



Bible Society

# BIBLE A MONTH

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Issue 205

## Gardens as Scriptural spaces

EYEWITNESS REPORT

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St Mary's Church in Tadley last year created a garden based on Psalm 23.

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Your amazing steadfast support ensures that the priorities of Bible mission in England and Wales do not change. Thank you for joining us in our commitment to increasing Bible confidence in the Church, changing the conversation about the Bible in wider culture, and encouraging Bible-inspired change in society. This Eyewitness Report is about our Psalm 23 garden project, which is just one example of encouraging a wider engagement with Scripture in a creative and positive way. It's hoped that our Psalm 23 Garden will be at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, and the aim is for it to inspire the creation of many community gardens on this theme around the country. One is already up and running, having been created in the first lockdown. Hazel Southam went to visit.

'Please do walk on the grass round the wildflower labyrinth!' reads the

wooden sign. I do a double-take. This is not the usual forbidding 'Don't walk on the grass' message. This is the opposite, an invitation to wander.

Wander where? St Mary's Church in Tadley, Hampshire, last year created a garden based on Psalm 23. And in May, a garden inspired by Psalm 23 will feature at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Designed by the world's leading garden designer, Sarah Eberle, it is intended to bring the much-loved psalm to life. It's also hoped that it will motivate communities around the country to create their own Psalm 23-inspired gardens, as places of solace and of contemplation as we hopefully emerge from the pandemic. The garden in Tadley has used many of the principles from Sarah Eberle's Chelsea Flower Show garden design, including wildflowers, trees and logs for seating.

A team of three created the garden

Revd Gill Sakakini says the Psalm 23 garden in Tadley gives the community hope during the pandemic. All photos: Bible Society/James Greg

during the first lockdown, making a labyrinth of wildflowers.

Unlike a maze (where you get lost!) a labyrinth is circular and leads you to the centre. This means you can simply walk it and be refreshed, not worrying about where you are: a metaphor for life and so, a simple tool for reflection.

**I took the invitation and stepped inside. Instantly, there was purpose and direction, my feet drawn to the centre. But it's slow, calm, unlike the walk to the shops, the bank, or in my case, the allotment. Who knew walking could be different and meditative?**

The outer ring of flowers was ablaze with blues, signifying the 'still waters' of the psalm: viper's bugloss and salvias doing their bit to depict water. Bees love blue flowers. So, this once barren stretch of grass was now a-buzz with honey and bumble bees.

It felt like I was walking down a country lane. Why? Because the gardeners cleverly chose a seed mix of more than 30 local varieties of wildflower. So, everything looked like it belonged, because it did. Yarrow, wild carrot, cornflowers and mallow were augmented by echiums and

coreopsis, as well as marigolds, grown by local children. This new, lockdown garden had a song to sing, and was singing loudly.

At the centre, a wooden stump offered a place to pause and reflect.

The neighbouring houses only have lawns so the garden was a pop of colour and interest, as well as a much-needed home for wildlife. A red kite wheeled overhead. Its presence meant there was something to eat, thanks in part to the newly-established garden.

On the wall of the church was a giant stag beetle, part of a nature trail across the town. Stag beetle larvae were found here as the garden was created, an auspicious sign of future flourishing.

**Shoulders relaxed, breathing slower, soul touched by Psalm 23, I returned to work knowing that many more will walk through other Psalm 23 community gardens feeling the same.**

Resources to help you create your own Psalm 23-inspired community garden will be launched in April. Sign up for your free copies now at: <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/psalm-23/get-active/>



**Hazel Southam**  
is Project Storytelling  
Manager at Bible Society



St Mary's Church in Tadley created a garden based on Psalm 23.



The garden became part of a wildlife trail through the town.

# Scriptures and aid get through to vulnerable people in Iraq

## MISSION UPDATE



Children from Christian families at a refugee camp in northern Iraq. Scriptures and aid reached camps in Iraq last autumn.

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Our team was granted permission to enter the refugee camps. Thanks to you, families received vital aid, and even more importantly, the hope of God’s word

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The relief and joy were visible in the woman’s face as the package with food and Scripture was placed into her hands.

‘My baby has not been drinking milk for two days, and today I didn’t have any kind of food to feed my family,’ she told our member of staff, as a cold wind shook the tent she calls home. ‘This distribution has increased my faith in God. He will not let anyone down. Thank you.’

**The woman, a Christian living in a refugee camp in northern Iraq, is one of 4,000 people who benefitted from a Bible Society distribution of Scripture, food and aid in October 2020. The precious package contained 15 types of food, a hygiene kit and five face masks as well as a Bible and Scripture material.**

In this camp, like many others in northern Iraq, Christian families are living in desperate situations. Violence and exploitation are a daily reality, children are out of school, and there’s a lack of basic services. The coronavirus pandemic has only added to the misery. Many people can no longer

earn a living, and they depend on help from kind people like you.

Our team, plus more than 30 volunteers, were granted permission to enter the refugee camps during Iraq’s severe lockdown. Thanks to you, families received vital aid, and even more importantly, the hope of God’s word.

Your support is also training more leaders to run Bible-based trauma healing workshops across Iraq. Due to Covid restrictions, we were unable to run face-to-face training – so we switched to Zoom, the video conference call system, instead. More than 50 people received training towards the end of 2020, particularly in how to tackle emotional trauma in children. The new leaders will now run trauma healing sessions with families, to help children to address their pain and have hope for the future.

**Meanwhile, in Baghdad, Iraq’s capital city, your Bible a Month gifts are supplying Bibles and aid to local Christians. Your support is building up their faith in Jesus and offering hope in the hardship.**

## Prayer pointers

**Pray for God’s peace and hope in this troubled nation. Pray for stable government, the restoration of proper infrastructure, and for Christians seeking to return to their homes.**

**Ask God to fill people’s hearts with hope. Life is so tough for Iraqi Christians, but God is our refuge and strength, and his love will never fail. Pray particularly for the mother in the camp, that God will keep providing for her family.**

**Pray for the safety of our staff and volunteers in Iraq. Bible work has always been a challenge here, and the coronavirus pandemic has only made things harder.**

# COSTA RICA

When almost everyone in a country believes in God, but only around half the population participate in church life, there's work to do to engage people in the richness and value of Scripture.

That is the situation in Costa Rica, Central America. So, thanks to your support, our team launched a new series of Bible studies through the online Bible tool, YouVersion. They prepared daily reading plans on themes like encouragement, humility, purpose and Christian living – and provided them free online.

In the last couple of years, more than 90,000 people completed a reading plan, and an average of 200 new people sign up each day. There are 13 Bible devotionals to choose from, and the most popular include 'God in our prayers,' 'kindness' and 'gratitude'.

Mayra Ugaldá, who leads our work in

Costa Rica, said, 'We can see God has us in his plans, and that the Bible will continue to be needed in the midst of so much uncertainty.' She also thanked people like you who supported our emergency appeal to keep Bible work alive in places like Costa Rica, which was hit hard by the pandemic.



Photo credit: Bible Society

Your kind giving has helped keep Bible work alive in Costa Rica. Here a girl holds Scriptures received from Bible Society.

## February prayer pointers

Give thanks for the success of the YouVersion Bible reading plans.

Costa Rica's economy depends on tourism, and the country has been severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Pray that our team can share the hope of the Bible in a time of high unemployment, uncertainty and anxiety.

Praise God for progress on a New Testament translation into the Ngöbere language for the indigenous Ngäbe people. Please pray that before the rains arrive in April, the team based in the US can travel to the hilly jungle region to check the completed work.

# MOZAMBIQUE

Your support is changing people's lives in Mozambique, by bringing the hope and peace of God's word right into the heart of the nation's significant challenges.

A resource-rich country on the east coast of southern Africa, Mozambique's development has been beset by problems. The pandemic hit hard as the country attempted to recover from a debt crisis and the devastating effect of two cyclones in 2019. Meanwhile, Islamist extremists are waging a campaign of violence in the north; around 1,500 people have been killed and many more are homeless.

Thanks to you, though, thousands of people are taking part in Bible-based trauma healing workshops. They're being equipped to deal with emotional pain, and to trust God for healing and restoration.

Your support is also going towards an ambitious project which helps the Church share the message of Jesus, and promote peace and love in neighbouring Muslim communities.

'Thank you for being with us, please keep us in your prayers,' said Valente Tseco, who leads our work in Mozambique.



Photo credit: Judith Kendall

A mother is thrilled to receive the Scriptures in Mozambique.

## March prayer pointers

In November, 100 pastors were trained to promote peaceful co-existence with people of other faiths. Pray for their ministries.

Pray for Christians in Cabo Delgado, where Islamist extremists are most active. Pray for an end to the violence and hatred.

Give thanks for Davina Santos (pseudonym used to protect her identity). She was raped by her stepfather aged 10, and carried the trauma with her for decades. After taking part in our Bible-based healing workshop, Davina said, 'I managed to share what I have in my heart, my greatest weight. I feel relieved, and I thank God'.

# COSTA RICA



## FACTFILE



### Area

19,690 square miles, about five times smaller than the UK



### Population

5 million



### Languages

Spanish (official), English



### Literacy rates

97.9%

'Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.'

Psalm 37.7a (ESV)

# MOZAMBIQUE



## FACTFILE



### Area

308,880 square miles, about three times bigger than the UK



### Population

30 million



### Languages

Makhuwa, Portuguese (official), many regional languages



### Literacy rates

60.7%

'So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'

John 8.36 (ESV)

# JOURNEY WITH US THROUGH LENT AND EASTER

Lent is a time of reflection when we journey with Jesus on his path to the cross and celebrate his resurrection. We have a host of resources to help you reflect and celebrate. To see all of our Easter resources go to [biblesociety.org.uk/easter](https://biblesociety.org.uk/easter)

## **All About Easter: A Resurrection Rhyme**

Our new Easter booklet for children, brought to life by the rhymes of Bob Hartman, explores the events surrounding Jesus' resurrection and why we truly celebrate Easter. There are family activity pages in the middle of the booklet, perfect as a give-away for children in your family, community and school.

## **The Lent Encounter**

2021 sees the launch of The Lent Encounter. It's a brand-new way to help you focus on the

Bible, the life of Jesus and your own life, in the run-up to Easter. Sign up at [biblesociety.org.uk/lent2021](https://biblesociety.org.uk/lent2021) and you'll receive a daily email message throughout Lent. You'll get beautiful pictures, Bible verses, practical challenges and personal reflections to help you encounter the Bible more deeply.

## **Exploring and reflection**

We will be exploring themes including The Beauty of Creation, Peace, Human Identity, Love and Who Jesus Was. Andrew Ollerton will be reading excerpts from his new book, *The Bible: A Story That Makes Sense of Life*, and reflecting on these themes as we journey through Lent.

It's completely free and you can eat as much chocolate as you like!

## 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!

### **Fiona**

It is great for other countries to access the Bible and also be supported with literacy projects.

### **Jill**

My sister is part of a small Open the Book group that takes the Bible stories into a Wiltshire school. Because of the coronavirus they filmed stories to be used. After the story of the woman and the lost coin my sister asked her nine-year-old grandson if he had recognised her. 'Yes, nanny,' he replied. 'Where do you find such lovely stories?' 'They are in the Bible,' she replied.

### **Christopher**

I am always pleased to hear of the work that Bible Societies are doing around the world. I would like to help those who are finding things tough because of Covid. I am able to help just now as I have more savings than I need.

### **Alan**

I am unable to lay hands on and pray for people because of the virus restrictions, so sending Bibles to people will help to spread the word of the Lord.

We love to hear from you. Email us your thoughts at [bam@biblesociety.org.uk](mailto: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](https://biblesociety.org.uk/bam)