



God's word is enough By David Smith

Children discovering the Bible at a shelter in Guatemala.

With Christmas approaching, once again I find myself lagging behind when it comes to buying presents. Whether you're like me, or whether you had everything ready by the end of August, I hope you'll find something you like from our 2016 Christmas resources – more information in 'Club Corner'.



Peace, hope and joy are themes we often associate with Christmas, and you'll find them running through the stories in this newsletter, particularly the moving account of my colleague David's trip to Guatemala.

Thank you as ever for your commitment to *Bible a Month*, we really mean it when we say that none of this work is possible without you. May you have a very happy Christmas and a blessed New Year!



John Ranford
Bible a Month
Co-ordinator

I was caught off-guard when I met José* at a government-run shelter for children recently, just outside of Guatemala City.

All of the 800 boys and girls in the shelter were in some way or another wards of the state. Some were orphans, some had special educational needs, and some had been rescued from gangs – nine-year-olds who had been given a gun and told to kill. These children rarely if ever leave the shelter, both for their own safety and for the safety of others.

During my visit I had the privilege to speak to 50 of the boys as part of a gathering organised by the Bible Society volunteers. What do you say in such a situation? I've rarely felt so inadequate.

As I stumbled through a short talk about David the shepherd boy, I was increasingly aware of the privileges of my childhood and that of my own children.

After I'd finished, a young man, José, asked to speak with me privately. As we withdrew to a corner I asked, via translation, what was on his mind. Immediately his face, which had been a hard and expressionless mask, crumpled as the tears rolled down.

Between sobs, José told us that when he was a young boy, he was abandoned by his parents and taken in by his aunt. Not long afterwards, his aunt also abandoned him and he became a ward of the state, entering the government shelter aged 11. In the intervening years he has never been visited by a family member. Not once.

This is the same experience as 80 percent of the children in the shelter. Today, aged 17, approaching his birthday and official adulthood, José is facing up to the prospect of having to leave the shelter and create a life for himself beyond the familiar walls. And he was terrified. He was preparing to leave the only home he'd ever known, for a world that had, in the experience of his short life, totally rejected him.

I can't even begin to imagine the fear, the isolation. But there were some words that took on a new meaning for me that day; a famous passage that exhorts us not to worry. In the Gospels, Matthew records Jesus saying:

'I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or

In focus

Spread the joy of Christmas

This Advent you can spread the joy of Christmas and bring the Bible to life for those around you by taking part in #AdventChallenge.

#AdventChallenge is our online Advent calendar. Each day throughout the month of December up until Christmas Day, you will be challenged to do a small, practical act of kindness to share goodwill and make a difference to the lives of those around you.

Last year, an incredible 13,000 people took part and a whopping 105,000 challenges were accepted; that's over 4,000 challenges each day! Thousands of people were impacted, as those taking part encouraged others, made contributions to local foodbanks, and sent Christmas cards to neighbours they didn't know very well.

Now you have a chance to join in with this movement of generosity and kindness. We'll send you three daily challenges by email throughout Advent, and you accept the one that suits you best – or take on all three!

All the challenges are simple, achievable and Bible-based. We believe that small acts of kindness and generosity add up to create a big impact, and you will have the opportunity to show your community what true hope, love, joy and peace looks like this festive season.

Sign up now to take part in this year's #AdventChallenge by visiting adventchallenge.org.uk.



Join us in #AdventChallenge by signing up at adventchallenge.org.uk.

clothing? Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth more than birds? Can worry make you live longer?' Matthew 6.25-27 (CEV)

We are in the hands of God himself. Not a distant, impersonal God, sitting on a cloud, itching to punish us. But a God who broke into our world as a helpless baby, born with the hint of human disgrace hanging over his head; the child of refugees, hunted by the authorities, raised in poverty and persecuted for bringing a message of mercy and love.

In the light of Jesus' own story, every one of those children in that shelter can afford to hope. All of them can have a bright future. And if the Bible story and its message of restoration seems distant to them, all the children have to do is

look at the lead Bible Society volunteer, Michael*; his tattoo-sleeves, his jail-time for gang membership, and the humility and fatherly love that he brings to them every week in a place that so few will visit.

The Bible Society volunteers and I were able to remind José of some of this. Where my words failed me, God's words were enough. As we wept together, I was able to remind José of God's promise to Jeremiah, that 'before I formed you in the womb I knew you', of the words of the Psalmist that he was 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.

And I was able to share those other words God gave to Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"

*Names have been changed to protect those concerned

Distributing the Bible here at home

Over the last year, thanks to your generosity, Bible Society has been able to give nearly 900 Bibles to organisations across the UK that work with refugees and seafarers, as well as hospitals.

Recently, Bible Society gave 30 Bibles to Apostleship of the Sea working at Tilbury Docks in Essex. Bible Society's Hazel Southam went on board the container ship, the Grande Abidjan, with dock chaplain Wojeiech Holub.

'These people work in a dangerous environment,' Wojeiech told Hazel, 'and at sea it's even more dangerous.'

'Natural theology is somehow built into seafarers' minds and lives. They are aware that there is a greater force that they cannot withstand.'

'They find some peace, stillness and consolation in reading the Bible.'

Many of the 26 sailors on board the Grande Abidjan are from the Philippines. Ratings are at sea for nine months at a time, officers for six months. It's a long time to be away from family and home.

Second Officer Reimiel Angelo Dorado was the first to receive a Bible on board. Aged 32, he's been working at sea since he was 18. On this particular trip, he'd been away from home for four-and-a-half months already and had six weeks to go before he could return to the Philippines.

He took a Bible and kissed it. 'You get homesick and you miss seeing your family,' he said. 'I get lonely too.'

'Reading the Bible gives me courage that everything will be OK and that everything will be safe here at work. The worst days were sailing through Storm Jasmine when waves broke over the ship.'

'I miss praying with my family. Here we pray alone. But the Bible gives me some inspiration and courage.'

Please pray for our work here at home in England and Wales, that we may be able to distribute the Bible to those who need it and that God's word may be a comfort to the likes of refugees and seafarers in lonely and frightening situations.



Second Officer Reimiel Angelo Dorado with his new Bible aboard the Grande Abidjan.

Photo © John Lawrence

Guatemala

December 2016

The number of violent deaths of children and adolescents is higher in Guatemala than in nearly all other parts of the world. There is also growing numbers of street children, often caused by domestic violence and/or sexual abuse within family homes. This is why we're focusing on presenting the message of God's love to children and young people in Guatemala.

Each year, 1,000 children are hearing the message of love and peace from the Bible. Workshops use play, drama and the arts to teach biblical values to children, combined with donations of portions of the Bible.

This work is equipping young Guatemalans to break the cycle of violence in their lives, understand that God has a purpose for them, and ultimately transform the Guatemalan society. Thanks to your support, the Bible is changing the lives of many Guatemalans, for good.

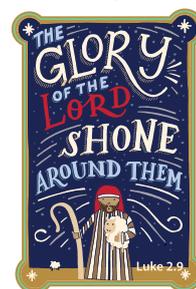


Our team in Guatemala presenting the message of God's love to young people.

Prayer pointers

- Thank God for the 1,000 children hearing the message of the Bible each year, and for the transformative power of Scripture for all peoples.
- Pray for José as he turns 18, that he may know and experience God's love, and that he would be able to face the world as an adult with confidence and purpose.
- Pray for love, patience and wisdom for all staff that work with the children in government-run shelters.

- Pray that ongoing violence in Guatemala would cease and that more churches would join the cause to change the country.



Uganda

January 2017

Uganda has a population of 37 million people, 1 million of whom are visually impaired. Blind people are often perceived as a curse in Uganda, and therefore tend to be stigmatised by society. They are frequently denied rights, like education and worship. They can even be excluded from church activities, because their leaders think they are of no use to them.

The PVD (Providing Scriptures for People with Visual Disability) project in Uganda seeks to address these issues by advocating on behalf of blind people in society, as well as ensuring they have access to God's word through braille, audio and large-print formats.

Sabrina (pictured) was born blind, but has braille literacy. She heard about the Bible Society of Uganda on the radio and made the journey to the offices in the hope of getting her own Bible. She was delighted to receive the four Gospels, Psalms and Proverbs.

Your support is enabling people like Sabrina to get access to the Bible and be more accepted in Ugandan society – thank you.



Sabrina receiving her braille Bible portions.

Prayer pointers

- Pray for the growth of the PVD project; that it will be able to reach more blind people.
- Pray for the parents and guardians of the visually impaired young people, that they will value them and send them to school in order that they will gain braille literacy.
- Pray that the blind everywhere will be able to access adequate education, health and other services necessary for life.
- Thank God that Sabrina was able to receive several portions of the Bible and pray that others like Sabrina will be able to access God's word.

Guatemala



'Our God, from your sacred home you take care of orphans and protect widows. You find families for those who are lonely.'

Psalm 68.5-6a (CEV)

Factfile



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

Population – 14.9 million, approx. 23% of UK

Literacy rate – 81.5%

Languages – Spanish (official), Amerindian languages (approx. 23)

Club Corner

Christmas resources for you

It's that time of year again, and we've produced a whole suite of quality Christmas resources for you to enjoy and give away this festive season. Many of them can also be bought in bulk for church events. Here's a snapshot of what we've got on offer:



Christmas stickers

Share the real Christmas story on your Christmas cards and envelopes this year with these specially designed Scripture stickers, from artist Emma Skerratt.

Children's Nativity booklet

The Well Good News of Christmas brings the Christmas story to life in a fresh retelling that will enchant children (and adults) of all ages.



2017 colouring calendar

Bring popular passages from the Bible to life throughout 2017 with this brand new colouring calendar.

Get these resources (and much more) by visiting biblesociety.org.uk/Christmas.

Uganda



'I don't know if he is a sinner or not. All I know is that I used to be blind, but now I can see!'

John 9.25 (CEV)

Factfile



Area – 241,038 sq km, approx. 99% of UK

Population – 37.1 million, approx. 58% of UK

Literacy rate – 78.4%

Languages – English (official), Ganda or Luganda, Swahili, Arabic, other local languages

Look out for your next *Bible a Month* prayer letter which will feature reports from **Austria** and **Bible Lands**.

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

Remember that if your circumstances change you can alter your gift at any time. To increase or decrease your regular donation call us on 01793 418222.

If you're paying by direct debit please call us on 01793 418222.



For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2.11)

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