



Intense concentration for the final of the Youth Bible Competition!



Photo credit: Hannah Williams



The power of interactive Bible study

By Hannah Williams

Many of you have told us how important it is to reach the next generation with the word of God.* In this edition, you can read how your support is reaching young people at home and abroad.

Whether in Lebanon, UK schools, or through our new Youth Bible, I hope you feel inspired and encouraged by the impact your regular giving is having on younger generations.

Thank you so much for helping change lives. May you have a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

T Newbold

Tom Newbold
Bible a Month Co-ordinator



Children whizzed past me as I made my way up to the rooftop youth centre at Bible Society HQ in Beirut. Entering the centre, the excitement was palpable. About 50 Lebanese children from two local schools were packed into a room, chatting and laughing in eager anticipation for the grand final of the Youth Bible Competition.

The stakes were high. Children from schools around Lebanon had been competing against each other for several months taking weekly online quizzes set by staff at the Bible Society in Lebanon to test their Bible knowledge. Now, only the two schools with the highest scores remained. The sense of team spirit was touching and I was bowled over by the children's passion to win the Bible competition.

First up was age category 10-12. Each team had chosen a panel of four students to answer the questions. The competition was fierce! The room fell into tense silence

before each question, then burst into life again as the teams shouted and cheered their encouragement, jumping up and down with uncontrollable excitement.

The speed with which the kids answered the questions was impressive. There was no chance of me keeping up with the rapid-fire Arabic being spoken. The study and preparation they must have undertaken was evident and it was lovely to see the teachers' pride in their students.

Next up came age category 13-15. The questions were harder and the atmosphere markedly more serious. The children consulted each other carefully and answered with precision. I'll never forget the moment when one girl disputed an aspect of one of the questions with the programme director... it turned out she was right!

I had known this would be a good event but until that moment I hadn't appreciated

In focus

Good News for the next generation

The Bible may be the most widely translated book in the world, but for many young people, it seems daunting, old-fashioned and irrelevant.

For this reason, we teamed up with Youth for Christ to create the *Good News Bible – The Youth Edition*. We listened carefully to young people and worked alongside them to put together a Bible that would empower them to know God and his written word, apply it to their lives and strengthen their faith.

Combining engaging study material alongside interactive online resources, this Bible makes space to create, write, think, explore, question and to build young people's confidence to be powerful witnesses to those around them.

There are full-page introductions before each book and timelines to understand the Bible's historical framework. And to equip young people to explore their own responses to the Bible's timeless message, there are over 400 interactive elements in the margins for reflection and note-taking.

We're excited about this opportunity to reach out to the younger generation with God's word and pray that many would come to know God and grow in their relationship with him as a result.

Perhaps there are young people in your church or family hungry to experience the Bible in a way that speaks to them? Visit biblesociety.org.uk/youthbible to find out more.



The Good News Bible – The Youth Edition

just how powerful getting children to study and interact with the Bible in a creative and fun way could be.

Thanks to your generous donations which support this work, children are reading and memorising the Scriptures. As I thought about what the future impact in these children's lives might be, I was reminded of Isaiah 55.11 which tells us that God's word goes out and accomplishes everything God has planned! I find this so encouraging.

It was a real privilege and incredible opportunity to spend three months as an intern at the Bible Society of Lebanon. I worked with the programmes department, helping to organise their Bible engagement events for children and youth. Sharing God's word with the young people who will shape the future of their nation is a top priority and they put a lot of energy into reaching out to children from diverse backgrounds.

Puppet shows, Bible World (an interactive exhibition), songs, dramas, youth talks and workshops, trauma healing and fun activities for refugee children from all over the Middle East, the list goes on. The Bible Competition is just one project among many that the Bible Society in Lebanon calls 'Child Friendly Gospel'. And it was incredible



Photo credit Hannah Williams

Curious children gathering round in a Syrian refugee camp.

to see first-hand what a difference this approach makes.

Many of the children I met were deeply curious, asking lots of questions about the Bible. It was wonderful to see these children being given the opportunity to dig deep into Scripture and to witness the Bible come to life for them.

Another treasured moment for me was when I visited a Syrian refugee camp in the north of Lebanon. I was able to bring my guitar and play and sing with the children. I will never forget the joy that such a simple thing brought them.

Thank you for the difference you are making in these precious children's lives. Please pray that the Scriptures they're learning would not only be knowledge in their heads, but be written on their hearts!

Open the Book is 20!

When a group of Christians in Bedford had the idea of taking Bible stories into their local primary school, they couldn't have dreamt of where their idea would end up. What started with 60 people in 30 schools, is now 16,000 storytellers in some 3,000 schools in England and Wales. And every day that number grows.

In 2019, Open the Book, the project which sees Christians take Bible stories into their local primary schools, celebrates its 20th anniversary and all that has been achieved over the last two decades.

'We have got not only the growth to celebrate,' said Paul Williams, Bible Society's CEO, 'but the fact that everywhere Open the Book operates, we see churches come together to serve their local community.'

Through the project, local Christians use *The Lion Storyteller Bible*, handbooks and a wonderful collection of props and costumes, to take weekly or fortnightly acts of collective worship in primary schools. With the help of the children, they tell stories such as Noah's ark and Daniel in the lions' den.

Bob Hartman, who wrote *The Lion Storyteller Bible* said he was 'a bit overwhelmed' at how popular Open the Book had become.

'There are so many children in our culture who don't know the stories,' he said. 'And whereas 20 years ago there might have been some resistance to taking these stories into schools, now they are just received joyfully.'

One storyteller is Megan Day from Cheltenham who joined the Open the Book team in her area a year ago. 'The children love it and are really excited,' she said. 'It's amazing that we can go into schools, have fun and engage with the children. We didn't have this when I was a child so I'm making up for that now.'

To find out more, visit: biblesociety.org.uk/openthebook



Photo credit Layton Thompson

Time to celebrate!

Lebanon

December 2018

Our team in Lebanon is doing incredible work under pressure. The conflict in the region has made the Christian population fearful, leading many to leave the country. Meanwhile, millions of refugees have moved in, having suffered persecution and trauma in their homelands.

Despite the many challenges, our staff in Lebanon have worked hard to bring hope to refugees in great emotional and physical need. Thanks to your gifts, our team has been able to provide Bibles and much needed resources as well as carry out crucial work such as trauma healing.

Additionally, regular visits to church congregations to serve and support them, has encouraged more and more Christians to stay in Lebanon and be witnesses in their communities. Praise God that in the midst of tragedy and difficulty our team in Lebanon is faithfully persevering in their mission to proclaim the life-transforming word of God.



Photo credit United Bible Societies
Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Lebanon gather to receive much needed relief packages.

Prayer pointers

- Thank God that addressing the gospel message to children through activities like the Bible Competition is equipping younger generations in Lebanon with the knowledge of God.
- Pray for our team in Lebanon, who are serving the cause of peace in the Middle East by partnering with churches and equipping Christian leaders to witness to their communities.
- Ask God to heal the hearts of Christians who feel discouraged and burdened by the turmoil in the region.
- Pray that our staff in Lebanon feel strengthened and remain faithful to God in the midst of adversity.

China

January 2019

In recent months, the media have reported drastic actions taken by the Chinese authorities against Christians, including the closure and demolition of church buildings. These actions are largely directed against unregistered churches, which the authorities see as illegal and a threat to society.

Encouragingly, the Chinese authorities have approved the printing of 3.4 million Bibles this year. However, this figure is lower than the previous year as a shortage in Bible paper funding meant the full allowance of Bibles couldn't be produced. Please pray for more funds this year to prevent the number being reduced again.

Despite challenges, the Church in China is growing faster than we can possibly imagine and around 1 million people come to faith each year. Thanks to your generous gifts, our team in China continues their mission, trying to fulfil the need and demand for God's word.



Photo credit Clare Kendall
A roll of Bible paper is collected from the warehouse at the Amity Printing Press in China.

Prayer pointers

- Praise God that the printing of so many Bibles has been approved.
- Ask God to provide the funds needed to cover the costs of producing the total quantity of Bibles permitted, so the maximum number can be distributed.
- Pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ affected by the challenges facing the Church in China. Pray they will experience the Lord's presence, comfort and help.
- Pray for those in authority that they will be sympathetic to the concerns and convictions of Chinese Christians today.

Lebanon

'...I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'

Psalm 40.8 (ESV)

Factfile



Area – 10,400 sq km, approx. 4% of UK

Population – 6.2 million, approx. 9% of UK

Literacy rate – 93.9 %

Languages – Arabic, Armenian, other local languages (1%)

Your Stories

Thank you once again for your heartening response to our *Pass it on* campaign. We love reading how God has touched you through his word and we hope you'll take courage in this edition's inspiring story!

Revd Richard Hovil from Warminster

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" Psalm 34.8 (ESV)

'In the hungry years of the Second World War, aged 15, I went to a Christian farming camp to help provide food for people. On the second evening, when our group met to read the Bible and to pray together, we read Psalm 34; and one verse stood out for me. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good."

'It seemed so appropriate that you could simply follow Jesus as Saviour and trust him as Lord. And even now, 74 years later, every time God gives me something to face, big or small, I see it as an opportunity to acknowledge the challenge, but overall remind myself that God is good.'

To read more testimonies like this or share your own, visit: biblesociety.org.uk/passiton2018

China

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.'

Romans 15.13 (ESV)

Factfile



Area – 9,596,960 sq km, approx. 39 x as large as UK

Population – 1.37 billion, approx. 21 x as large as UK

Literacy rate – 96.4%

Languages – Mandarin, Yue (Cantonese), Wu, Minbei, Minnan, Xiang, Gan, other local languages

Look out for your next *Bible a Month* prayer letter featuring reports from **Sierra Leone** and **Egypt**.

Thank you for your support which is bringing the Bible to life at home and around the world.

If you'd like to receive email updates about how your gift is making an impact and ways to get further involved, please provide your email address:

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