

MORE THAN WORDS

DECEMBER 2016 - JANUARY 2017
MCI (P) 052/11/2016

The Bible As God's Story 2

What is Orality? 3

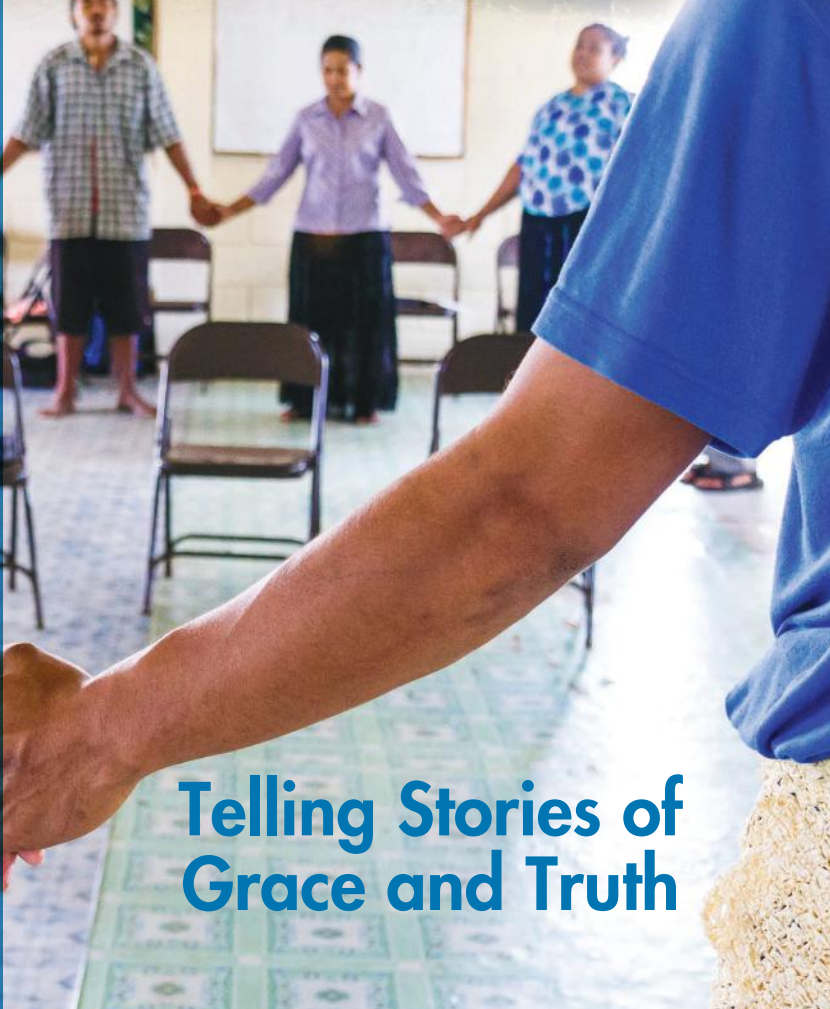
Let Me Tell You A Story 4

Word Alive in Weak
Vessels 6

Bible Storytelling
Workshop 8

Stories from Other
Countries 9

Adventures in Thailand -
Camp Wycliffe 10



Telling Stories of Grace and Truth

The Bible As God's Story

by Dr David Tan, Chief Editor



Have you ever wondered why the Bible is mainly narrative, poetry and prophecy? Or why Jesus used mainly parables in his teaching? Well, I have.

The Bible is essentially, God's Story. Often, people say that history is His Story as well.

Recently, I have discovered that people learn best through proverbs, stories, songs and drama. These people are oral learners, preferring non-print forms of communication. Some studies have shown that about 80% of the world, or 5.7 billion people, are oral learners. I am one of them and like many around me, it is the stories from a sermon that leave the most lasting impression on me.

For some time now, Wycliffe has realised the importance of orality. And so for many language projects, the translation of stories is often part of the plan to provide heart language Scripture and Scripture-based materials for unreached people groups, including songs and poetry using multi-media platforms. Stories and other oral forms of Scripture pave the way for the translated word of God to be more accessible to the people, leading to greater transformation of hearts and lives.

Therefore, Bible storytelling is the focus of this issue of *More Than Words*. "Let Me Tell You A Story" covers an interview with Marcus Choo who works with an oral storytelling team. I like his insight that "oral storytelling opens the door to hearts of people that might otherwise not want to read the written Word of God." In "Word Alive in Weak Vessels", we feature an interview with a former participant of a storying workshop held in Singapore. You will also find testimonies from other countries about the impact of telling Bible stories in their communities. Lastly, Elissa Low reflects on her time in Camp Wycliffe, a one-week cross-cultural experience held in Chiangmai, Thailand.

So, dig in and enjoy the stories!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Executive Director
Wycliffe Singapore

Chief Editor: David Tan

Editors: SW Leong, Dawn Wan, Josephine Tan and Adeline Koh

Photographers: Elyse Patten, Tim Scott, and members of Jubilee Church

Design: Leftfield Concepts

What is Orality?

In this issue, you will come across the terms “oral people” and “orality”. Here are some answers to questions you might have as you engage with the stories in this issue of *More Than Words*.

What is “Orality”?

“Orality” is concerned with the study of spoken communication and of people who learn mainly through oral communication. Such people are known as primary oral communicators.

What does it have to do with Bible translation?

Orality recognises the fact that millions of people communicate and learn primarily by oral means. It is a strategy intended to bring the stories and truths of Scripture to life in the minds and hearts of people, in a way that does not rely on written form. Bible translation is concerned with the accurate transmission of Biblical truth, in appropriate forms, in all the viable languages of the earth. Thus, when the discipline of good

exegesis (Bible interpretation) is applied to the oral approach, something like an “oral translation” of the Bible is possible for millions who might not otherwise have access in a way that speaks to their hearts.

Isn't literacy enough? Why don't we just teach everyone to read the Bible?

Even in societies where literacy has been introduced, many people are able to communicate much more effectively through

speech and hearing. Writing as a widespread means of communication is a more recent development in history, but it is not the most prevalent and preferred way of communication for millions of people.

Where can I learn to do this?

Don't miss the opportunity coming up in May 2017. Go to page 8 to find out about the next Bible Storytelling workshop in Singapore.

Helpful resources:

International Orality Network: <https://orality.net>

OneStory Partnership: <http://www.onestory.org>

Chronological Bible Storying:

<http://www.chronologicalbiblestorying.com>

story4all (resources and podcasts on storying): <http://story4all.com>

Faith Comes By Hearing: <http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com>

Audio Scripture Ministries: <http://www.asmtoday.org>

Storying the Scripture: <http://storyingthescriptures.com>

Bible Telling: <https://www.bibletelling.org>

(Adapted from Wycliffe Global Alliance website.)





Let Me Tell You A Story

- an interview with Marcus Choo, working with an oral storytelling team in Thailand

The red ball drops lower on the horizon, amidst clear skies with deepening blue hues tinged with burnt orange. Smells of dinner still hang in the air, a mix of spices, salty and tangy, mingling with oil. A few men sit on low stools. Wisps of pale grey smoke gently rise upwards from the ends of cigarettes. Some men chew betel nut, one spits, leaving a red stain on the ground. Some womenfolk laugh at a joke. Above the chatter, one voice says, “Who would like to hear a story?” A happy chorus of voices chime, “Let’s hear it!” And so, the storyteller begins a story on Jesus calming the storm.

Paving the Way

Oral storytelling opens the door to the hearts of people who may be unable or are not interested to read the written Word of God. To prepare the community to receive the Scriptures in their mother tongue, an orality team crafts Bible stories and tells them to communities so that they can become familiar with Jesus.

The Northern Thai Bible translation project is in an area with a fairly educated younger generation who has access to the public school system. However, the older folks struggle to read. Oral stories bridge this gap and give them access to God’s Word.

Bible Storytelling and Translation Go Hand in Hand

A Wycliffe Malaysia member, Marcus Choo, has worked in the orality project in Northern Thailand for the past five years. He was drawn to the potential

of storytelling and its efficacy in leading people to open their Bibles to discover more for themselves. The typical response after listening to a story on Jesus is that “Jesus is a good man”. This creates a conversational space to talk about who Jesus is. The oral story team complements the Bible translation team and presently, the Northern Thailand teams are looking forward to the publication of the translated New Testament. “Our hope is that the people are interested in things about Christ before they even receive the printed Bible.”

No Text Allowed

Different approaches are used in crafting stories from the Bible. After trying various approaches, Marcus’ team found that a group-crafting approach was most suitable for their context. The story crafters listen to the Bible story, with a general rule that “no text is to be read”. Instead, they rely on visualisation through pictures, role-plays, and simple props. A safe environment is established in the group and members help correct and refine one another’s stories. This also creates a more natural environment suitable for true oral learners.

One lesson learnt is to focus not only on the stories themselves, but also consider the storyteller and the audience. The storyteller may tell the story differently to different audiences. For example in a story told to children, word choice should be simpler. Good storytellers who know the story well are able to contextualise the story to the audience and through their storytelling are able to convey key terms such as grace, forgiveness and sin.

Raise awareness for Bible Storytelling

In Thailand, orality and storytelling are still unfamiliar to the local churches. Wycliffe Thailand has undertaken to raise awareness and champion Orality and Bible Storytelling. Groups who indicate interest are trained as storytellers and provided with story sets. Crafting stories is less popular but Wycliffe Thailand is ready and willing to train those who show interest.

So far, 20 stories in the Central Thai language have been developed, and the team is adapting the stories into Northern Thai. Besides these, there are several shorter story sets in Northern Thai: a seven story set on Joseph, a four story series on Jesus' ministry, and a few other stories that were done at Storytelling workshops.

Bible Storytelling Brings Change

On a personal level, Marcus finds it fulfilling to tell Bible stories. "It has contributed to my personal growth. This is one reason I went into this ministry. When we attended the workshop and participated in telling the Bible stories, we learnt so much! God's power is evident as He uses us - the storytellers, and the stories - to lead the listeners to Himself."

Marcus joins a storying fellowship group that was started two years ago, with many in that group from Wycliffe Thailand. They come together regularly to tell stories, and discuss the stories. At one of the meetings, someone commented, "Do you realise everyone who has come has been changed by the Bible stories?"

"I feel very encouraged. Everyone who has come has caught the vision. Most didn't feel confident at all at the start but now they are bringing it into other areas of their lives. They tell stories to their family and their children and at hospitals when they visit friends or relatives. Others are using stories in their church sermons and to lead Bible study groups. A Bible student invited the Wycliffe Thailand staff to help use a Bible Storytelling approach in evangelising at an event."

Bible Storytelling Inspires Participation

The feedback on the use of storytelling for Bible studies and sermons has been positive. "With storytelling, people are paying more attention. Lessons or sermons come alive! People can understand better and they feel that they are really learning. They don't feel like they are obligated to sit there to listen or that they are being 'preached to from above'. There is a genuine sense of being able to participate in the lesson itself."

At the end of telling a story, the work of the Holy Spirit is evident as people begin to voice what is on their hearts. One participant said, "I had not thought of that before." Another added, "This is what struck me..." and went on to share a spiritual truth that God had revealed to him. Confusion or difficulty in grappling with parts in the story leads to listeners bringing up and discussing issues. The possibilities are indeed endless.

Orality and storytelling are exciting because as Marcus puts it, "It is not just something that we learn, put aside and forget! Although the process does take time - about six to eight months of meeting together once a week - before we noticed changes in ourselves, we have become confident and courageous in sharing the good news!"

Just like the master storyteller, our Lord Jesus, who told parable after parable, we too can use stories with anyone we meet, so that barriers might be torn down and people can respond to God's truths as they listen to Bible stories. Let the people hear God's stories!



Bible Storytelling workshop held in Singapore in July.



“Bible Story training is unlike most other courses of study... Bible storytelling is a hands-on process that will engage your whole mind and body in the learning process.”
- Bible Storytelling Manual, CLAGI Manual, Version 3

Bible Storytelling workshop in session.

Word Alive in Weak Vessels

- a journey of one church discovering the strength of Bible Storytelling -

“Auntie, do you remember I called you the other day to say we’re coming? These are my friends and we’ve come to visit you.” Pastor Liau Nai Fwei greeted the elderly woman looking out from the safety of her gate. The woman broke into a warm smile as she recognised Pastor Nai Fwei, who had befriended her some weeks ago. She opened the gate to welcome the group into her flat. The team with Pastor Nai Fwei was from Jubilee Church. The woman, glad for some company, served them drinks and sat down to hear what they had to say.

“Christmas is in a few weeks’ time. We would like to share some stories with you so you understand what Christmas is all about.” Pastor Nai Fwei nodded at one of the ladies who had come with her. Taking the cue, the woman began her story about Mary, Joseph, and the birth of Jesus.

A Hard Beginning

For Pastor Nai Fwei, one of the pastors from Jubilee Church, this was one of two ways she tried to introduce Bible Storytelling. Together with four others, she attended the first Bible Storytelling workshop in Singapore, organised by Wycliffe Singapore in early October of 2012. However, it was not all plain sailing. Pastor Nai Fwei and her team wrestled with many problems that arose, learnt many precious lessons and gained new insights into people.

The workshop she attended stretched over four full days. “But we had no time to train our volunteers what we learned in the workshop! We only had six hours, two practices -- that’s all! There were five steps we learnt but we could only go through the first one,” she said ruefully.

To reach a group of about 40 Chinese young adults who wanted to learn English, church volunteers taught Bible Stories in English to them and asked them to repeat the stories. They did this

semester after semester but gradually the number fell until finally they were left with two people and sadly had to close the English programme.

No Longer Fearful

Even training the elderly people in church to tell stories on home visits in the neighbourhood was not easy. Pastor Nai Fwei said, “It was hard to teach Bible Stories to elderly people with failing memory. They tried to memorise the stories but unfortunately, after learning a story the previous week, they would have forgotten it by the time we met. We spent much time repeating the same stories or the same parts.”

Moving beyond the Christmas stories, Pastor Nai Fwei used Genesis 1 and 2 to help them learn to craft stories. “The elderly trainees left out a lot of details as they crafted the stories. Every one of them was about sixty years old. It was very tough on them. Furthermore, they were not able to read the Bible.” Yet they persevered.

What is seemingly weak in man's eyes could, however, be used of God. Armed with Christmas stories, the team visited elderly folks to explain the true meaning of Christmas. That Christmas visit opened up the heart of the woman to Jesus. With a smile on her face, Pastor Nai Fwei said, "A wonderful outcome was seeing that grandma come to the Lord and be baptised. Her husband was also baptised before he passed away. The team did not see him when they visited but the saving grace of God touched him through his wife and his son."

After the training sessions, the elderly women in Jubilee would go home to practise. Some shared with their grandchildren or neighbours. One of them took on a temporary job and began sharing the stories with her colleagues. She said, "I realise there is nothing to fear. I just tell stories. I don't have to 'convert' them." The other trainees told Pastor Nai Fwei, "I'm very happy because now I know how to tell stories." Pastor Nai Fwei later took them on a mission trip to Malaysia. She encouraged them, "Just as long as you can tell stories, just do it! Although the way they told stories was so unlike how I was trained, they managed to tell Bible stories!"

Unfortunately the elderly storytellers could not go beyond Genesis 2 as many hurdles cropped up. Eventually they stopped meeting due to other demands, health issues or deaths in the family.

Looking back, Pastor Nai Fwei said this experience has taught her to lower her

expectations of her trainees. "The participants at the first Bible Storytelling workshop were pastors, missionaries or people serving in Sunday Schools. My trainees were not like them. I could not set the bar too high. I tried a few times to replicate what I was taught, especially with the people from China. I asked them to do storyboarding. They found it helpful to draw the storyboard in visualising the stories but they would cut corners – like using only two frames to represent one story! I ended up drawing in other frames for them. Pastors and missionaries have read the Genesis story hundreds of time. They know those stories so well. My trainees did not."

Close study of Scripture

Fast forward to 2016.

Studies of Scripture have become lively discussions in Jubilee Church cell groups. Pastor Nai Fwei finds that many people tend to gloss over details or have a lively imagination that adds to the Biblical text. She decided to ask questions to provoke them into making keener observations based on Scripture.

Over the past few years, the cell groups studied 1 and 2 Peter and Romans. After that, the focus turned to Genesis, which includes the Creation Story, Abraham and Jacob. The study of the epistles meant that they could not use the Bible Storytelling approach but borrowed the principles of observation from there to help church members grow in their grasp of Scripture. "I would make them talk



This woman heard the Christmas story presented to her at her home. She has accepted the Lord and is baptised.



One of the zone cell groups studying the Jacob narratives.



This group is studying the Abraham narratives through Bible Storytelling.

about what they read. What did they see? What did people say in the text? Then they ask questions: What does this suffering that Peter talks about have to do with me?" From observation, they could move onto Bible-based personal applications. Thus we were able to implement the principles of the Bible Storytelling approach even to the epistles."

The road of Bible Storytelling as experienced by Jubilee Church has

been fraught with challenges. Yet we see the enabling hand of God through Pastor Nai Fwei's perseverance in using the approach and adapting it to her audience. Bible Storytelling has become a blessing to her church members, who are now much more able to grasp the truths as revealed by God and to share God's stories with others naturally as part of their lives.

Will you consider being trained for Bible Storytelling too?

Bible Storytelling Workshop

A Bible Storytelling workshop was held over two days in Singapore on 29 and 30 July. The lead trainer was from Wycliffe Australia, who invited several volunteer trainers from different churches in Australia to join him.

Without a script to learn from, participants had to listen to the trainers and tried to tell the Bible stories. One might be tempted to think the learners would just parrot their trainers but it was not so. Their distinctive personalities and styles were not squelched in the process!

A follow up storytelling training workshop will be held next year. The workshop will be held on the evening of 9 May, and from morning to late afternoon on 10 May (Vesak Day) and 13 May. In this workshop, the trainer will help participants craft stories and practise telling them. The lead trainer is bilingual in both English and Mandarin. The online registration will be ready in January 2017.

Please check our website: www.wycliffe.sg.



Stories from Other Countries

Bible storytelling is making its impact felt in many communities around the world. Here are two short testimonies from Tonga and Papua New Guinea, on how Bible storytelling has changed people. May you be encouraged to learn Bible storytelling and let God use you to reach others with His story.

(Source: Wycliffe Global Alliance website)



Storying Together

by Elyse Patten

Participants at a Bible storytelling workshop on the island of ‘Eua, in the Kingdom of Tonga, gather together for prayer at the close of the day. Learning to craft and internalise stories from the Bible to share with their neighbours, many of the participants also found the Bible stories touching their hearts. Sinita, a church leader, says that when she first came to the workshop she thought that telling Bible stories was, “Sunday school stuff.” But she now realises that it is about interpreting and sharing the Bible in a meaningful way. As another participant reflects, “Jesus is asking us to do what he did: tell Bible stories!”

“Please tell us more!”

by Tim Scott, Catherine Rivard, Janeen Michie
Papua New Guinea

Julie, her spoon hovering over a pot of simmering vegetables, paused in the middle of dinner preparations and straightened. The boys’ voices carried easily from the other room, and as she listened, one of the young men avidly described his entrance into local cult worship in Milne Bay province. The other Maiwala boys prodded him to learn more, and as he shared, Julie began to pray. Lord, how can I reach these boys?

Once dinner was ready, Julie invited the boys to join her. “But first, before we eat, I want to tell you a story.” And as they listened, Julie brought to life the Biblical story of the Israelite nation and their rebellion against God when they worshiped the golden calf. When she finished, the room was silent, and Julie, smiling a little, merely handed the boys their bowls and bid them eat.

Two weeks later, Julie heard that another group of boys had sought out their friend who was involved with the local cult to learn more, but he held up his hand. “I knew,” he admitted, “but I’ve decided to stop.” The other boys pressed him, but he shook his head and explained he had heard a story from the Bible about a golden calf. “The story is still in me; I can still remember [it]. When I go to do other things, I feel like God is speaking to me since I heard this story.”

He paused, then looked them straight in the eye, “I know that there are no other gods—just God himself.”



Adventures in Thailand - Camp Wycliffe

by Elissa

Elissa works at a university as a research staff member. David Tan, the Executive Director of Wycliffe Singapore, encouraged her to go to Camp Wycliffe, organised by Wycliffe Thailand. This is a one-week programme in Chiang Mai, Thailand that gives campers insight into Bible translation and literacy ministries, as well as a short cross-cultural exposure. Already keen on missions and excited to find out more through short-term mission trips, she agreed to go.

My time in Thailand has opened my eyes to the challenges of the mission field. On 22 May this year, I went with seven others from Singapore to Camp Wycliffe, a stay-in experiential programme run by Wycliffe Thailand, that gave me the opportunity to learn about myself, the work of missionaries and the needs on the field.

After landing in Chiang Mai, we met the rest of the campers coming from all over the world. It was time to make new friends! Icebreaker games created opportunities for us to know one another and gel as a team. To help prepare us for the two-day stay in the village, a Pwo Karen language teacher coached us in speaking basic phrases and demonstrating acceptable cultural behaviour. I had already been learning Thai on my own and enjoyed learning the Pwo Karen language of the village we were to visit.

Learning from a Bible Translator

From Chiang Mai, we headed to Omkoi where more preparation awaited us. During the four-hour van ride, we were treated to the hilly landscape of Thailand.

Pastor Daniel Jesudason, who served in Papua New Guinea from 1985 to 2003, spoke from his experience on Bible translation and literacy development. He and his wife had completed one translation and

revised another, so he understood the many challenges and joys of the ministry very well. He helped the campers think through critical issues such as the contextualisation of the gospel, syncretism and cross-cultural adaptation.

To better understand the world of missions, we played a simulation game. We were divided into two groups, one playing an unreached people group and the other, the missionaries who were meeting them for the first time. Growing up in church, I often hear about the need for missions, but this simulation brought a welcomed fresh perspective. I experienced the rawness and unfamiliarity of what it felt like to be on the mission field, albeit with much laughter!

Ministry and Cultural Adaptation

After a two-hour road trip up bumpy mountain roads, the likes of which we don't see in Singapore, we were rewarded with the cool mountain air of the village. We headed off in small groups to stay with different families in the Pwo Karen village. The hosts welcomed us warmly into their homes. I found it more difficult to learn the Pwo Karen language in the village, as our host family did not speak standard Thai. Such are the challenges on the mission field.



Presenting "Jesus calms the storm"

Our first night there, we held a special service in the local church. We sang a Pwo Karen song that we had learnt and presented a skit on Jesus calming the storm. As I watched the gathering of people from different countries and continents huddling together in a small building and singing praises to God, I felt like I had caught a tiny glimpse of the picture the Apostle John describes in Revelation 7:9-10, of people from every nation and tribe worshipping God in heaven.

On the second day, we got into two groups. One group ran a special programme of songs and games for the children. I was part of the construction group and we helped with the building of a kitchen for the local church. The work required brute strength as our jobs consisted mainly of carrying and lifting logs. Many hands and much effort went into the project. In some ways, this made me think of the hard work that goes into the building of a community and how we need different gifts from the Body of Christ. Translating the Bible, teaching people to read, discipleship, church planting and community development can only come about through the united efforts of many people.

Reflection

Stars filled the night sky, undimmed by city lights, as the campers sat together on the last night for a campfire. The beauty and quiet of the night brought to mind the need to listen for God's voice and not be distracted by other things.

REACHING 200 by 2025

By 2025, in partnership with the Singapore Church, Wycliffe Singapore will be engaged in 200 languages needing a Bible translation programme.

My Response

I would like to:

CONNECT with a Wycliffe representative

- to explore volunteer, short-term service or long-term service
- for other matters (please specify)

RECEIVE

- Wycliffe's updates on news and events
- Wycliffe's prayer bulletins

GIVE to

- Wycliffe General Fund
- Language Project Fund

Please make cheque payable to
"Wycliffe Bible Translators (S) Ltd" and mail to:
34 Craig Road, #B1-06/07
Chinatown Plaza
Singapore 089673

- Please check box and complete your contact particulars overleaf if you would like to receive future issues of *More Than Words* in pdf format via email only. Thank you for helping us be better stewards of our and the earth's resources.**



My Contact Particulars*

Name: Rev / Dr / Mr / Mrs / Mdm / Ms
(circle the appropriate title)

(please underline surname)

Church:

Address:

Postal Code: _____

Contact Nos:

M : _____

H : _____

O : _____

Email:

**By providing Wycliffe Singapore your contact particulars, you hereby consent to us storing your personal data in our secured database and using it to provide you with information, updates and reports on the ministry of Wycliffe Singapore and/or its related partners via post, email, text messages and other forms of communication, including but not restricted to social media. Wycliffe Singapore will not sell, share or release your personal data to third parties unless it is for the purpose of carrying out contracted services for Wycliffe Singapore under supervised or usage-controlled conditions.*

Although we had only spent two days at the village, we had experienced so much and shared with one another our reflections with thanksgiving and joy. Some shared that they had been greatly inspired by the stories told. Others affirmed that they would be faithful to God's calling. One camper said she used to think that anybody who became a missionary would die in the field — to which all the missionaries present protested loudly! This trip has left a deep impression on many of us. May the Lord continue to speak to each of us about how He wants us to serve Him.

As for me, this is but one small step towards the journey of seeking His will and obeying His Word.

Has Elissa's story got you thinking about Camp Wycliffe? Find out more about missions and your place in missions at the next camp, 21 to 27 May 2017. Call us at 62257477 or email Josephine Tan at jo_tan@wycliffe.sg.



This boy was one of the many children we met

More Than Words is distributed without charge by:
Wycliffe Bible Translators (S) Ltd
34 Craig Road #B1-06/07
Chinatown Plaza
Singapore 089673

Tel: 6225 7477

Fax: 6225 2289

Email: admin@wycliffe.sg

Website: www.wycliffe.sg

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Wycliffe-Singapore/138652679504589>

Printer: Oxford Graphic Printers Pte Ltd

