



Women gathering for Bible Society's literacy programme in October 2015.



FOR ANTHONY IN PAKISTAN, and for many more of my colleagues around the world, sharing the Bible is becoming increasingly more difficult and dangerous. As we embark on another year of offering the Bible to the world let's keep praying for these amazing Bible Society staff members who, despite the risks, continue to share the Bible with their neighbours and countries. They are inspirational!

Also in this issue we're looking at education – both in UK schools and literacy classes around the world. Let's give thanks for the Bible being encountered and lives being changed through teaching.

Thank you for your committed support. Because you stand with us in our work we are able to support and stand with Anthony and others as they share the Bible in their own countries.

John Ranford
Bible a Month Co-ordinator



Photo © Bible Society



Anthony Lamuel: General Secretary of the Pakistan Bible Society

THE ATMOSPHERE IN PAKISTAN IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT NOW from when I was growing up. When I was a student, I used to set up a stall on street corners and distribute Scripture booklets. Now, I don't. At the back of my mind, there's a fear that never was there in the past.

Let me give you an idea of what it's like to be a Christian here. Imagine coming to our bookshop and office, on a busy main street in Lahore. As you arrive, you'll notice the giant concrete barrier

filled with earth. It's there to prevent terrorists driving into the building. Then you'll see the armed guards. You might catch sight of one of the 16 CCTV cameras round the building before you show your ID card and enter through our whole-body scanner.

Inside, our bookshop is always full. Ironically, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism has led to many moderate Muslims becoming disillusioned – and there's a lot of curiosity to know what the Bible says.



Bible Society in focus



MORE STORIES FOR OPEN THE BOOK

Two thirds of children across England and Wales don't engage with the Bible on a regular basis. Bible Society's Open the Book is working hard to bring about this change.

Every week, thousands of volunteers go into 2,231 primary schools around England and Wales where they act out Bible stories in assemblies. Using drama, mime, props, and costumes the Bible is explored in lively hands-on ways.

Open the Book has followed a three year programme. The first year consists of 33 stories starting with creation and finishing at Jesus' ascension. The second and third years contain sets of themed stories, such as meals and children, taken from both the Old and New Testament.

But this year Open the Book is introducing a fourth year of stories, looking at Christian values through Jesus' life, parables and other Bible stories.

There are currently an incredible 12,588 volunteers in England and Wales. But there are thousands of schools who still don't have any storytellers. Could you open the Bible for children in your local area? If you're interested in joining or starting an Open the Book team then please get in touch. You can call us on 01793 418222, or you can find more information at openthebook.net.

'When you act the Bible, it splashes a little bit more colour on it. It doesn't seem as boring.' Thomas, 11



We also have a wonderful Bible museum, which many school children come to visit.

Bible Society in Pakistan is a very highly-regarded and respected organisation. That's why we're more exposed. But all Christians are wary these days. Church members carry guns to Sunday services and arrive from three or four different routes.

But, I say to my staff, in the forest the small rabbit also lives. He doesn't stay in his hole all the time, and despite the risks of doing Christian work in Pakistan today, we must not hide. We live with this situation.

Recently, I was in a place called Cholistan, where I met some women who'd been through our Bible-based literacy programme. They were cotton-pickers; they spend their days in the field picking cotton and placing it in a basket on their backs. At the end of the day, the men who run the farm weigh their baskets and pay them accordingly.

When I visited, the women were celebrating a small victory. For the first



In Pakistan three out of five women can't read.

time, they'd received a fair payment for their work. Since they learned to read numbers on the weighing scales, they realised the men were cheating them by paying them for three or four kilos below what they actually collected.

I told the women, 'This is possible because Christians in the UK are concerned for you to have this opportunity to read, so that you can place the Word of God at the heart of your family.' When I said this, they clapped – and I pass on their thanks to you.

ABLI IN MALAWI

Some 150 church, government and civil society leaders from 20 countries met in Malawi recently. They were part of the African Biblical Leadership Initiative (ABLI), a Bible Society-run event. Its aim is to enable Africans to discuss the key issues facing the continent.

This year, the event's fifth, focused on corruption, migration and the recent peace agreement in war-torn South Sudan.

Three government ministers from the world's youngest nation, from both sides of the bloody divide, attended the event.

South Sudanese government minister Paul Bonju said that he had 'been afraid' of meeting opposition members of parliament at the event. But he believed because of the meeting 'peace could be created' in South Sudan.

Currently some three million people are fleeing wars in South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria, as well as oppressive regimes such as that in Eritrea.

In a closing statement, Lord Paul Boateng, the forum's moderator said, 'We appeal to all African societies to welcome the strangers in their midst, particularly migrants and refugees fleeing persecution.'

'Equally, we challenge the oppressive regimes of this continent to respect the right to life, the rule of law, freedom of belief and freedom of speech.'

David Smith, Head of International Programme for Bible Society called on Christians in England and Wales to pray for peace in South Sudan.

'Pray for true peace,' he said. 'A peace agreement has been signed, but with tens of thousands dead and millions displaced, for South Sudan to find peace a huge amount of repentance, forgiveness, justice and healing is needed.'



Joanna Williamson asks guests to exchange an item with a neighbour.

Bible a month

February 2016

Thank you for helping others to encounter the Bible.

PAKISTAN

Photo © Bible Society of Pakistan



Thousands of women in Pakistan who are learning to read and write through the literacy programme.

PAKISTAN HAS ONE OF THE LOWEST LITERACY RATES IN THE WORLD: three out of five women can't read. Girls born into rural families rarely go to school. Many are married at 13 or 14, and by 20 they'll have a couple of children. They might become labourers in Pakistan's vast textile industry, or cleaners in the home of a wealthy family.

That's why, in 2014, we set up a literacy programme which

focused on teaching women to read. Recently, the first 4,000 women graduated and thousands more have signed up for lessons this year.

The impact of becoming literate can be life-changing. Women are able to trade better, help children with their homework, and their self-esteem is raised. Critically, they are able to read God's Word – which is a great encouragement in a culture where 97% of the population is Muslim. Many women who've been to our classes say they now read Scripture to their families every evening.

Anthony Lamuel, who leads our work in Pakistan, added, 'Women are central to the family in Pakistan. As mothers and wives, they have a big influence. If you reach one woman with the Bible, you reach everyone else who lives in her household.'

PRAYER POINTERS

- In Anthony's words: 'The Bible speaks for itself. So pray that, as these women read God's Word, they will be blessed. Pray that churches will encourage newly-literate women to grow in their faith. Pray the women will enjoy the Bible.'
- Give thanks that the cotton-pickers in Cholistan now receive fair payment for their work, as a result of becoming literate. Give thanks that this programme improves people's lives in significant ways, as well as giving them access to the Bible for the first time.
- For God's protection over Anthony and his team. Churches have come under attack in Pakistan in recent years, and Christians are fearful. Pray for courage, safety and wisdom for our staff, and give thanks for their selfless commitment to this mission.
- For our other key project in Pakistan; a Christian youth sports tournament, which draws thousands of young people every year. Scripture booklets are distributed to participants, who compete in multi-faith teams at cricket, football and basketball.

To discover other ways in which we offer the Bible to the world visit biblesociety.org.uk

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March 2016

Thank you for your faithful prayers.

CHINA

Photo © Bible Society of China



Next year we hope to reach 30,000 Christians across rural China.

CHINA'S CHRISTIAN POPULATION IS OFFICIALLY ESTIMATED AS BEING 40 MILLION, with unofficial estimates reaching 100 million.

This phenomenal growth of the Church in China is amazing. However, many people – particularly those in rural areas – do not have a high enough level of education to be able to read the Bible. In fact, around 60% of the Christian population in Henan province alone is illiterate, and most of these are women.

Bible Society's China Partnership is working to meet this need, and seeks to provide literacy classes for over 30,000 people across rural China in the next year.

Zhang, a teacher at a Bible Society literacy class, says that although the improvement in her students' reading and writing is positive, 'it was the fact that they have a better understanding of the Bible that encouraged me.'

Thanks to your support, thousands of people across China have access to these Bible literacy classes, which provide people in rural areas with the knowledge and understanding they need to grow in their faith.

Li Fenglian, a student at a Bible Society literacy class says, 'I am overjoyed that I am able to read and write now after attending the class. Thank God for this Scripture literacy class!'

PRAYER POINTERS

- Give thanks for continued church growth in China. Pray for the thousands of rural Christians who cannot read the Bible due to illiteracy.
- Give thanks for Zhang's encouraging class. Pray that teachers like her would continue to be motivated to teach, and would persevere.
- Give thanks for the fact that people are able to come along and learn to read the Bible. Pray the students would learn quickly, and would be able to understand the Bible better.
- Pray the authorities would approve of this initiative and others like it, so that more rural Chinese Christians can experience Scripture for themselves.
- Pray for a good working relationship between the churches and the Provincial Christian Council, and that the literacy classes would continue to be run well.

Bible a month

February 2016

'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'
John 8.32 (CEV)

PAKISTAN FACTFILE



Area: 796,095 sq km approx. 3 x larger than UK

Population: 199,085,847 approx. 68% larger than UK

Literacy: 57.9%

Languages: Urdu (official), Punjabi, Sindhi, Saraiki, Pashto, local languages

Bible a month

Club Corner

Thanks for supporting Bible Society, and for sharing in our mission as we offer the Bible to the world. Around one-third of the donations we receive are from gifts in wills, which is a vital source of funding as it helps to place God's Word in the hands of people who need it, around the world.



Howard Barker is Bible Society's legacy advisor.

Please would you prayerfully consider remembering Bible Society in your will? If you would like more information, please contact Howard Barker, Head of Legacy Giving, on 01793 418222 or giftsinwills@biblesociety.org.uk. He'll be happy to answer any of your questions.

To submit your story to Club Corner, please email bamc@biblesociety.org.uk or write to us at the address at the bottom of the page. Your Club Corner story may be edited and we cannot guarantee its inclusion. Please ensure you include a return address so we can return any materials.

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To discover other ways in which we offer the Bible to the world visit biblesociety.org.uk

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Bible a month

March 2016

'Your word is a lamp that gives light wherever I walk.'
Psalm 119.105 (CEV)

CHINA FACTFILE



Area: 9,596,961 sq km approx. 39 x larger than the UK

Population: 1,367,485,388 approx. 22 x larger than UK

Literacy: 92.2%

Languages: Standard Chinese or Mandarin, Yue, (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghaiese) and other languages.

Bible a month

Look out for your next *Bible a Month* prayer letter which will feature reports from **Jordan** and **Serbia**.

Thank you so much for your support which is helping others to encounter the Bible.

Remember that if your circumstances change you can alter your gift at any time. To increase or decrease your regular donation call us on: 01793 418222.

If you're paying by direct debit you can fill in the form below and post it to us at: Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon SN5 7DG.

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