

SOWER

*Out of
darkness
in Pakistan*

AUTUMN 2019



**BIBLE
SOCIETY**

Living and working in God's house



A Bible verse came to mind as I was interviewing Barb Mathie, a supporter and team member of a Bible Society branch in New South Wales:

“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” Psalm 27:4 (NIV)

Barb lives on a half-hectare property, in Foxground on the NSW south coast, in a sustainable house that is a sanctuary for anyone who needs it.

Her journey to faith started at a Presbyterian church in Croydon Park in Sydney, where she took on the role of Sunday school teacher at age 15. When her family moved to Gerringong, south of Sydney, she became a superintendent of Sunday school. One weekend

after a women's convention at Stanwell Tops, south of Sydney someone asked her on the bus ride home whether she had given her life to Jesus. She realised that she hadn't but she wanted to!

From that moment on, she began to live and work for God. **After she started studying the Bible, it became an integral part of her life** and this led to her becoming involved with Bible Society. She says: “You cannot study the Bible without knowing how important it is.”

The Bible Society branch she is part of, Kiama,

Jamberoo, Gerringong, prefers to be known as an Action Group. That's because members love being active for Bible Society!

There are nine churches in Barb's area and each has a representative from the Action Group. This enables churches to be aware of events, and to be regular in their prayers.

The branch holds four main events each year: a Prayer Day, an annual general meeting in May, two coffee evenings in Kiama and Gerringong, which are hosted at different churches, and a youth night in November.

All members of the Action Group work to the same

goal of promoting Bible Society in their community.

The annual youth night is seen as an important way to connect with the four youth groups in the area, and to encourage young people to learn about the work of Bible Society.

“Youth have to be encouraged to become wonderful Bible Society supporters. We need to pass on the baton to them,” Barb says.

To celebrate the Bicentenary of Bible Society Australia in 2017, members of local youth groups formed the number 200 with their bodies on the sports oval.

Knowing the importance of her youthful training in setting her on the path of living and working for God, Barb hopes that Bible Society Australia will keep exploring ways to reach out to young people.

She would love to see Bible Society's successful Masterclass series for Christian high school students developed for use in a smaller format for youth leaders to share as a resource with their groups.

“God needs us to be his hands and his feet, so people can come into his kingdom. He will always give us the means to do that,” she says.

Joanne Pope

Dear friends,

The day after Valentine's Day this year, I noticed that a columnist writing in the *Australian Financial Review* began his piece about shenanigans in Canberra by citing words from 1 Corinthians 13. “Love, scripture reminds us,” he wrote, “is patient and kind.” He continued with the reference for a full paragraph, ending with “it keeps no record of wrongs”. It's nothing like politics, he concluded!

What struck me was how natural it sounded. There was no jarring religiosity about it, no sense of special pleading. It didn't sound like Bible-bashing. It just sounded like wise reflection with the ring of truth about it. I felt surprised, because that's not the way the Bible is usually dealt with in public. But it should be. Referring to the Bible in order to understand an issue, a story, an ethical dilemma or an experience, is like breathing for Christians. We want to know what God might have to say to us, so we turn to Scripture. We do it on Valentine's Day, Christmas Day, our birthday and every day.

I don't know anything about the journalist's own faith, but I love the idea that a natural part of any reporting might be to utilise the resources of the Bible on the subject. **We ought to see the Bible everywhere,**

as a conversation partner in the joys and struggles of life, both big and small.

We believe that the Bible is an everyday book, for everyone.

It contains the wisdom of the ages and fresh words for us every sunrise.

That's why we want to see it in everyone's hands, every person meaningfully engaged with the rich and rewarding words of life.

Thank you for sharing this vision and contributing to the task.



Dr Greg Clarke, CEO
Bible Society Australia



Words that are here to stay

Shabnam Gulzar is an unmarried Christian woman living in Faisalabad, the second-largest city in Pakistan's eastern province of Punjab. Having never attended school, she was illiterate but had to work to help feed her family and support her younger brothers' and sisters' education.

After five years working as a cleaner in a private school, Shabnam got the chance to join literacy classes at her local church, which were taught by her cousin.

Here she relates how these classes changed her life.

"I started studying after hours in the women's literacy class," she says. "During the last month of my class, one day my supervisor at my workplace asked me to check the attendance of other workers. I checked and signed on the register.

"From that day, our head assigned me as a supervisor of the sanitary workers. **Now my salary is up and status is up because of the education.** I am thankful for

the Pakistan Bible Society, donors and my church for providing me such an opportunity for upgrading my life status."

By becoming literate, Shabnam has gained a skill that can never be taken away. The literacy rate for women in Pakistan is one of the lowest in the world, largely due to the social structure that suppresses women's rights. Women's literacy rates vary from a modest 60+ per cent in the capital, Islamabad, to less than 20 per cent in some rural areas.

Christian women, who mostly live in these rural areas, are most likely to be illiterate. The sad reality is, many millions of Pakistani women are lacking this basic life skill, dramatically limiting their opportunities, and condemning them to shame, exploitation and poverty.

For 30 years, the Pakistan literacy programme, known as *Beacon of Light*, has been giving Christian women the opportunity to read and write at literacy classes organised by their local church. **The sad fact is that although these women have knowledge of God, their faith is not always well-grounded in Scripture.** Moreover, they live in a country where their Christian faith is not always welcomed, as the notorious blasphemy case of Christian woman Asia Bibi shows.

The name of the project derives from the belief that when a woman is taught to read and write, she becomes a beacon to illuminate her family and community with the word of God. Being equipped with reading and writing skills can have a profound impact. At an individual level, women will be able to come to a better understanding of their faith through reading the Bible. They will also be able to encourage their family in their faith, and

develop their Christian leadership.

At a household level, these women will be able to calculate any wages owed to them, read important documents such as medical instructions and utilities bills, and obtain better prices on household goods. They will also set a higher standard of education for their children, and may receive a greater level of respect from their husbands and extended family.

At a community level, having more highly educated women leads to many benefits, including the overall health and well-being of families, better employment conditions, and a more equal representation of women in leadership roles.

Equipping these women to read and manage the household budget and calculate their wages correctly strengthens Christian families, as the experience of Parveen shows. Parveen's mother died when she was young and she was too busy looking after her father and brother to be able to go to school.

"I used to get up early in the morning and cook breads [chapatis] for the family. My father and brother used to go out to plough the fields very early in the morning before the cock crows. I provide them breakfast in the



fields, which were about 3.5km away from my home. After I came back home, I prepared lunch and then dinner for the family.”

At the age of 22, Parveen married and moved in with her in-laws in a neighbouring village. She is now 39 and has a son and two daughters.

“I myself was fond of education in my childhood but due to the load of work for my family I could not go to school in my childhood ... I was very interested to read the Bible but could not because of the illiteracy. Now I am so glad that I can read the Bible. When I read the Bible with family, my children listen very carefully because I read slowly. When I make a mistake, my children laugh and enjoy it,” she says, covering her face with her hands in embarrassment.

Parveen also benefited from the introduction in 2018 of a new mathematics subject to enable students to calculate wages, expenditures and complete other household duties.

Parveen is glad that she can now calculate the accurate weight of the cotton plucked by the labouring women and pay them the correct wages.

Thanks to supporters like you, 36,000 Pakistani women have learned to read through this programme in the past five years.

In 2018, Pakistan Bible Society particularly focused on reaching women in the brick kiln factories, where the working conditions have been likened to slavery. Al Jazeera reports that female workers in the brick kilns have virtually no rights, with most not even possessing a national identity card (a basic government document).

In 2019, there are plans to reach 8000 more women through 350 centres in slums and villages of four provinces of Pakistan, including terrorist hot-spot K.P.K. (Khyber Pakhtoom Khawa), formerly called the North West Frontier, where life for women, even in Christian families, is very restricted. **Will you help Bible Society meet this challenge?**

\$41 teaches one Pakistani woman to read and opens up Scripture for her family.

\$77 provides eight literacy graduates with an Urdu New Testament each.

\$120 equips four rural blackboards and stationery.



GIVE NOW

Please call **1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537)**, use the donation form on the back page or visit **biblesociety.org.au/sowlight**

Devotion

Making room for growth

I once visited the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris at the end of winter. The garden beds had obviously been planted through the last part of winter with robust cabbage-like plants, but the last nip of cold weather had destroyed them. Their foliage was black and withered and the plants were either dead or very close to it. They weren't an attractive sight and I moved on rather quickly.

The next day I walked through the gardens again and found an army of gardeners at work clearing the dead plants and debris, turning the soil and fertilising the beds. Clearly, they were preparing the beds for a new season and the expectation of a harsh frozen winter turning into a fruitful sunny spring.

What was happening in the garden reminds me of Lent – that time before Easter when God invites us to prepare our lives for growth. It's an

opportunity to take stock, draw closer in our relationship with God, and clear out the things that distract us, burden us or hold us back from a more intimate connection with him.

On my last day in Paris, I walked through the gardens again and found a real transformation had taken place. The gardeners had planted thousands of small annual plants just waiting for the flower buds to open and burst into full bloom. I imagined how gorgeous the gardens would look when that happened – row upon row of tulips and other exotic bulbs, a riot of colour with not one plant out of place, not one gap or one too many. The garden beds were a product of great intent. They were no accident at all – someone had planned them precisely so that there was great symmetry, colour and coordination. I knew the result would be stunningly good.

In the same way, we need to

recognise that we don't grow closer to God by accident. It will only happen if we earnestly seek it. **The lead-up to Easter gives us an opportunity to clear out the debris of our lives, the distractions and the sin that separate us from fullness in God.** Once we've done that, we can intentionally make room for new growth in our Christian faith. We don't need to be miserable or mournful about our failures – rather, joyful that God in his grace meets us wherever we are and encourages us forward so that new things can grow in and through us. God can turn the frozen winter season that is in each of us into a fruitful spring. The turning point, according to American writer Patrick Morley, is when we stop seeking the gods we want and start seeking the God who is. I hope we will all be able to do that this Easter season! *Melissa Lipsett, COO, Bible Society*

Help take the pain away and replace it with joy

Narrative exposure therapy

George still remembers the horrendous day when he was walking to his mother's house and a shell fell and hit people. What most shocked the general secretary of Bible Society in Syria was the calm reaction of the crowd.

"Some were killed and some injured! Nobody was crying, nobody wailing and there were no hysterical people rushing out of their homes. Everybody was dealing with the injured and killed without emotions, just a matter of fact! I was shocked and said to

myself: 'What's happened to us?'"

It was this numbed reaction by a suffering people that led George to develop a plan to involve Syrian churches in helping locals overcome their trauma.

Today there are two Trauma Healing Programmes up and running. The project trains Syrian health workers to run healing groups in local churches, for all Syrians, regardless of religious affiliation. The sessions use narrative exposure therapy, which helps trauma victims to reprogramme their brains so that

they can remember traumatic events without reliving them.

As the war enters its ninth year, there is no one in Syria who isn't traumatised. Some families have young children so depressed they have tried to take their own lives. Others have run for their lives from snipers. Nearly all have lost at least one friend or family member. Millions are living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Most have a story of a bombing near their workplace or home.

One Syrian who lost his younger brother when a rocket

struck their home in Homs was not a Christian when he attended a trauma healing group and read the Bible for the first time.

"I still remember reading this verse saying, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

"I read it maybe 20 times and kept thinking how can he – Jesus – take our pain away and replace it with joy again?"

After a few sessions, the boy returned home and told his mother what had happened, then they read the Psalms together.

"The Psalms gave us both such a relief from our grief. I wanted my mum to feel what I felt when I poured my pain on to the cross of Jesus. I wanted my mum to be set free just the way I had been. That lesson was so great, but the forgiveness lesson was the hardest one. I cried a lot and finally felt like something came out of my heart; it felt like I was in captivity and now I am free to fly ... Now I am confident that our God is with me and giving me more capacity to help the desperate people around me by using his word."

Thank you for your past support for our Syria-related projects, such as literacy for young refugees last winter. Could you continue to help Syrians through this trauma healing project?

'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ...'
(Matthew 11:28)

Will you help bring healing to war-ravaged Syrians?

GIVE NOW

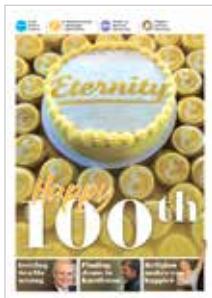
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Eternity scores its first century



John Sandeman, second from right, with the Eternity team.

Eternity, a monthly Christian newspaper published by Bible Society Australia, chalks up its 100th issue in March.



The paper is distributed free to churches of all denominations across the country. Here, we introduce Sower readers to its founder and editor, John Sandeman.

I come from a very strange family. I come from a family that was assembled from adopted boys and one natural daughter. I'm half Japanese, half American, brought up by British parents and I live in Australia.

What shaped me was having an adoption experience but also growing up in a very conservative – almost fundamentalist – church. It showed me how to accept contradictory thoughts in my head at the same time. That's the sort of person I am.

I was an incredibly shy child. I was the sort of child who found it hard to make friends at school. I would go home and just read book after book after book. We had a house with a huge garden and I spent lots of time in there, just playing with the neighbourhood kids.

I first trusted Jesus when I was about 12 and there was a movement – which sadly is not around so much these days –

called Christian Endeavour. And it was a movement encouraging kids to explore their own faith and that worked for me.

I studied architecture in Adelaide. I was involved in the EU – the Evangelical Union – which was a really wonderful experience. I was involved in the Australian Union of Students. And I ended up becoming the editor of *National Student*, which was a national paper.

I entered journalism and spent a huge chunk of my life working inside the grim great fortress that was Fairfax. I sent out a little newspaper about myself and Evan Whitton, who was a great editor of the *National Times*, interviewed me. And so I had a job with Fairfax

(as a writer to begin with) within a week of finishing my final-year exams.

I started as a writer then I became art director for the Sydney papers. So I was looking after the designers. In fact, I was part of inventing their idea of newspaper design and later information graphics. And I ran those teams for a long, long time, working on designing the papers, hiring, firing – quite a big staff – an exhausting job.

I ended up starting Eternity after Fairfax decided they didn't need my services, and it happened that I ended up with no mortgage and I could pre-pay my second child's school fees. So there I was mid-50s, able to have a new beginning.

And so I was sitting in what was then the Cafe Paradiso, outside the old Fairfax building in Darling Park, and talking to Rob Forsyth, then Anglican Bishop of South Sydney. He said to me: "You've got the ability to do something dangerous."

And I thought "I'm going to start a national Christian newspaper." It's a bit of a dream I'd had. And I could do everything on the paper. I could write, I could design it, I could lay it out and get it ready for print. A Christian guy, David

Maegraith, saw to the ads and I produced the paper, and that's how it started, right there on my kitchen table. And we very cheekily distributed to churches right around Australia.



After about a year and a half, along comes Bible Society and says "Hey, we'll actually pay you to do this work." David had moved on to other things and I was happy to become part of Bible Society, and it's been a great friend to *Eternity* ever since.

It was an initial success. I mean, the shocking thing about *Eternity* is that nobody had really done it before. And there were people who said "well, it's not possible." There'd been some attempts, but the secret formula to *Eternity* – there is a secret to *Eternity* which I can now reveal – is: scale.

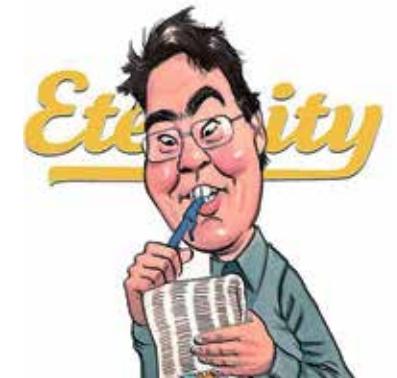
We gave it a target circulation of 100,000 and sent it out to lots and lots of churches. What we did was treat it like real media and do a wide-ranging circulation.

And now we've got a very, very professional website.

We've got people with a wide range of experience – a number of them with commercial news experience – working on the paper. So we're treating it seriously because Christianity deserves in media terms to be treated just as seriously as everything else. In fact, because it's true, it deserves to be treated more seriously.

I think we're newsier than other Christian media in Australia. Compared to other Christian media, *Eternity's* privileged to be broad. We've got a licence to talk to many types of Christians ... I have the feeling that I could declare it a success and hand it on to others.

It's robust enough not to need me. I mean, that's a fantastic indicator of success in journalism. I think it is. Every time we do an audience survey, it comes back the audience love it. That's wonderful.



Lives changed by the word



pixabay / StockSnap

A prisoner in Victoria felt so ashamed of being in jail again that he felt almost suicidal. When a chaplain came to him in prison and asked him how his family was, he broke down in tears, thoroughly ashamed of having left them to fend for themselves.

He says: “When she asked whether I believed in God, I told her I was pretty sceptical. She offered to get me a Bible and suggested I consider asking God to make himself known to me.

“That night, with a little trepidation, I did just that. My fiancée and I had a ritual where, if we were apart for some reason, we would say: ‘At such-and-such a time, look at your

palm and I will do the same’ and we would feel close to each other.”

When the chaplain gave the inmate a Bible the next day, along with a list of things to pray for, something leaped out at him.

He explains: “It had a picture of the palm of a hand with a Bible verse written on it: ‘See, I have not forgotten you, I have carved you onto the palm of my hand’ [Isaiah 49:16.]”

Stunned by the coincidence, he phoned his fiancée and told her about the Bible verse that reflected their special ritual with the palms of their hands.

“Was this God making himself known to me? We agreed I should spend more time reading

the Bible. I started to believe in God and became a follower of Jesus. **“As I read the Bible over the following months and learned to pray, I started to feel a peace inside I had never felt before.”**

However, he was not immune to setbacks. “Once, when I was feeling pretty low spirituality and wondered whether I’d ever again get a sign from God, a visiting pastor stood up and made a speech starting with Isaiah chapter 49, verse 16: ‘See, I have not forgotten you, I have carved you onto the palm of my hand.’ You could have knocked me down with a feather.”

Since that experience, this prisoner has continued to grow

as a follower of Jesus, coming to a much clearer understanding of salvation through Jesus by regularly attending church and completing a church-run prison programme.

“I can honestly say that, through God’s grace and intervention, I have changed my life,” says this prisoner – one of scores of people who testify to lives turned around by God’s living word.

Chaplains in frontline ministries such as prisons and hospitals can testify to the life-changing impact of bringing the word of God to people who are struggling and searching for meaning at a time of crisis in their lives.

Those who have lost their way in life have the time and motivation – often for the first time – to discover what the story of the Bible is and how it speaks to them in their situation.

Fr Tadros el-Bakhouni, who serves the Christian Orthodox inmates in correctional centres all over NSW, says **“The word of God is the strongest way to touch the human soul and help people change their lives.”**

“There was a non-Christian Irish inmate in his 50s, who noticed me around the jail – he was introduced to me by his cell

mate. The first moment I sat with him, he came with a very angry face and explained that he is very angry with himself because he committed triple murder and he cannot forgive himself. This made him all the time depressed and not coping at all.

“After a few sessions looking into the Bible to explain that **God ‘shed his blood on the cross not for the righteous but for the sinners,’** and explaining that the Lord made it clear that the healthy do not need a physician but the sick, he calmed down and **his heart was enlightened and he was baptised.**

“He felt great after baptism. The officers noticed the change in him. He is now added to the Bible reading and attending my service, doing Bible courses by correspondence while in jail.”

People in difficult places can feel overwhelmed when God is absent from their lives.

Will you help **bring people to Jesus through his word** in Australian hospitals, prisons, refugee communities, children’s camps, ESL groups, seafarers, drug and alcohol rehab groups – and this year, for the first time, graduates of the Alpha course which introduces people to Jesus?

“See, I have not forgotten you, I have carved you onto the palm of my hand.”
Isaiah 49:16.



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GIVE NOW

\$44 provides the life-changing word of God to four people who are seeking.

Please call 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537), use the donation form on the back page or visit biblesociety.org.au/sowchange

So desperate, they wrote it by hand

Across Indochina, Christians who belong to ethnic minority groups are looking forward to **receiving portions of the Bible in their heart language for the first time.**

In Vietnam and Cambodia, the Bunong ethnic minority have been waiting for a translation of the Bible for nearly 50 years. Informal translation began before the dominance of communism in the region, but all work was lost in the 1970s and stalled for four decades. **So desperate were they for Scripture, they took to copying portions of the Bible by hand.** In 2011, the United Bible Societies' Vietnam Partnership

began to translate the New Testament into Bunong, and the project has since been extended to a translation of the full Bible.

In Vietnam, Rut*, a 50-year-old man from an Eastern Cham village, has been reading the Bible in Vietnamese ever since he became a Christian 15 years ago, even though Cham is the language of his heart. "I am so excited to know that there is a translation team currently working on translating the Bible into the Cham language. **I can't wait to have the Bible in our own language.** My heart is already so touched to hear about it and I am so happy to have the New

Testament soon," says Rut.

It is estimated that among the Eastern Cham, only about five per cent are Christian. The majority are Hindu. When Rut became a Christian believer, his friends and neighbours stopped talking to him. **But eventually people saw how his life changed, and how God blessed his family.** Rut feels that he has been blessed because he follows God's word and God has been kind to him. He says, "Now, people want to be my friends again and they are coming to me for advice. I have a very strong desire to own a Cham Bible because I know that when I share God's living word with others,

they can experience God like I have been experiencing him."

Vietnam Bible Society's translation of the Bible into the Cham language is scheduled to be completed this year.

In a different part of Vietnam, as many as 70 per cent of the Stieng people have converted to Christianity, but they have very low literacy levels and no Bible to encourage them. There are hundreds of churches, but pastors report that they have to translate from a Vietnamese Bible in order to preach in their churches.

One pastor says, "When the Stieng tribe holds a Bible in their mother tongue in their

hands, that Bible will be more precious than a piece of gold."

Christians across Indochina are waiting to read the life-giving words of God in their heart language. Will you partner with us to bring the Bible to communities that have been waiting patiently for so long? *Name changed for personal security reasons.

Rut can't wait to have the Bible in the Cham language.



GIVE NOW

Please call **1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537)**, use the donation form on the back page or visit **biblesociety.org.au/sowheart**



Bounty of birthday blessings

On May 8, 2019, Bible Society Australia will commemorate 200 years of Bible work in Tasmania. Alan Harris, formerly the Bible Society State Director, has shared some stories from the period 1984 to 2011. As a birthday gift of praise to God, they are a snapshot in time. In Alan Harris' words, "They are a wonderful testimony of sacrificial giving."

Tas News, the state newsletter in summer 2003-2004, reported a woman winning a Westinghouse fridge in a ticket draw. After it was sold, God prompted her to give the money to three missions including Bible Society. In 1984, a supporter had allocated some money to pay for two trees to be removed. But when the trees fell by themselves in a storm, she sent the earmarked money to Bible Society as a thanksgiving gift.

In 2007, Mike and Janine Cranney, two supporters in Wynyard, central Sydney, combined their love of bikes and baking to raise funds for an annual Bike for Bibles event. Both husband and wife participated as a rider and support driver. As a bonus, when Janine won



Betty Owens with her apples

14 first and 14 second prizes for her baking, she sent the prize money and proceeds from all cake sales to Bike for Bibles. This Bicentenary year, the Bike for Bibles event on February 8-22 is raising funds to help women in Bangladesh learn to read.

Another supporter described receiving a Bible Society appeal letter and putting it aside, not intending to act on it. But a few days later, God prompted him to find the appeal letter so he could provide money to support it. He wrote a cheque to pay for a roll of paper for Bibles in China.

Then there was the story of Betty Owens selling apples at harvest time for the Bible Society. She would place the apples in baskets and sell to waiting

Janine and Mike Cranney



customers. She did this because the word of God was the "apple of her eye" and she wanted to share it with others.

In October 2008, in Orissa, India, hundreds of Christians were forced to renounce their religion to become Hindus. Many died rather than renounce their faith and thousands became homeless and churches were burned down. The Tasmanian Bible Society and its supporters, in partnership with Empart, provided Bibles for persecuted Christians in Orissa.

Sower magazine in 2011 printed a story about a woman called Babita, who had received a Bible the year before. During the conflict she had not converted to the Hindu religion. Her family lost their home and her Bible was taken from her. But God had not forgotten her. When Babita received a new Bible, her face lit up, she smiled, cried and praised God. Babita held the Bible close. She was so happy she could read it again. What had been forcibly taken had been returned as a blessing from supporters from Australia.

As you read these snapshot stories of the Tasmanian Bible Society and its supporters, please celebrate its Bicentenary by thanking and praising God!

Joanne Pope



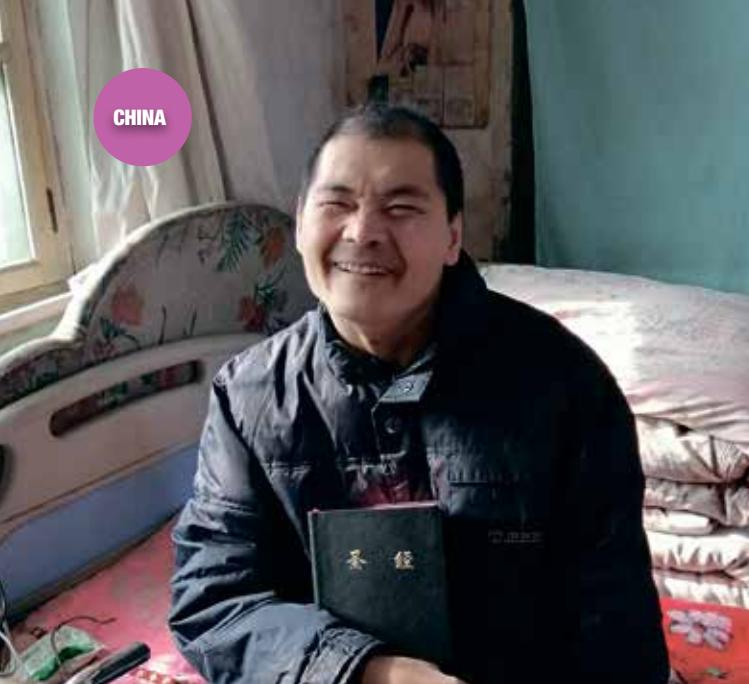
Trekking for Bibles

Are you up for a physical and fundraising challenge? Would you like to join a group of Bible Society supporters who are training for an unforgettable adventure, trekking the Great Wall? The four-day trek – which will involve clambering up restored and unrestored sections of the Great Wall – will require some arduous walking and climbing, but will provide amazing views of the mountains and valleys north of Beijing. After the walk, you will experience the contrasts of ancient and modern Beijing, including Tiananmen Square and the grand imperial architecture of the Forbidden City. Finally, you will visit Nanjing to hand out Bibles at a church and visit Amity Printing Press, where

millions of Bibles are printed each year, thanks to Bible Society supporters.

Best of all, you will be helping to provide Bibles to the exponentially growing church in China. Each participant is asked to raise \$3500 before flying out of Australia on September 21. The funds raised through Bible Society Australia's Great Wall of China Trek 2019 will help supply Bible paper to Amity Printing Press. These Bibles are sold or given away to those for whom the cost of a Bible would otherwise be a considerable financial burden. Participants will be able to witness first-hand, the impact their fundraising efforts will make.

Register by March 31: biblesociety.org.au/china-trek



Where you brought hope



CHINA

In China, there are still many Christians who do not have a copy of the Bible. Last year, thanks to donors from Bible Societies around the world, subsidised Bible paper was provided for 1,169,075 Protestant Bibles and 100,000 Catholic Bibles. Through your support of China Partnership, free Bibles were distributed in three provinces – 340 Protestant Bibles at Luhe (Jiangsu Province), 3620 at Shandong Province and 1000 at Hebei Province.

You also helped to provide Bible paper to the Catholic Church to print affordable Bibles. As well, 3000 Catholic Bibles and 1000 New Testament Diglot Bibles were distributed free in various Catholic dioceses. "Receiving the free Bible gives me the greater responsibility and duty to spread the gospel and it gives joy and encouragement to our hearts," commented Zhang Jianghua, age 39.

EGYPT

Thanks to your support of Egypt's adult literacy programme, Bible Society of Egypt has set an ambitious aim to teach at least

THANK YOU

60,000 Christians to read by 2020 and provide each of them with a Bible. This will require a doubling of the number of literacy classes run last year. The programme received a great boost after Emad Selim of Bible Society of Egypt had the chance to seek the endorsement of Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros at a meeting in April.

The Pope promised his ongoing support and in the next copy of the official church magazine he introduced the programme and included Emad's complete report in the article. This was more than Emad had hoped for and has led to a steady increase in numbers. In 2018, there were 2795 graduates, 12,000 students, 650 classes and 700 volunteer facilitators.

ISRAEL

It was a big year for the Arab-Israeli Bible Society, which works in difficult conditions to provide Bibles, resources and training to the local church whose members are a double minority – a minority among Jews and Muslims.

We are grateful for support from Bible Society Australia donors, which helped us hold: 23 workshops for women, eight for abused girls, 10 marriage

THANK YOU

enrichment workshops for couples, five conferences for families and women, two events for Mother's Day (1200 women attended), one Easter event for children, a December event for 100 women, a Christmas event that attracted 2000 people, and 11 Bible Summer Camps for children where 1200 Scriptures were distributed.

There were also activities for orphans and weekly discipleship (Bible study) for young women.

AUSTRALIA

We have been overwhelmed by your support for our remote and Indigenous projects. Thanks to you, several new resources have been published including Bible Engagement resources for children in the Northern Territory and a colouring book based on the Christmas story in both the Kriol and Kunwinjku languages.

As well, a translation of *God's Story for the Outback* was published in the language of Kaytetye. This is the first translated Scripture in this language. Please pray that these books will bless the children and their families in remote communities.

THANK YOU

BSA updates



Bibles for Bubs

Sweetie Mathew says her family has been greatly blessed by the Bibles for Bubs campaign. Sweetie was one of 2500 parents who registered their babies, born in 2017, for the Bible Society programme. This year, Bible Society is giving another 2500 children, born in 2018, the chance to engage with God's word. While Sweetie registered her baby Eva, it was her toddler Anaia, then aged three, who really benefited from the programme. "This Toddler Bible is not like the other Bibles - it's very simple to read and simple to understand. I found it was really relatable to the toddler age," says Sweetie. "It's been such a big blessing because she knows all the stories now and ... when we get halfway through she recites it back to us."



Richard Johnson talk



The Western world is seeing a collapse in people's faith in institutions, democracy and even each other. Societies are fractured; political norms upended. Polarising debates centre on issues of identity, values and belonging, and tribal voices muzzle the notion of a common good. In the 2019 Richard Johnson Lectures held this month in Melbourne and Sydney, Tim Dixon offered a vision for how we might reunite increasingly fragmented societies. Tim Dixon is a former economic adviser to two Australian prime ministers. He also has helped grow social movement organisations that have worked to protect civilians in Syria and address modern day slavery. The Richard Johnson Lectures are annual events hosted by the Centre for Public Christianity.

BSA Diary

Thank you events*

Enquiries: events@biblesociety.org.au
Rhiannon on 0417 467 076

April 2	Gold Coast, QLD
April 3	Capalaba, QLD
April 9	Wollongong, NSW
April 10	Shellharbour, NSW
May 7-8	Canberra, ACT
May 14	Toowoomba, QLD
May 15	Springfield Lakes, QLD
May 16	Caboolture, QLD
May 21	Campbelltown, NSW
May 22	Liverpool, NSW

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
Philippians 1:3-6

Melbourne Bike for Bibles

Enquiries: bfb@biblesociety.org.au

March 30-31	Around the Bay, VIC
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See the full list at biblesociety.org.au/events or call Bible Society on 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537)

*Thank you events are an opportunity for us to meet our faithful supporters and to say "Thank you" over a light luncheon or morning/afternoon tea. You will hear the latest mission stories from Australia and around the world and have an opportunity to share your own stories about being part of Bible Society over the years. Please contact us if you would like to attend one of these free events.

Prayer points

April-June

April 7-13

Australia - Remote and Indigenous: Pray that there will be many more translations of Scripture into Aboriginal and Torres Strait languages as a result of the new Diploma of Bible Translation Course run at Nungalinga Aboriginal Theological College.

South Africa: Please pray that the English Bible for the Deaf, to be published this year, will be a blessing in the lives of Deaf readers. Pray for the planning of the celebration of our Bicentenary in 2020.

April 14-20

Pakistan: Pray for the women's literacy project that is reaching into new areas. Pray that God will bless the women as they learn to read the Bible and for the improvement of their social standing in society.

Australia - Publishing: We have a couple of great new books that tell fabulous stories of people following Jesus. Please pray that we do a good job of publishing and promoting these titles.

April 21-27

Germany: Please pray for completion of the translation of the Old Testament of the Basic Bible this year. Ask God for the Basic Bible to be published for the first time in 2020 as a full Bible.

Angola: Pray that we will be able to buy a warehouse to store Bibles, in addition to some well-located land for our future facilities.

April 28-May 4

Australia - Missions: Praise God that we have another opportunity to reach children in Australia,

this time through *The Seriously Surprising Story* (about Easter). Pray that this little book will touch many hearts with the real meaning of Easter.

Bangladesh: Please pray that the Adivasi (indigenous peoples) can read the Holy Bible in their own languages. Ask for the Rohingya (nationals of Myanmar) who are living as refugees in Bangladesh and facing many difficulties. May God help the Rohingya to overcome them.

May 5-11

Australia - Tasmania: The first Tasmanian Bible Society auxiliary was established on May 8, 1819. Praise God for the many supporters and staff who have been part of the work over two centuries.

International: May 9 is the United Bible Societies World Day of Prayer. Please pray for the Bible cause around the world, especially in countries where Christianity faces opposition.

May 12-18

Uganda: Pray for Bible Society of Uganda as it begins revision of the Bible into Ateso language. Pray for God's guidance and accuracy for the translation team as they work on the project.

Brazil: Please thank God for the success of the 2nd Year of the Bible in Brazil, which was celebrated across the country by churches throughout 2018. Pray that the new Brazilian government installed in January is guided by the hands of the Lord.

May 19-25

South Pacific: A great need identified by churches in the Pacific is provision of scriptural materials and training to help church workers understand the Bible in depth so that they may correctly teach the word. Please pray that programmes can be implemented to meet this need.

Singapore: This year we will begin implementing our new five-year plan. One of our main priorities is developing our digital presence so that the Bible Society of Singapore will be accessible to everyone wherever they are.

May 26-June 1

Australia - Church relations: Praise God for the city-wide Hymnfest that is to be hosted by the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Wahroonga, in Sydney's north, and for continued strong relationships with the SDA church.

Colombia: Ask for lasting peace with the new agreement between the government and the largest insurgent group in Colombia. Pray for the strengthening of the Christian faith in the country.

June 2-8

Indonesia: Pray for Bible distribution through major distributors, so that we can reach all the regions of the country, including small towns and even villages. Ask for the publication of the Rote Bible, in early 2019, and for the Yali Nania Bible, in late 2019.

Greece: Please pray for the 200th anniversary of the Ionian Bible Society in Corfu, the first Bible Society in our country, to be celebrated on June 19.

June 9-15

Australia - Mission: Praise God for the Ignition events that have been funded to share the love of Jesus with young people. Pray that this initiative will bring the gospel to many youth across Australia.

Albania: Pray for the publication of the new translation of the Old Testament and the full Bible into Albanian for the first time based on the originals. Ask for the beginning of the New Testament translation into Gheg Albanian and financial support for translation of the Septuagint.

June 16-22

Syria: Last Christmas and this Easter will see some of the biggest distributions of Scriptures that Bible Society Syria has ever undertaken. Ask God to bless each recipient with a revelation of himself and that these resources may be used to bring many into a relationship with Christ.

Malaysia: Please pray for the sale, delivery and distribution of Arabic/English bilingual Bibles for migrant ministry. Thank God for the Bahasa Malaysia formal translation of the Bible and Wisdom books. Pray for a smooth process with printing and distribution.

June 23-29

Vietnam: Ask for development of several projects for the hard of hearing, illiterate people and ethnic minorities. Pray also for our relationship with the churches in the country.

Namibia: Please pray for the work of the Bible Society in a very volatile economy. Pray for funds for the translation of the new Bible into Oshiwambo and other fund-raising initiatives.

June 30-July 6

New Zealand: Praise God for the impact *The Field Guide to the Bible* is having on youth. Pray others will discover this resource and be encouraged to engage with the Bible. Pray also for the Maori and Tokelauan translations being done locally. The very first Tokelauan Bible should go to print in 2019.

Peru: Pray for the "Bread of Life" and "End to Violence" projects, so that children can grow up healthy, safe and knowing the Bible. Ask for the translations into Machiguenga and Quechua Apurimac. Pray also for the evangelisation and discipleship initiatives carried out with churches, which help to reduce violence and corruption.



The Rugged Cross

By Tess Delbridge
Writer and editor

Week One

APR 7 – APR 13

SUN 7 Luke 1:16-17
MON 8 Luke 1:76-77
TUE 9 Luke 3:16-17
WED 10 Luke 1:30-32
THUR 11 Matt 3:16-17
FRI 12 Matt 16:15-16
SAT 13 Matt 16:21-23

Week Two

APR 14 – APR 21

SUN 14 Matt 20:17-19
MON 15 Matt 26:38-39
TUE 16 Luke 23:20-23
WED 17 Luke 23:39-43
THUR 18 Matt 28:5-6
FRI 19 Luke 24:39
SAT 20 Luke 24:46-47
SUN 21 1 Cor 15:12-14

Easter is the crowning event of the Christian calendar, when we remember our precious Lord Jesus who stepped in to secure forgiveness and life for everyone who trusts in him. Together with millions of other Christians this Easter, let's remember with thankfulness Christ's great sacrifice for us.



Follow: Experiencing Life with Jesus

By Graeme Anderson
Senior pastor, Northside Baptist

Week Three

APR 22 – APR 28

MON 22 Matt 4:18-20
TUE 23 Matt 5:1-3
WED 24 Matt 5:13
THUR 25 Matt 5:14-16
FRI 26 Matt 5:20
SAT 27 Matt 5:21-22
SUN 28 Matt 5:43-44

Week Four

APR 29 – MAY 5

MON 29 Matt 6:1
TUE 30 Matt 6:9-10
WED 1 Matt 6:19-20
THUR 2 Matt 6:25-27
FRI 3 Matt 7:1-2
SAT 4 Matt 7:24-25
SUN 5 Matt 11:28-30

Unless we are confident that Jesus invites us towards the best way to live, we're not going to take time to learn from him all of life - which includes death. We may learn techniques for good behaviour and "right" living, but we will not experience deep, lasting, whole-of-life change. This series focuses on the greatest 15 minutes of teaching of all time - the Sermon on the Mount. What is the life Jesus is inviting us towards, and what does it look like to follow him?



Famous Last Words

By Richard Condie
Anglican Bishop of Tasmania

Week Five

MAY 6 – MAY 12

MON 6 John 14:1-3
TUE 7 John 14:5-7
WED 8 John 14:8-10
THUR 9 John 14:15-17
FRI 10 John 14:18-21
SAT 11 John 14:22-24
SUN 12 John 14:27-29

Week Six

MAY 13 – MAY 19

MON 13 John 15:1-4
TUE 14 John 15: 8-11
WED 15 John 15: 12-15
THUR 16 John 15:18-20
FRI 17 John 16:7-11
SAT 18 John 16:19-20
SUN 19 John 16:32-33

What were Jesus' last words? Not the words from the cross but the last words he taught his disciples? These are found in John 14-16. These famous last words are filled with encouragement and challenge for how we live the Christian life. They continue to guide, guard and inspire his disciples today. Over these two weeks, my prayer is that Jesus' last words will be left ringing in your ears.



Our Work as Worship

By Kara Martin
Author and lecturer

Week Seven

MAY 20 – MAY 26

MON 20 Gen 1:26-28
TUE 21 Gen 2:15, 19-20
WED 22 Gen 3:17-19
THUR 23 Gen 11:3-5
FRI 24 Luke 4:18-19, 21
SAT 25 Eph 2:8-10
SUN 26 Col 3:17, 22-23

Week Eight

MAY 27 – JUNE 2

MON 27 Gen 2:1-3
TUE 28 Gal 5:22-23
WED 29 Matt 5:13-16
THUR 30 Ps 46:1-2, 10
FRI 31 John 1:14, 18
SAT 1 Exod 31:1-5
SUN 2 Mic 6:8, 10-11

If we think of work as anything we do with intent or purpose, then it is the most significant activity in our lives. This makes sense if we look through Genesis 1-2 and see that work is the first command we receive from God. We were created to work with God in stewarding his creation. In this series we will look at different dimensions of our work in light of God's word.



A Funny Thing Happened Along the Way in Israel

By Catrina Henderson
Pastor, Hillsong Israel

Week Nine

JUNE 3 – JUNE 9

MON 3 John 14:6; Matt 4:19
TUE 4 Exod 3:7-8
WED 5 Exod 3:1-2
THUR 6 Exod 13:21-22
FRI 7 Exod 14:13-14
SAT 8 Exod 14:15-16
SUN 9 Exod 7:16

Week Ten

JUNE 10 – JUNE 16

MON 10 Exod 13:17; 23:30
TUE 11 John 4:50-53
WED 12 Exod 16:21
THUR 13 Hos 2:14
FRI 14 Exod 35:29
SAT 15 Josh 3: 5
SUN 16 Josh 5:12

The early disciples of Jesus were called followers of The Way before they were ever known as Christians. This tells us that Christianity is meant to be a journey, a daily walk, a way to walk rather than a religious institution or set of behaviours to try to perfect. This study looking at Israel's journey from slavery to freedom is designed to simply help you journey with God and discover great things along The Way.



We know you love reading the Bible. If you would like to engage in our full Bible devotional series, why not sign up to receive our Daily Bible emails? Each morning in your inbox you will receive commentary on each day's reading along with a question to ponder and a prayer point.

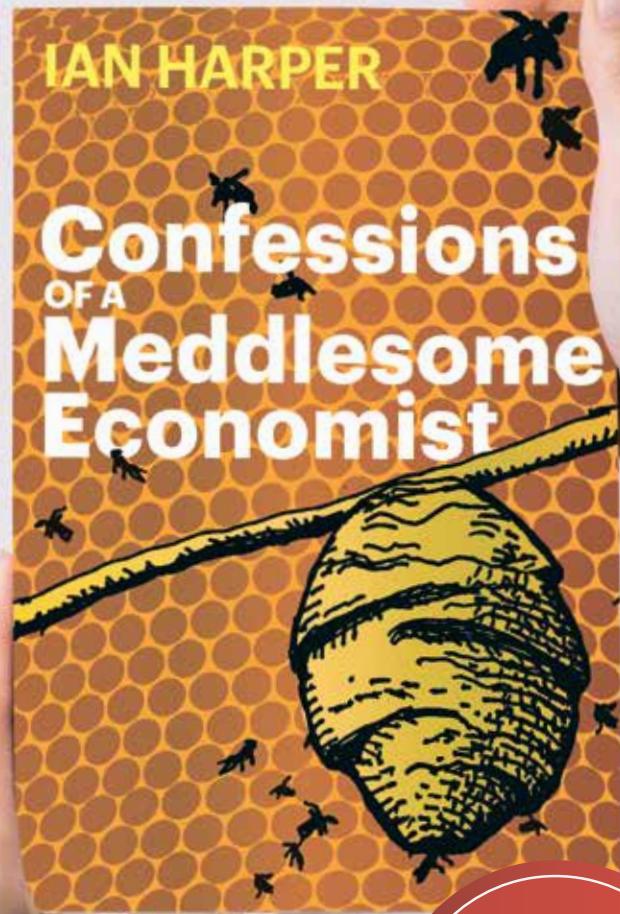
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“I pray that this book will help people to appreciate the power of economics to help us lead more prosperous and fulfilling lives, but also to understand the limitations of economics in helping us to comprehend what life is ultimately all about.”

Ian Harper

AUTHOR,
DEAN OF THE MELBOURNE BUSINESS SCHOOL,
AND A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF THE
RESERVE BANK OF AUSTRALIA



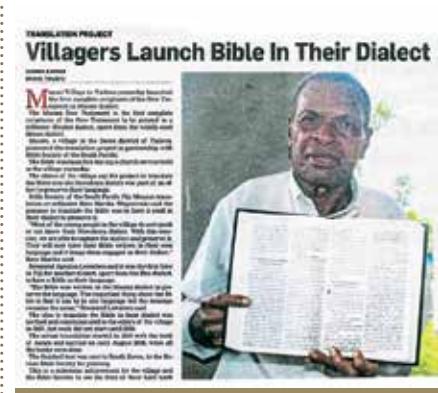
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Bible Societies around the world



Crossing barriers

A new Turkish-Bulgarian bilingual of the New Testament is mainly targeted at the Turkish (mostly Muslim) minority in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian minority in Turkey. A joint initiative of the Bible Societies of Bulgaria and Turkey, it took two years to complete. “May it be a blessing to our two nations,” said Rady Apostolov, executive secretary of Bible Society in Bulgaria, and Tamar Karasu, executive secretary of Bible Society in Turkey.



Fijian milestone

Maumi Village in Tailevu, a district of Fiji, has launched the first complete Scriptures of the New Testament in Maumi dialect, of which there are just 500 speakers. The project was part of an effort to capture and preserve the language and keep the young people in the village engaged in their dialect. This is a milestone achievement for the village and for the Bible Society of the South Pacific, having taken eight years from 2010 to 2018.



Easter Island NT

“This is the most beautiful day of my life because we, the Rapa Nui people, have met the word of God in our language,” Maria Ipacapararat said. Watched over by Easter Island’s iconic monumental statues, called moai, Maria joined in last October’s celebrations to welcome the first New Testament in Rapa Nui. The translation work was undertaken by Robert and Nancy Weber of SIL International, who arrived on the island 40 years ago.



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Bible Society Australia is a not-for-profit interdenominational organisation. It’s a member of the United Bible Societies, a fellowship of 154 organisations working in more than 200 countries. Our mission is to achieve the widest possible effective and meaningful distribution of the Bible; also to help people interact with it and to have their hearts lightened by the Bible’s message of unconditional love in Jesus Christ.

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You can also donate online at www.biblesociety.org.au or by phone on **1300 BIBLES** or (1300 242 537).

If these appeals are oversubscribed or a project changes due to unforeseen reasons, we will reallocate remaining funds to similar projects.

*Receipts for tax-deductible donations of \$2 or more will be issued by the trustee for Bible Society Foundation. ABN 41 725 839 724



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