



BIBLE A MONTH

AUG/SEP 2021
Issue 208

God's seeds sown in Niger need special care

EYEWITNESS REPORT

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I thank God that you don't forget us, here in one of Africa's toughest places.

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The Bible is our hope in all circumstances.

My name is Hama and I've been the General Secretary at Bible Society in Niger for four years. In that time we've endured the pandemic, deadly floods, and the constant threat of Islamic terrorism. Despite some economic growth, our country remains one of the poorest in the world.

But Peter's words comfort me: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.' John 6.68–69 (ESV).

We are hopeful and positive about our ministry, and are so grateful for your prayerful support through Bible a Month.

The majority of people here are Muslim (about 98 per cent) but Christians are usually highly respected. We stand out for our integrity of character and honesty.

I remember a time when my village had entrusted various pots of communal money to a local leader. This money was for the school, the well and other village activities. But the leader stole from the pot. I was called upon to take over, because I was trusted as a Christian.

Another time, I was going to church with a Bible strapped to the back of my motorbike. Some guards stopped me and asked for my papers – but then saw the Bible and let me through because they knew I could be trusted. That was a real answer to prayer, because it turned out I had actually forgotten to bring my ID documents with me!

However, it can be difficult to be a Christian in Niger. The government is, strictly speaking, secular but will randomly crack down on us. One year, a government official announced that Christmas was cancelled. And the authorities could easily stop our Bible Society projects if they felt we

were being too bold in our outreach.

One of the greatest needs for the Church here is deeper Bible engagement and knowledge of Scripture. Many of the first missionaries who came to Niger in the 1920s and 30s primarily focused on material poverty and misery. It drew people into the churches – but for the wrong reasons. It led to ‘surface’ Christianity, with no depth.

The Bible should be guiding people’s lives! We want to see spiritual growth and we long for every believer to own a Bible and read it daily.

A big barrier to Bible engagement is the low level of theological training among our church leaders. You can go to Bible school with little qualifications. But to study and teach the Bible you need skills! Some churches are so desperate for leaders, they put forward people for training just a year after they’ve come to faith. Anyone who shows a bit of enthusiasm can become a leader in a church.

So, thanks to your amazing support through Bible a Month, we plan to partner with theological schools to

provide resources. We’re targeting the root cause of poor discipleship in churches by focusing on Sunday schools and family engagement. And we’re continuing to provide Bibles wherever they are needed.

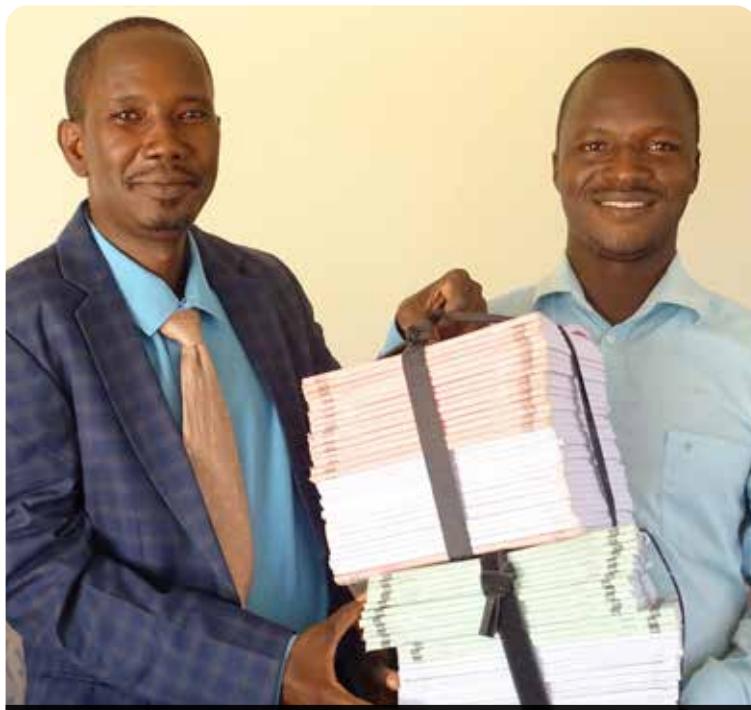
Last year, when a huge flood swept through Niger and stole people’s homes and lives, your kind giving provided God’s word and practical help to those in need. At the time, we were panicked by the number of the people affected. But God in his grace sent us help from many people, not least the committed, regular help from Bible a Month supporters.

Hundreds of families received food, relief and a Bible. In fact, the Church’s response was more consistent and uplifting than many other aid agencies – and people from Muslim backgrounds have started coming to church as a result. We are also training leaders in Bible-based trauma healing. We need God to heal our heart-wounds and help us recover from this disaster.

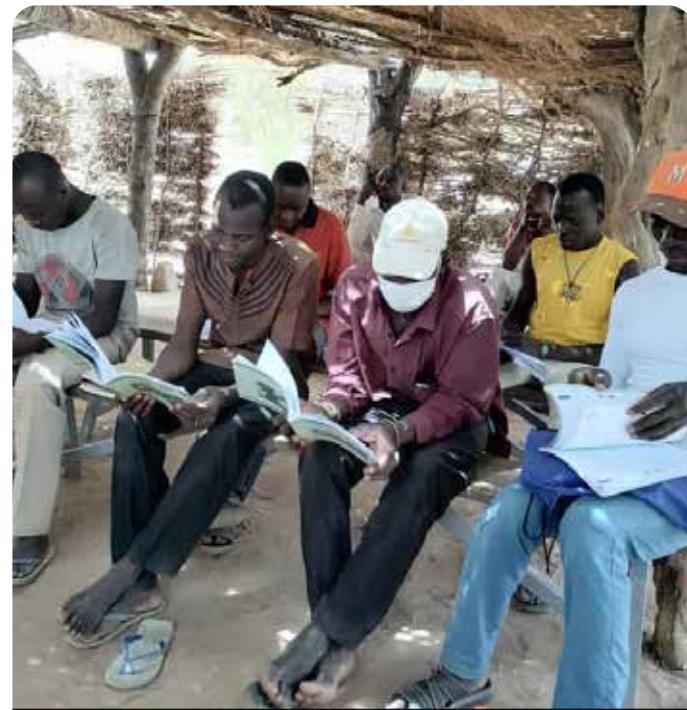
I’m so grateful for your partnership and prayers. I thank God that you don’t forget us, here in one of Africa’s toughest places. The Lord is faithful; God is good!



Hama Yaye
(General Secretary of the
Bible Society of Niger)



Hama hands over piles of Bible Society literacy training resources to Pastor Issa. Just one in five people can read and write in Niger, but you’re helping change that.



Hama visits this ‘pop-up’ Bible-based literacy class in an insecure region of Niger once a year without warning (for security reasons).

Getting practical with a Psalm 23 garden and banquet

MISSION UPDATE

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Psalm 23 has a huge amount to offer everyone at this time

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The way our churches have related to the communities around us has changed during the pandemic. As we emerge from restrictions, it may well change again. But we have two exciting, fresh ways in which Bible a Month supporters with their congregations can draw alongside friends and neighbours locally.

You may remember the account of the Psalm 23 garden in a Bible a Month prayer letter earlier this year. Well, thank you for your prayers! We are thrilled to tell you that we'll be sponsoring a garden on the theme of Psalm 23 at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show (September 20–26).

Psalm 23 reassures us that God is with us in every experience of life, and at its end, so it has a huge amount to offer everyone at this time.

Verse 5 says, 'You prepare a banquet for me where all my enemies can see me'. Over this last year, the coronavirus – and its consequences – has been an enemy to us all.

Now, we're inviting Bible a Month members to hold socially distanced meals for those within your

communities who've really suffered during the pandemic.

You can do this in your churchyard, or in your back garden. It's a way of bringing the blessing of this psalm to people in neighbouring streets who've had a hard time.

Or, you may want to create a lasting legacy by joining with others locally to create a community garden based on Psalm 23. Gardening was popular before the pandemic, but during the last year, an estimated three million people have taken it up.

Paul Williams, CEO of Bible Society, said, 'We've all spent too long apart over the last year. It would be wonderful to create community gardens together as a positive way of emerging from the pandemic. Those gardens will unite people, and be beautiful sanctuaries for many years to come.'

- Free, easy-to-use resources to help you with these mission activities are at biblesociety.org.uk/psalm-23/get-active/
- Let us know what you did by emailing hazel.southam@biblesociety.org.uk



A community garden can be an enriching experience for the whole community, such as here at St Mary's, Lewisham.

Prayer pointers

Thank the Lord for the opportunity to take Psalm 23 to the world through Sarah Eberle's garden at the Chelsea Flower Show.

Ask God to reach out to individuals, churches and communities through this garden and touch lives through it.

Pray that many churches will be inspired to hold banquets or to create community gardens, and in so doing that people would hear about God's consistent love and presence, through this psalm.

Pray that all the gardens that are created will be a place of blessing and solace for generations, enabling people to experience God's presence, and his word.

NIGER

'I am growing in faith because we can read our own Bible and also re-read the notes from sermons once we get home from church,' says Yaliema Lompo, who attends a Bible literacy class thanks to your support.

She's one of thousands of mostly women who attend Bible Society lessons in Niger, where nine out of 10 adults in rural areas can't read or write. Most of the students are new Christians and come through our Bible listening programme.

But Yaliema and her classmates are not only enriched spiritually but also blessed in practical ways too. One man tells how he now records names and amounts when people donate to the village 'pot' for schooling and water, which prevents disputes; and a woman says she's learned to care for her animals so they live longer.

Your Bible a Month donations are vital in Niger, one of the world's poorest nations. In the last year, you helped flood victims, you kept Bible Society open through the pandemic and you're providing a 4x4 vehicle to distribute Scripture around this vast nation. Your faithful gifts are sharing the Bible in powerful ways, and your support is changing people's lives.



A family of evangelists in Niger. The girl on the right is a 'walking Bible,' says Hama. 'She memorises the Bible stories and at school shares them with other children,' he says.

August prayer pointers

Give thanks that Yaliema and others are growing in faith since attending our Bible-based literacy class. Pray they will find great joy in reading God's word.

Pray for Hama Yaye, who leads Bible work in Niger. Pray for energy as he perseveres with ministry, and for faith and passion as he shares God's word.

Ask God to bless our ambitious plans to help Christians in Niger go deeper with the Bible, so their lives will be shaped by the gospel.

Ask that families still recovering from the October 2020 flooding will be restored by Christ.

LEBANON

Thank you for your prayers last year after the explosion ripped through Beirut, leaving more than 200 dead.

Thanks to your generosity through Bible a Month, almost 9,000 Bibles or Scripture portions were distributed free or highly subsidised to families whose homes were damaged in the blast.

Despite severe economic problems in Lebanon, your support of many Bible projects is having a huge impact.

The Bible-based trauma healing project 'Reconcile', that your kind gifts are supporting, is giving hope to Syrian and Iraqi refugee children living in Lebanon (where there are about 1.5 million refugees).

Camille Safar, who works for Bible Society in Lebanon, said that shifting to online ministry during the pandemic has

enabled the Bible mission team to reach many more young people.

In the first quarter of 2020, before the pandemic took hold, 2,100 young people were reached. In the first quarter of this year, however, it was 40,000 young people encountering the Scriptures through online outreach!

'They were thirsty to know more about Jesus and engage with the Scriptures,' Camille said.



Children look at Scripture booklets distributed by the Bible Society in Beirut.

September prayer pointers

Thank God that none of the Bible Society staff members were killed or injured in the blast and that they have been able to help those rebuilding their lives in Beirut.

Ask God to help Christians persevere as they are often in a minority. Pray that they will remain in the country rather than leaving and become witnesses to the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Thank God for the amazing response of young people to hearing his word. Pray that these young people will form a real relationship with Jesus.

NIGER



FACTFILE



Area

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



Population

23.6 million



Languages

French (official), Hausa, Djerma



Literacy rate

19.1%

'You can get horses ready for battle, but it is the LORD who gives victory.'

Proverbs 21.31 (CEV)

LEBANON



FACTFILE



Area

4,015 square miles, about 23 times smaller than the UK



Population

5.5 million



Languages

Arabic (official), French, English, Armenian



Literacy rate

95.1%

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.'

Hebrews 12.1 (ESV)

YOUR FREE BIBLE SUNDAY RESOURCES

Bible Sunday is on 24 October this year and we want to invite you to join us in celebrating the wonderful gift of God's word!

We've prepared material, for adults and children of all ages, that will provide you or your church with an entire Bible Sunday service.

Last year was a huge success with thousands of individuals, small groups and congregations using the material at home or in church.

This year's sermon, which will be available as a video and in note form, draws from Isaiah 55, which opens with 'Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.'

It's an invitation to receive the glory of the Lord's restoration – and what could be more relevant in the troubled times that we live in?

For Sunday schools and youth groups there is an exciting array of fun and intriguing material that focuses on the same passage of Scripture as the sermon, meaning everyone, young and old, will be on the same page!

A pack of inspirational stories of people who have been helped through your support of Bible a Month, and a short video showing the work you prayerfully support, is also included.

To receive the free material, all you need to do is go to biblesociety.org.uk/biblesunday2021 and enter your email address. We will notify you when the resources are ready.

Here is some of the feedback from last year:

'I used the notes in my own personal study as a guide and found them a help in bringing the Scriptures alive to me personally. Thanks.'

'I incorporated elements of the sermon notes into my own sermon. The congregation loved it.'

'My two kids loved making the scroll and they added to the authenticity by writing the Bible verse using quill and ink.'



ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Last year, Bible Society of Lebanon asked for prayer after the chemical blast in the capital, Beirut, that killed more than 200 people and left 7,500 injured. This year we heard how God has answered your prayers.

'Thanks to all the prayers and support

received, we were able to repair the Bible Society Centre and continue with our ministry. Free Scriptures were distributed to people affected by the explosion to help them gain hope again,' said Bible Society staff member Camille Safar.



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

Reading the prayer letter made me realise how much I take Bibles for granted. I respond more quickly to appeals for those hungry for food. Thank you for providing food for the soul.

James

I appreciate the way the prayer letter covers the world so clearly and brings the needs of people we are praying for.

Christine

I cannot imagine life without my trusty Bible, so the thought of other Christians going without this wonderful revelation from God prompted me to increase my regular gift. I wish it could be more.

Anne

I found the testimony of the lady from Laos being touched by the Holy Spirit such a blessing. How inspiring that at the age of 71 she is being used by God to spread the good news about Jesus in that country.

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