*.



CMS MENTAC: immersive cross-cultural ministry training.

Book and article recommendations:

Dillon, Christine, 2012. *Telling the Gospel through Story: Evangelism That Keeps Hearers Wanting More*. (Downers Grove IL: IVP Books)

Guinness, Os, 2015. *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Books)

Other resources



The Mark Drama: a well-known dramatic presentation of Mark's gospel that has been used widely by CMS workers around the world.



The Big Brick Story: An Australian site featuring Lego Bible stories.



NIV Audio Bible: An alternate way to hear the Bible, read by David Suchet.



Kapur, Shekhar. 2009. *We are the stories we tell ourselves*. TEDIndia. This is a secular resource that has some relevant insights.

MISSIONARY spotlight



Read more here:



J
“As we sat looking at the sea, I searched for a segue into a gospel conversation. The best I could do was ask, “Do you know any stories about boats?” In broken English, she told me the story of Noah and how God rescued his family. I had been wondering whether the stories I had told made any sense to her, with her limited grasp of English. Not only had she understood the stories, but she had also remembered them weeks later! Even with the language barrier, God had been growing her understanding of Jesus through Bible stories.”

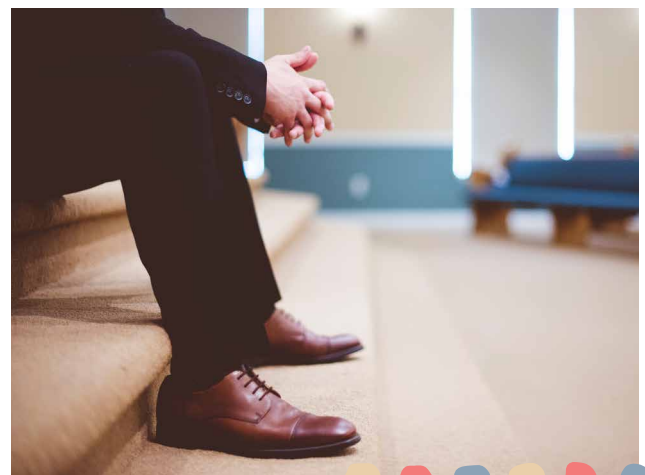


Read more here:



Caroline

“Before Bible storytelling was implemented by our colleagues, they had attempted a preaching ministry. But hearing a lengthy sermon at the end of a long, hard, working day was often too much for the men. Usually, they would fall asleep, no matter how hard they fought against exhaustion. Our colleagues noticed a huge change when they began Bible storytelling. The delivery style helped to keep the men engaged, and the word of God, written or spoken, is living, active and powerful to change hearts and minds. Believers who work as labourers are now being trained to use storytelling with their friends and roommates.”



PRAYER DIARY UPDATES



DAY 2: JUDITH CALF from CMS NSW & ACT begins final Home Assignment in June.



DAY 2: MARTY & KATRINA FELTHAM from CMS NSW & ACT have resigned as missionaries.



DAY 8: ANDREW & LIZ GLOVER, Short-Term Workers from CMS NSW & ACT have finished their ministry in Cambodia.



DAY 13: MICHAEL & RANI GRIVAS-ALLISON from CMS NSW & ACT welcome their son Alexi who was born 8 April.



DAY 18: RAY & SANDY from CMS NSW & ACT are serving as Short-Term Workers in an international church in the UAE.

GIVING *thanks* TO GOD



ALEC BAKER

Give thanks to God for the life and ministry of Alec Baker who died on 20 February 2022, aged 86. With his wife Deirdre,

Alec served as a missionary with CMS in Cyprus between 1993 and 2000. During their time in the Middle East, Alec worked as executive director of MEM (Middle East Media), streamlining the organisation's diverse media output and coordinating MEM's print and video ministries. He also had an active role in teaching and preaching at St Paul's Cathedral.

After seven years of ministry in the Middle East, Alec and Deirdre returned to Australia where Alec served as acting principal of St Andrew's Hall. The Bakers returned to the Middle East in 2001 as Short-Term Workers, serving in Egypt.

In his retirement, Alec continued his involvement in mission with CMS, participating in the CMS Victoria Branch Council as a member and chair. We pray for comfort for Deirdre and their children and the extended family.



SUZANNE AULT

We give thanks for the life and ministry of Suzanne Ault (formerly Morton) who died 26 April. Suzanne served with her husband

Russell Morton (died 2013) in Pakistan and Thailand at the Murree Christian School (MCS) 2001-2004. Russell served as director and Suzanne taught music and French.

On 5 August 2002, MCS was attacked by terrorists. Five members of the school staff, and one associate of the school were killed, and several others were injured.

The school was closed, and in September 2002 'MCS in exile' was set up at Thailand with the help of Chiang Mai International School.

Sue gathered poems and stories from teachers and pupils recounting their experience and thankfulness to God for his protection during that eventful day in August 2002. The result was a small book, *Angels in the Rafters*, published at the end of 2002.

Sue and Russell returned to Australia for final Home Assignment in 2004 for Russell to commence his new ministry as Registrar of the Diocese of Tasmania. Sue continued to serve CMS upon their return to Tasmania serving on the Branch Candidates Committee, Branch Council [Board], and on Federal Council.

Sue is survived by two children, multiple grandchildren and her second husband, Antony Ault.



CMS is a fellowship of Christian people and churches committed to global mission. We work together to set apart long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our vision is for *a world that knows Jesus*.

OUR MISSION



OUR DISTINCTIVES



BIBLE-BASED



GOSPEL PRIORITY



IN-DEPTH
TRAINING



LONG-TERM
FOCUS

Read the full CMS vision: cms.org.au/vision

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pray

Visit cms.org.au/get-involved/pray to find out more



care

Visit cms.org.au/get-involved/care to find out more



give

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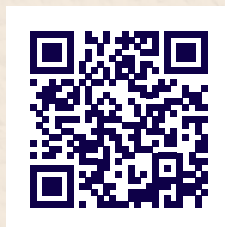
go

Visit cms.org.au/go or contact your local branch (see back page) to talk to someone about becoming a missionary.

JOIN US *in person!*

CMS events are happening again around the country.
Come along and reconnect with the fellowship!

Contact your local CMS branch or
visit our events page for more information.



cms.org.au/upcoming-events



CMS (Church Missionary Society) works with churches to set apart, equip and support long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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