



A shocking scene at the mudslide site in Sierra Leone.

Finding hope in the midst of grief

By Noémie Smith



Photo credit Noémie Smith



In Jeremiah 17.8, we read about a tree that always remains green and never ceases to bear fruit. It stands as a powerful picture for those who put their trust in the Lord.



This is what your *Bible a Month* gifts do. You help people remain 'green and fruitful' as they get rooted in God's word.

Throughout many circumstances – Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Egypt and this country – you are having a mighty impact. Thank you.

T Newbold

Tom Newbold
Bible a Month Co-ordinator

I lifted my head from the dirt road up to the towering mountain ahead and was horrified to see the bright streak of orange mud splitting the landscape in two. Before my arrival in Sierra Leone, our local team had warned me that a visit to the mudslide site would be hard to bear.

Three days of torrential rainfall in August 2017, coupled with poor urban planning and widespread deforestation, caused flash floods and triggered a massive landslide, sending a tidal wave of debris down into the valley below. Overlooking the capital city of Freetown, Sugar Loaf mountain partially collapsed, killing 1,141 people and leaving another 3,000 homeless and destitute.

Thanks to your support, last year we were able to send emergency aid straightaway. As a result, I wanted to meet survivors and assess how to continue supporting our team on the ground. When I arrived on the site of the mudslide, local workers were removing big boulders to begin the

rebuilding process. 'It looked like the earth was rising high above the ground, before engulfing everything on its way back down', they remembered vividly. 'The entire side of the mountain was submerged in under a minute. There are still hundreds of bodies buried deep under the ground.'

As I looked around and saw the extent of the damage, I felt overwhelmed by a profound sense of sorrow and grief. It would have been easy to give into emotions of helplessness, but I was deeply humbled and encouraged by the resilience of my colleagues in Sierra Leone.

In the immediate aftermath of the mudslide, your generous gifts here in the UK meant our team could provide vital trauma healing and essential resources (food, clothing, toiletries and mattresses) in emergency camps. They also distributed Creole and English Bibles and Scripture portions as well as audio-Bibles for those who can't read. With an average of 48%, the literacy rate in Sierra Leone is one of the

In focus

Share the miraculous news of Easter

What if we could find out what Jairus' daughter or the boy with the five loaves and two fishes made of what happened to Jesus after their miraculous encounters with him?

Based on the gospel accounts, our brand new children's booklet for 2019, *Three Friends and the Miracle Man* by Dai Woolridge, imagines their journey to discovering who Jesus really is.

Perhaps these booklets would make a perfect gift for a family member, or be a great resource for children in your church?

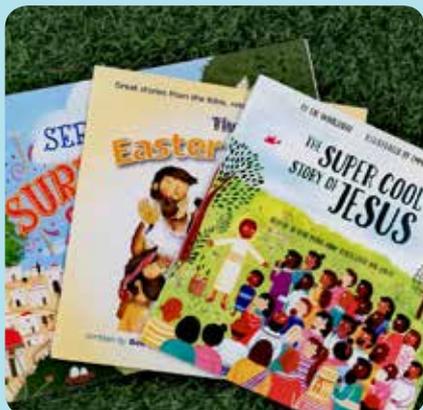
You may also be interested in our full collection of Easter children's story booklets:

The Seriously Surprising Story follows in the footsteps of Jesus' followers from Jerusalem to Emmaus as they get talking to someone who gives them the biggest surprise of all.

The Super Cool Story of Jesus combines the 'super cool' words of Dai Woolridge with illustrations from Emma Randall to tell the amazing story of how Jesus lived and loved.

The Easter Poem written by Bob Hartman uses rhyme to retell the Easter story from the Gospel of John.

Visit our website biblesociety.org.uk/Easter or call 01793 418222 to get your copies of these children's booklets. Together we can help bring the Bible to life for the next generation.



Help share the Good News with children this Easter!

lowest in the world*, so providing audio versions of God's word is a vital component of our team's ministry.

I was eager to meet survivors of the mudslide who'd been relocated in camps around the edge of the capital. After a long drive along a modern, well-kept motorway, we turned off onto bumpy dust roads filled with muddy puddles from the rainy season. When we arrived at the camp in the oppressive midday heat, we were instantly surrounded by curious adults and a large group of children waving at us.

Far removed from any schools, market places or medical facilities, the people in this camp have no clean running water, and are dependent on a broken sewage system and basic electricity. What I witnessed was miles away from the comfort I enjoy every day at home in England. Yet in the very midst of poverty, I saw God's work at hand in a remarkable way.

One person I spoke to was an elderly woman, whose face looked worn by sorrow and grief. Before the mudslide, Nana Samura was a tradeswoman, but she lost everything in the disaster. Nana received a Proclaimer audio-Bible in the emergency camp after receiving training from our team. Her face lit up as she witnessed powerfully to the comfort and hope she



Nana and her family proudly posing with their Proclaimer.

found in the Bible: 'When I listen to the Proclaimer, I feel strengthened that God will help me out of my predicament and heal my soul.'

Nana proudly showed us her Proclaimer and posed with her large family. As Nana spoke, those around her also shared their own experience, describing the precious moments they spend listening to God's word. As they opened up to me, I felt deeply moved by the difference God's word can make in such a terrible situation.

Before leaving Sierra Leone, our team asked me to thank donors back home for their generosity and prayers. Please know that your support makes such a difference in the world. And please do pray for provision and healing as our team persist in sharing God's word with the broken-hearted around them.

* <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sl.html>

Equipping Egyptian Christians with a complete study Bible

Egypt may be a majority Muslim country but according to Ramez Atallah, the head of the Bible Society of Egypt, the perception of Christians in his country as a persecuted minority is not completely accurate.

There are approximately 10 million Christians in Egypt, around 10% of the population. 'That's more than in many European countries,' stressed Ramez. 'We can't keep up with the insatiable desire of Christians to have a Bible,' he continued.

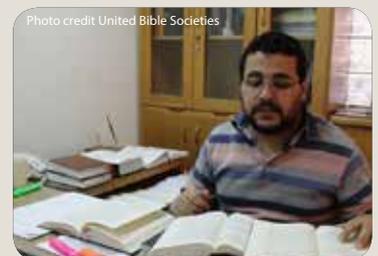
In order to continue providing relevant, effective Scriptural resources to strengthen Egyptian Christians in their faith, our team have been working on producing a new Arabic Study Bible, complete with historical, geographical and background notes.

So far, the New Testament has been completed, culminating with the first printing of 10,000 copies which sold out within two weeks! Thanks to your faithful *Bible a Month* gifts, work now continues on the Old Testament, with the hope of having a complete copy ready for print and distribution by the end of 2019.

Despite encountering difficulties in some areas of the country, Ramez and his team prefer to see challenges as opportunities. Whilst it's against the law to give Scripture away for free, it is legal to sell it; whilst it's against the law to evangelise, it is legal to advertise the Bible as a product. Working within the legal, religious and political restrictions they are still able to make the Bible widely available.

Praise God for our team in Egypt who are overcoming the challenges of distributing Bibles in their in their country with courage and ingenuity.

And please pray that the new Study Bible will be a real blessing to churches and Arabic speakers in Egypt and across the world, helping them to engage more deeply with God's word.



An Egyptian translator working on the new study Bible.

Our team in Sierra Leone are still facing tremendous heartache in the wake of a disastrous mudslide in Freetown in 2017. The country was only just coming out of the Ebola crisis, so rescue teams had to be even more careful dealing with the aftermath.

Survivors endured further trauma when emergency camps were closed by the government due to overcrowding. Yet despite the enormity of the suffering around them, our team remain hopeful and rooted in the Gospel as they serve survivors in the emergency camps in Freetown.

Christiana, the head of the Bible Society in Sierra Leone powerfully described the impact of their witness: 'Bible Society here is 72 years old and people realise that Christians perform according to what they believe, living a life in service to Christ. Now, people are beginning to ask questions, and news about Bible Society is growing to the four corners of Sierra Leone.'



Photo credit Sierra Leone Bible Society
Mudslide survivors receiving vital material support and Bibles in the camps.

Prayer pointers

- Praise God for the message of hope and restoration our team are spreading, which has even led to the conversion of some Muslims.
- Please pray for our team, in light of the mass relocation of victims outside of Freetown, that they would maintain the vital friendships made in the camps and continue to lead effective programs.
- Thank God for the powerful witness of Nana and her family in the survivor camp, through the provision of audio-Bibles.
- Please pray for the authorities in Sierra Leone, that they might respond to the needs of the mudslide victims and provide vital support towards the rebuilding of the communities left destitute and abandoned.

Eritrea

Over the last few years, prolonged periods of conflict, repeated droughts, and land degradation have badly affected Eritrea's economy, and it remains one of the poorest countries in Africa. Estimates show that around 80% of Eritrean people depend on agricultural activities, with a majority of the population living on less than US \$1 a day. In this context, there are approximately 2.5 million Christians in Eritrea, about half of the overall population.

Despite increasing government oppression, the growth of the Church in Eritrea is strong. Persecution and restraints on personal freedom test believers sorely, but they have only strengthened the rise of a widespread house church movement.

In this context, our local team are persisting in their mission to equip the Church with God's word through ongoing translations into minority languages and the production of audio Bibles for those who can't read. And thanks to your ongoing generosity, our colleagues are able to run free Bible distribution programs, and lead vital ministries in prisons and hospitals.



Photo credit United Bible Societies
Praying at the Orthodox cathedral in Asmara, Eritrea.

Prayer pointers

- Praise God for our team in Eritrea who are overcoming the difficulties of distributing free Bibles in their context with courage and perseverance.
- Pray that our team would persist in their efforts to develop relationships with local churches and government authorities.
- Ask God to bless plans to print more Scriptures in Tigrinya, the country's most widely-spoken language.
- Pray for God's continued protection over Christians who are experiencing persecution. May he strengthen them and may they know his presence in the midst of difficulty.

Sierra Leone

'The King will reply, "I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these members of my family, you did it for me!"'

Matthew 25.40 (GNB)

Factfile



Area – 71,740 sq km, approx. 29% of UK

Population – 6.3 million, approx. 10% of UK

Literacy rate – 48.1%

Languages – English (official, but regular use limited to literate minority), Mende, Temne, Krio (English-based Creole)

Your impact

You are a part of a community of *Bible a Month* supporters who are deeply passionate about the Bible and its impact in people's lives, in England and further afield. To give you an idea of just how much your support has achieved, here is an overview of some of the things you helped make happen in the last year:



Over half a million affordable Bibles were distributed in China.



In Africa, over two million people experienced the word of God in their heart language for the first time.



In the Middle East, nearly 40,000 people received vital support through Bible-based trauma healing and refugee projects.



In England and Wales, you helped distribute over 1,200 Bibles in 7 different languages across 21 prisons nationwide. You also supported *Open the Book*, which celebrates its 20th Anniversary this year. And the list goes on...

All in all, you've provided messages of hope in the midst of suffering, love in the face of persecution and joy after long years of waiting. So **thank you!**

As we look ahead, we can't wait to share news of projects and activities your gifts will be enabling. Make sure to look out for ways to grow your impact in the next edition of *Bible a Month*.

Eritrea

'For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I remember you in my prayers.'

Ephesians 1.15-16 (GNB)

Factfile



Area – 117,600 sq km, approx. 48% of UK

Population – 5.9 million, approx. 9% of UK

Literacy rate – 73.8 %

Languages – Tigrinya (official), Arabic (official), English (official), other local languages

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

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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You can alter your gift at any time. To increase or decrease your regular donation call us on 01793 418222.

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