

# News from Bible Society

*Transmission* is provided free by Bible Society as part of our mission to equip the church to live out the Bible's message. We also work creatively and with passion to show that the Bible resonates with issues today – and to make Scriptures available where there are none.

**Paul Williams**  
Chief Executive



As I've read through the articles about childhood in this edition of *Transmission* I've found myself informed, challenged and edified.

In the West we tend to think of ourselves as providing a relatively good and safe place for children. After all, it's in other parts of the world where children are most likely to experience poverty, disease or war. It's elsewhere that children may be enslaved, trafficked or trained to kill on behalf of brutal and brutalising adults. I saw some of the effects of the violence of the adult world on vulnerable children first-hand in a recent trip to the Middle East. Iraqi refugee families told me why their 8- and 11-year-old daughters started crying if they heard adults shouting. They had survived several hours of hiding – and praying – while an ISIS militant shouted and cursed as he searched for them in Mosul. The Syrian refugee children I met in Beirut are so used to associating the sound of aircraft with a bombing raid that many still run for cover when a passenger jet comes overhead. It was an incredibly powerful experience to see these children laughing and engaging excitedly with the Bible Society's 'clown'. The trained actor and entertainer skilfully taught about the love of Jesus for children through a variety of Bible stories that somehow he had turned into all manner of hilarious tricks, jokes and routines. Imagining what they must have been through, it was not hard to be reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 19.14 (NRSV) 'Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' It was also a testimony to their parents – Christian and Muslim alike – that these children could still play and experience joy after the trauma they've gone through. Many of these parents had gone to great lengths, often risking their lives, to protect their children.

In many ways, Middle Eastern parents put those of us in the West to shame. A whole range of indicators suggest

that we value children less and less, but also for the wrong reasons. We're having fewer children and having them later in life as we prioritise consumer lifestyles. Despite our wealth, we are increasingly spending what we've saved in an indulgent retirement rather than passing it on to our children. As Bishop Lesslie Newbigin once put it, we are a 'society without a belief in the future.' At the same time, there is a downward pressure on the age of consent, the frightening emergence of demand for 'designer babies', and the horror of institutional child abuse. *The Good Childhood Report 2016* from the Children's Society revealed that a growing number of girls (10 to 15 years of age) are unhappy with their lives as a whole, and with their appearance in particular. There is a growing crisis of child mental health as we expose people to the pressures and demands of the adult world at ever younger ages. Children, it seems, are becoming products in our consumer society.

Jesus warns us, in graphic terms, not to put any kind of stumbling block in the way of children.

One of Bible Society's most exciting projects in Britain is called Open the Book. This is a three year programme of themed and dramatised storytelling provided at no charge to children in primary schools. Teams of volunteers throughout the country use drama, mime, props, costume – and enthusiastic amateur dramatics – to present the Bible stories in lively and informative ways. We are currently working with over 14,000 volunteers in 2,500 schools. It's a great encouragement when people, now in their twenties, get in contact to say that the only engagement that they had with the Bible as children was through this programme, and that the Bible is still playing a central role in their lives.

I've given just a few examples of how Bible Society is reaching children around the world. The more I learn about Bible Society the more I

appreciate the privilege of taking up the role of Chief Executive. I'm very conscious reading these articles that the entire Bible Society movement owes its genesis to the faith and courage of a 15-year-old girl. School children from around the country still delight in discovering her story at our Mary Jones World, visitor centre in Bala, Wales. You can find out more about it and discover the history of Bible Society, as well as the impact of the Bible on the world by visiting <http://www.bydmaryjonesworld.org.uk/education>.

My prayer is that there will be some way in which each of us reading these articles will find ourselves shaped to see children as God does and make some appropriate commitment in our own lives in response.

Thank you, as always, for your partnership in our global Bible mission.

Paul Williams

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