

BIBLE A MONTH

JUN/JUL 2020
Issue 201

Crucial help for Christians in China

EYEWITNESS
REPORT

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With church meetings suspended due to the virus, believers turned more to the Scriptures.
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‘I’m old and it would not be long before I make my final journey, but I haven’t even read much of the Bible!’ confessed 80-year-old Mr Meng in a village in Sichuan province, China, during the coronavirus outbreak.

‘During this time of isolation, I read the Bible without stopping for 10 days and I could not stop reading about God’s forgiveness and love for me,’ he added. ‘Now I want to spend the rest of my life reading the Bible!’

Mr Meng’s was one of many uplifting testimonies I heard during the Covid-19 outbreak. The reason he, and many more like him in rural China, has a Bible is because they were kindly provided by people like you through Bible a Month.

With church meetings suspended due to the virus, believers have been turning more and more to the Scriptures in my home country.

In another testimony I read these words: ‘We are often too busy to spend time with God prior to this crisis. Now we are taking this time to do more self-reflection and praying to God.’

Your continuing generosity means that in China, Bibles are kept accessible, affordable, or often completely free. In 2019, Bible a Month supporters contributed to the printing of millions of Bibles in mainland China. A regular £20 donation, for example, can provide enough Bibles in one year for a small congregation.

Prior to taking up my new job at Bible Society, I lived for thirty years in China, and in my final talk at a Beijing church before leaving I described that we had been involved in China since 1811 and that it was our first-ever overseas mission. I explained that Amity Printing Company was jointly established by Bible Society and the Chinese authorities and is the

only company permitted to print Bibles for distribution in mainland China.

I explained how supporters like you kindly provided the Bibles they were now holding in their hands.

After the service, an elderly man approached me with tears in his eyes. He said he became a Christian more than 30 years ago and it was the first time he had heard the story of how the Bible came to him.

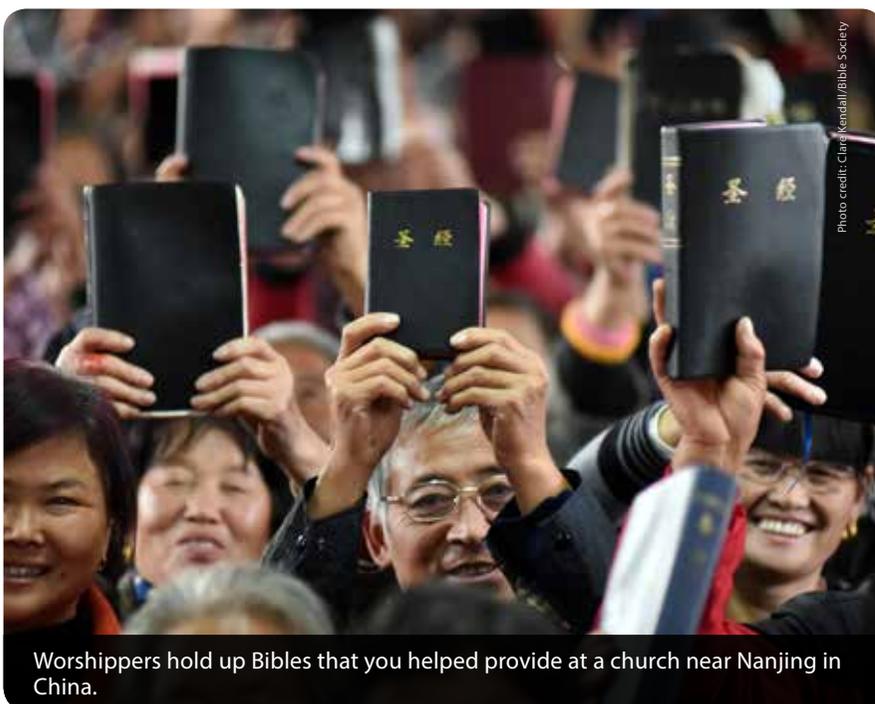
'It has never been easy to be a Christian here in China,' he said. 'I have been through the Cultural Revolution (in which millions were persecuted). I've been through pressure in recent years. It's like we're enclosed in a dome. We cannot see. Your story really encourages me. Now I feel I am not alone, not forgotten. I now know there are brothers and sisters across the other side of the world who have been supporting us for so long.'

He then asked for the address of the printing company. 'I just want to simply go there and do whatever I can to serve them,' the old man said. 'To show my appreciation but I don't know much. I am old and unskilled. But at least I can clean their tables or make them tea to show them how thankful I am for my Bible.'

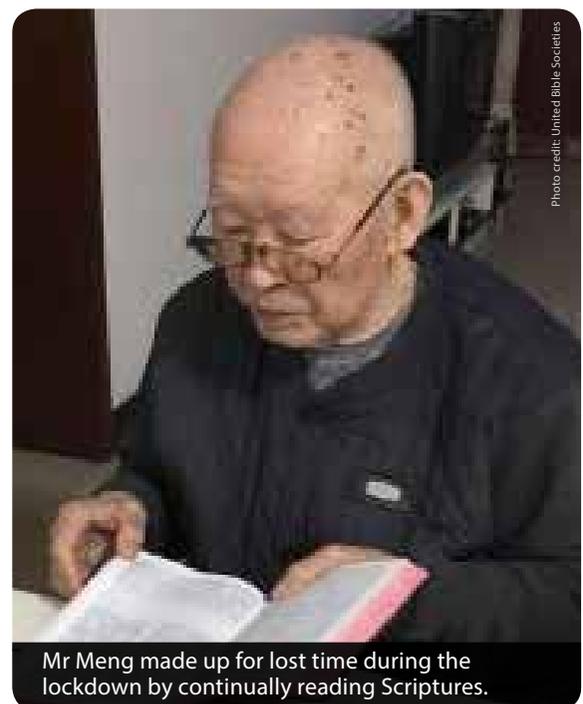
This moment in time is more crucial than any to ensure that Bibles not only continue to be printed in China, but also that people there receive resources to help them understand their Bibles more, and also that more leaders gain the correct theological training. Only God knows what the future holds, but with an estimated one million new converts to Christianity every year, as well as big rises in other religions, the authorities have been increasingly regulating and restricting religious activities over the last few years.

Your gracious support is enabling Christians in China to rise to many challenges. For example, China faces an acute shortage of trained pastors with one trained leader for every 6,700 Christians on average. Your generous giving helps support Chinese pastors and volunteers who spread God's word. You enable them to be provided with quality Bible teaching tools, resources and training. Recently, gifts from our supporters have helped preachers who have been unable to travel and earn a living during the coronavirus outbreak and quarantine.

I want to thank all of you who have joined Bible a Month for your tremendous support through gifts and prayers.



Worshippers hold up Bibles that you helped provide at a church near Nanjing in China.



Mr Meng made up for lost time during the lockdown by continually reading Scriptures.

Thanks to your support, the mission continues

MISSION UPDATE



As a result of your continued support, Bible production in China is returning to normal as the nation recovers from the coronavirus outbreak.

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In a situation where people are thinking about life, death, God and what really matters, there's a greater openness to the Scriptures.

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The coronavirus crisis may have put the brakes on a lot of organisations, but your continuing generous support means that Bible Society continues to move forward.

Just like many of you, the vast majority of our team are now working from home. But your support ensures that some things do not change, such as a commitment to increasing Bible confidence in the church, changing the conversation about the Bible in wider culture, and encouraging Bible-inspired change in society. All this is even more relevant in the current situation. In a period when people's confidence in the institutions and systems on which we depend has been shaken, growing confidence in the 'better story' the Bible presents is more important than ever. In a situation where people are thinking about life, death, God and what really matters, there's a greater openness to the Scriptures, and that's something that can be responded to creatively and sensitively.

Whilst the strategy outlined above remains unchanged, some of the projects that you generously support to reach the goals have changed. Many of the activities planned for 2020 are no longer possible and, in their place, new

initiatives are being generated to bring the Bible to people. Much time has been spent in prayer and also listening to God to discern our future directions.

Helpful resources for people to engage with the Bible in these challenging times are available on our website. Existing resources have been repackaged to make them more accessible (The Bible Course is now streamed online), and new resources are being produced. During Easter, a series of Easter video reflections engaging with the coronavirus situation were produced and widely viewed across social media.

We remain deeply grateful for your continued generous support and, above all, we remain thankful to God who is with us in all of this. He's there with patients alone in the ICU. And he's there for those who are anxious about their finances, elderly parents, children and other loved ones. He's there with us in our mission. God has been with Bible Society for the last 216 years, through two world wars, epidemics, stock market crashes, recessions, and terrorist attacks, and God will remain with us as we remain faithful to the mission to which he has called us. Thank you so much for joining us on this mission.

Prayer pointers

Pray for those for whom this is a particularly difficult time, because of bereavement, illness, loneliness, job and money worries, or fear for their families.

Pray for our Bible Society colleagues working in fragile countries where the challenges of coronavirus are so much greater than here.

Pray that those involved in sharing the Bible in online services and bible studies will respond creatively and sensitively to the opportunities that may open up in these difficult times.

'Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father': praise God for his enduring love for his people and his world, even through the darkest times.

CHINA

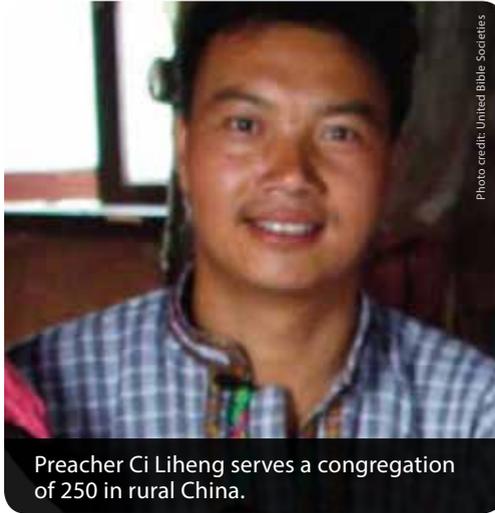
Forty years ago, the Bible was banned in China, but with an easing of restrictions on worship in recent decades, the number of Christians is now estimated at around 100 million and the Bible is a bestseller.

However, more restrictions have recently been imposed by authorities. This means your support, right now, is even more crucial as it makes use of this window of opportunity, which may not last.

Scripture distribution is a top priority, but the explosive growth of the Chinese Church means resources to aid greater understanding of Scriptures and leaders to offer spiritual guidance is critically important, especially to counter cults that spring up.

Your amazing support through Bible a Month not only provides Bibles, but can also supply Bible resources and training.

Preacher Ci Liheng was born into a poor family and juggled church ministry with farm work, but he received training thanks to the generosity of people like you. Ci said, 'There have been times in the past when I was not confident that I had preached correctly. Now I'm much more confident.'



Preacher Ci Liheng serves a congregation of 250 in rural China.

June prayer pointers

Thank the Lord that so many are coming to the faith in China. Ask that they be guarded against false teaching and will grow strong in the faith.

Thank God that so many more people now have access to the Bible, and pray that the generosity that has enabled this will continue, so that they will receive further resources to help them understand more of God's word.

Praise God for the preachers in China. Ask the Lord to continue to give them strength and courage.

Ask the Lord to grant wisdom and inspiration to all those who are involved in planning the next steps of Bible mission in China at this crucial juncture.

NIGER

Bible work in Niger is tough. Very tough. This large country is mostly desert, and people living here grapple daily with poverty, the impact of climate change and threats from Islamist extremists. Churches are ill-equipped to serve the region's 95 per cent Muslim population. On top of that, communities have now been hit by the coronavirus.

Thanks to your kind support, Bibles still being provided to churches and literacy efforts are helping new converts to interact with Scriptures for their spiritual growth. Your Bible a Month gifts have helped keep the Bible Society office and bookshop open, and contributed towards the salaries of the mission team there. Last year the team attended a workshop to generate ideas to share God's word with the majority Muslim population.

Covid-19 has the potential to be catastrophic in the poorest African nations such as Niger. Our team say Bible sales have halted as families divert finances to vital items, and only two staff are keeping the office open. Their fear is that, with no economic reserves, the Bible Society in Niger would have to close its doors if the crisis continues.



A Niger family who recently took part in a Scripture listening project.

July prayer pointers

For God's protection over our staff in Niger, that they would remain healthy and safe as they continue their Bible ministry.

For the poorest communities, who have been hardest hit by the coronavirus. Pray for families as they balance the need to survive and work with the need to keep safe. Guide them when they start rebuilding their lives.

For the future of Bible ministry in Niger. Despite the uncertainty of the situation, we know God is faithful, his word offers hope and, when the Lord builds the house, the workers do not labour in vain.

CHINA



FACTFILE



Area

3,705,407 square miles, 40 times larger than the UK



Population

1,394,015,977 million



Languages

Standard Chinese (official), many regional languages



Literacy rates

96.8%

'Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.'

Jeremiah 15.16 (ESV)

NIGER



FACTFILE



Area

489,191 square miles, about five times bigger than the UK



Population

22,772,361



Languages

French (official), Hausa, Djerma



Literacy rates

19.1%

'I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.'

John 15.5 (ESV)

A TREASURE CHEST OF BIBLICAL RESOURCES ... IN YOUR HOME!

If you want to engage more with God's word while at home, we've got lots of options for you. *The Bible Course* is now fully digital, ideal for social distancing. You can now stream all eight sessions and unpack the big story of Scripture in virtual meetings.

Another superb option for group study is Bible Book Club. This free resource tackles the Scriptures book by book in an eye-opening and rewarding way. It's brilliant for groups who want to meet up and talk through Scripture in easily digestible chunks. If you haven't started a meeting yet, no worries, we have tips to get you started, and it's really easy.

At Easter, we put together a series of videos that you can still access on our website. Paul Williams,

Bible Society's chief executive, looked at biblical ways of thinking about the emergency situation we have found ourselves in.

If you prefer physical over digital, then we've got a number of things to keep you busy and encourage creativity. If you've seen the excellent video of Dai Woolridge performing his poem *Eden* you may want to order a printed copy, which comes with tips for writing your own poetry based on the Bible. Are you into colouring? You should try our Books of the Bible journal, full of original artwork inspired by the Bible's many wonderful stories. Please visit our website to access your resources. Go to :

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/study-the-bible/>

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO ACCESS YOUR RESOURCES! GO TO BIBLESOCIETY.ORG.UK AND LOOK IN THE 'EXPLORE THE BIBLE' SECTION. CLICK ON STUDY AND PICK AND CHOOSE!

YOUR STORIES & COMMENTS

You are part of a community of 23,000 people, committed to seeing God's word change lives around the world. Here's a snapshot of what some of you have to say!

Mary

It never ceases to amaze me what God is doing around the world. It is good to know our donations help to meet the need for the word of God.

Simon

Thank you for your ministry of encouragement as God's word is read, studied, memorised, heard and meditated upon. At present we have the gift of time to do this more often.

Michael

Thank you for the prayer pointers in the Bible a Month newsletter. We pray using these every day.

Helen

I find it both thrilling and inspiring, learning how lives have been transformed, both young and old.

We love to hear from you. Email us your thoughts at bam@biblesociety.org.uk or use the comments form attached. You can also find an online version of the prayer letter at biblesociety.org.uk/bam