



Fun on the climbing frame at Casa Bernabe.



Wings of Refuge in Guatemala

By Stuart Noble

It's been a long, hot summer and one of my highlights was meeting some of you in the Bible Society Café at New Wine. It's always a privilege to get to know you and be able to thank supporters in person.



Thanks to your gifts, orphans in Guatemala are learning of their loving Father in heaven and you're also equipping pastors and churches in Laos and Costa Rica to teach the Bible more effectively. Read more inside and get your first look at our new Christmas resources!

 Tom Newbold

Tom Newbold
Bible a Month Co-ordinator

Having driven across Guatemala City in the intensity of morning rush hour, we left the busy highway, taking a sudden left turn down a small hill. As we parked under some of the pine trees that surround the Casa Bernabe School and Orphanage, the noise of traffic faded and was replaced by the shouts and laughter of children playing.

They seemed carefree, talking animatedly in small clusters or tackling the climbing frame – balancing, swinging and trying to impress each other. But the reality is that most of these children have suffered greatly.

Casa Bernabe is one of many orphanages run by the Social Welfare Department of the Guatemalan government. The need is great. UNICEF estimates that there are more than 370,000 orphans in the country. Furthermore, at least 5,000 children, abandoned by mothers too poor to keep them, live on the streets of the capital city alone.

Even though their basic housing needs are taken care of in these homes, the children, many of whom are likely to have been victims of physical or sexual abuse and exploitation, are still incredibly vulnerable. Without support and clear guidance the risk is that the cycle of violence they have experienced in their early lives will continue and many will be lured into a life of crime as they get older.

But, thanks to your generous gifts, our team in Guatemala is making a difference through the Wings of Refuge project. Our team visits Casa Bernabe and other safe homes every week, using games and Bible stories to teach children the messages of love, peace and restoration in the Bible.

Carlos (not his real name) greeted us with a smile, laughing as we tried out our rudimentary Spanish. Aged 14, he seemed just like any other teenager, but I was deeply moved as he told us about his life.

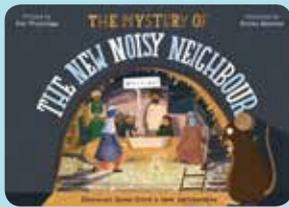
In focus

More to Christmas?

We all know the nativity story, right? The manger, the shepherds, the bright star and the wise men... But what's really going on beneath the surface? Could there be more to the Christmas story?

To help you share the big story of the Bible with those around you, we've created a whole new batch of Christmas resources.

Our children's story booklet, *The Mystery of the New Noisy Neighbour*,



follows a mouse detective as he discovers the identity of Jesus... Emmanuel, Rescuer and King. It's perfect for giving out to children in your church or local school. You can also download the accompanying instant nativity script (no rehearsal necessary), for free.



But what about something for adult faith seekers and new Christians? Our short booklet *Just Hay in the Manger?* offers a concise historical

explanation of the people, places and politics surrounding Jesus' birth.

Looking forward to some Christmas carolling? Our colourful new carol booklet *Come and Sing the Christmas Story* features twelve well-known Christmas carols as well as the Bible story in a nutshell to help you unpack the tale that's been told for generations.



To find out more and order your resources, visit biblesociety.org.uk/christmas or call 01793 418300.

'My father was sent to prison and I really struggled,' he explained. 'I was out of control.' Carlos became violent and his family rejected him. 'It's dangerous on the streets and hard to survive.' Eventually he was picked up by the police but when his family wouldn't take him back he became a ward of the state.

On top of everything else, Carlos was caught up in a terrible tragedy. In March 2017 a fire swept through the girls' accommodation at the Virgin de la Asunción Safe Home where he was originally placed. 41 girls aged between 14 and 17 were killed. Afterwards Carlos, plagued with terrible memories, was separated from many of his friends and relocated to Casa Bernabe.

But Carlos' story doesn't end with rejection and tragedy. At Casa Bernabe Carlos encountered the message of the Bible. 'It's helped me to come to terms with what has happened. Also, I used to be very angry with my family but now I have forgiven everyone who has hurt me.'

I'll never forget the moment Carlos asked if *he* could pray for *us*, a group of strangers he didn't know. He thanked God for the Wings of Refuge project and how it has changed his life and prayed for God's blessing on us. What an incredible



Intense competition during the Bible-based relay game!

display of God's grace and the power of the Word of God!

Later, I watched teams of children participate in a Bible-based relay game, designed to reinforce their Bible knowledge and allowing them to show what they have learned. There was laughter, competitiveness and lots of fun in the warm Guatemalan sunshine. I pray the message that God has not abandoned them and has a plan for their lives will sink deep into their hearts.

Our team in Guatemala asked me time and again to pass on their thanks to you for your support and asked that you keep praying for the children. Thank you for your generous *Bible a Month* gifts which help shine a light of hope into the most desperate situations.

Providing a study Bible to the Lao people

Located in the heart of South East Asia, the small country of Laos boasts a complex religious landscape, with Buddhism flowing into a tribal tradition of animist worship. However, the Christian population in Laos, estimated at just 3%, has experienced significant growth during the last ten years. Church planting is on the rise, and with it comes a strong need for pastoral training and in-depth Bible study resources.

Over the last two years, our team in Laos have been working alongside the Laos Evangelical Church (LEC) to produce a study Bible in the Lao language. Together with a team of expert translators and reviewers, we're working hard to equip Christians in Laos with valuable study tools for understanding the Bible.

The Lao language is the official language of education and government affairs, yet very few Lao study materials currently exist to help equip church leaders. On our latest visit to the country, a pastor told us that, 'the ministry of Bible Society is crucial for pastors like myself as I minister and deliver Bibles in each village I visit.'

Completing this translation, which we hope to do by 2021, presents a challenge. The country is still under tight Communist rule and authorities closely scrutinise the Church. Missionaries are not allowed in, and public evangelism is frowned upon.

Despite the risks, Christians in Laos are eager to study the Bible for themselves. And it's thanks to your generous *Bible a Month* gifts that our partners in Laos can work towards producing this study Bible for the Lao people.

Please pray for continued wisdom amongst the translators and editorial staff. And praise God that the Lao people will soon get to experience the Word of God through a study Bible of their own.



Worshippers at a church in Laos.

Guatemala

October 2018

Children have become the main victims of violence in Guatemala. In 2015 the country had the second-highest rate of child murders in the world and it is estimated that four out of ten children experience sexual abuse. To make things worse, an estimated 88% of reported crimes against children go unpunished.

These vulnerable children are also at risk of being recruited to commit acts against the law because criminal gangs know they're too young to face trial. They've come to be known as 'little soldiers of crime.' But thanks to you and your generous gifts, our team in Guatemala is equipped to shine a light into these bleak situations.

Praise God for the early intervention work of our team in Guatemala as they seek to support efforts in safe homes to break the cycle of violence. Their work to share the message of love and redemption in the Bible is transforming these children's lives and bringing hope.



Sharing Bible stories at a safe home.

Prayer pointers

- Pray that the partnership between our team in Guatemala and the Social Welfare Department would continue to grow so that we can reach more orphanages and safe homes.
- Thank God for the amazing transformation in Carlos' life since engaging with the Bible at Casa Bernabe. Pray for his continued healing and clear direction in his life.
- Ask God to heal and protect all those affected by the tragedy that occurred in March 2017.
- Pray for our team in Guatemala as they work with churches and with their government to transform society and protect children.

Costa Rica

November 2018

In 2014, the research agency CID-Gallup conducted a survey as a donation to our team in Costa Rica to measure the practice of Bible reading in the country. The results were discouraging, showing a significant decline even among church-going believers.

Thanks to your support, our team has been able to develop a number of projects to help churches teach the Bible effectively. For example, they set up the Institute of Biblical Sciences in Costa Rica to offer continuous training for pastors and laypeople in biblical interpretation, theology and contemporary issues.

Pastor Marcos Arguedas, a student at the Institute since 2015, has just been awarded a diploma in pastoral studies. 'The Institute is so important. I tell everybody about it because it changed the way I understand and read the Bible.' He can already see that his learning is helping to benefit and grow the church he leads.



Pastors listen intently during a lecture at the Institute of Biblical Sciences.

Prayer pointers

- Pray for the staff and students at the Institute of Biblical Sciences. Pray that as the programme grows and new students join in, the work will continue to bear fruit.
- Ask God to give pastors in Costa Rica a thirst to learn more and enable them to make the most of the courses offered at the Institute.
- Pray for churches and believers in Costa Rica to be confident in the Word of God as they reach out to friends, family and acquaintances in their increasingly secular society.
- Thank God for pastor Marcos Arguedas and his enthusiasm and commitment to growing in faith and digging into the Word of God. Ask God to bless him, his congregation and his ministry.

Guatemala

'He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.'

Colossians 1.13-14 (GNB)

Factfile



Area – 108,889 sq km, approx. 45% of UK

Population – 15.5 million, approx. 24% of UK

Literacy rate – 81.5%

Languages – Spanish (official), Maya languages, other local languages

Your Stories

Thank you for your responses to our Pass it on campaign. We love hearing people's testimonies, and hope you do too.

Joan from London

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."
John 3.16 (ESV)

'When I was young, I attended a Christian holiday camp at Hildenborough Hall in Kent. Sharing a dormitory with about six other girls, I was amazed at bedtime on the first night when they all knelt down and prayed aloud! I was the only one who didn't join in.

'Next day, the guest speaker invited anyone who had questions to come and talk to him. I decided to go and he literally brought the Bible to life for me. It had never occurred to me that Jesus died for my sin in order to give me eternal life.

'I knelt down, confessed my sin and asked the Lord to forgive me and come into my heart. It was a wonderful moment and the feeling was like he was cleansing my whole body and soul.

'This memory has stayed with me all these years. Reading the Bible every day for guidance is a real joy and gives me a peace I had never known before.'

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

Costa Rica

'The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until they bear fruit.'

Luke 8.15 (GNB)

Factfile



Area – 51,100 sq km, approx. 21% of UK

Population – 4.9 million, approx. 7% of UK

Literacy rate – 97.8%

Languages – Spanish (official), English

Look out for your next *Bible a Month* prayer letter featuring reports from Lebanon and China.

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

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