

STORIES

CHINA

'Yes, Lord Jesus, I am willing to serve you!'

Mu Weixu is a 33-year-old preacher who lives in a mountainous area of Yunnan province in China. He was facing many challenges even before the coronavirus outbreak. How easy do you think it would be to say, 'Yes, Lord Jesus, I am willing to serve you!' if you are a poor preacher living in a rural area? You'd have to give up all your farming income to go out and preach the gospel.

Mu also has a wife and newborn baby son to support too. When Covid-19 started spreading, the mountains preachers like Mu had to climb to continue their God-given mission suddenly got much bigger.

The suspension of all church meetings during the lockdown meant the income of preachers like Mu evaporated. These situations can lead to rural preachers abandoning much-needed ministries in order to survive. And in China there is already a huge shortage of trained pastors, with just one trained leader for every 6,700 Christians.

Mu admits he was tempted to quit to seek a better paid job in the city, especially after the birth of his baby. But he kept going, lifted up by the generosity, both in donations and in prayer, of Christians thousands of miles away in England and Wales.

Wu wanted to share his gratitude. He said, 'I am thankful for your support, for now I can visit more brothers and sisters, and travel far to preach God's word. What's more, the needs of our baby can be taken care of now. This has strengthened my faith to know that God will always provide for me as I serve him faithfully!'

Prayer: Thank God that Bible mission was able to meet the needs of pastors like Wu and their families during 2020. Pray that more and more pastors in China will be able to receive quality Bible training.

MIDDLE-EAST

'Mummy, will you read me a story about Jesus?'

It was Easter, in the city of Aleppo in war-torn Syria. Bible Society staff member Miss Nour gave pre-schooler Bechara a Bible storybook and said to him, 'This is a story from the Bible about Jesus Christ who loves you. See how Jesus is sitting among the children loving them with all his heart?'

Bechara took the book and ran to his mum. 'Look what a beautiful book they gave me! Will you read me a story about Jesus?'

Bechara's mother asked him if he had thanked Miss Nour for the book. He turned and shouted at the top of his voice, 'Thank you, Bible Society!'

Also at the same event in Aleppo, a very excited Nadim demonstrated his own kindness. He said, 'I've already got a Bible. Now I can give this one to my friend who hasn't got one!'

In Syria, Bible mission focuses on the younger generations. Many of these children and young people have been exposed to the horrors of war. Many more have been displaced. More and more of them are finding hope in the Scriptures, hope to mend their broken lives.

In 2020, at Easter, 28,000 Bibles and Scripture storybooks were distributed to children at Big Bible Distribution Easter events in many towns and cities in Syria where it is safe to do so. Even more will be distributed at Christmas. It's estimated that Scriptures handed out in 2020 will be seen by at least 100,000 children by the end of the year. These gifts uplifted the youngsters who have suffered years of war and were also facing the added threat of coronavirus.

Prayer: Thank you Lord that children in the Middle-East are finding hope in your word. I pray that tears of joy will replace those of despair as many more people discover hope promised in the Scriptures.

AFRICA

One child loved the Bible so much he read 10 stories a night

There are about one thousand children at Nsungwi Church in rural Malawi. For Sunday school they split into classes with about 100 kids in each class. This is church on a big scale ... until it comes to their resources. There may be a thousand children in the church, but there are just 40 children's Bibles.

In one class, five children each week are allowed to take a Bible home. They must read a story every night and learn one by heart. One child loved the Bible so much he read 10 stories a night. Bibles are brought back to church the following Sunday. Children's hands shoot up as they offer to retell stories they had read and knew inside out. Stories such as David and Goliath, Noah's Ark, Jacob and Joseph are told with pride, clarity and accuracy. The Bibles are passed to another child. Children can wait around six months for their turn to take one home.

One child said, 'The Bible tells me about God's love.' Another said, 'We love the pictures, and the stories teach us good behaviour. A very little boy added, 'We know these stories off by heart and they help us trust in God.'

Clapperton, who leads Bible Society work in Malawi, said, 'I remember one of the first churches we went to. We brought 120 Bibles, which we thought was quite a large number. When we got there, we found there were 750 children. Almost every week, churches ask us for Bibles and we can't say yes to them all. We are still just focusing on the cities because the need is so great. But we believe we are sowing seeds. We trust God the seeds will germinate and grow, and these children will know the foundation of God's word in their lives.'

Prayer: Thank you Lord that thousands of children are receiving God's word. I pray that the stories in the Scriptures they read will touch their lives and encourage them to follow and rely upon Jesus Christ.

ENGLAND & WALES

In a garage at the edge of the forest stands Dennis the Donkey

In a garage at the edge of the Forest of Dean stands Dennis the Donkey. Bright-eyed and pink-tongued, he is the star in assemblies at a local primary school. Beside Dennis, who's actually made of cardboard, is a whale (to devour Jonah), a roll-out temple and other props used by Bible Society's Open the Book volunteers who are invited to schools to dramatise Bible stories.

Cyril Twist, a retired chartered engineer who makes the props, said, 'When we did the story about Jesus healing the blind man, I made a chocolate paste as the mud to go over the blind man's eyes. The children loved that!'

He added that a group of boys came up to him after one assembly and said they wanted to be Christians. About 10 of them then started attending church.

Cyril also recounted a very special moment. He said, 'We also had a very dramatic story of a little girl who kept going home after assemblies and saying to her parents, "God loves us and God loves you too, Mummy and Daddy." And one day, the father gave his heart to Jesus.'

Cyril added, 'That was absolutely profound. You always wonder if they really get the story. But this shows that absolutely, they do.'

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for saving me by grace through faith in Jesus. Help me to pass down to the next generation a legacy of faith and the truth of the gospel.

CHINA

An elderly man approached with tears in his eyes

At a church service in Beijing, Arleen, now China Mission Specialist at Bible Society, was telling the congregation about Bible mission in China.

After Arleen had finished speaking, an elderly man approached her with tears in his eyes. He said he had become a Christian more than 30 years ago, but it was the first time he had heard the story of how his copy of the Bible came to him.

He told Arleen: 'It's never been easy to be a Christian here in China. 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.'

The old man then asked for the address of the Bible printing company. Arleen told him that Amity, the name of the printers that Bible Society helped establish, was in Nanjing. She asked him why he wanted to know this.

The old man said, 'I just want to simply go there and do whatever I can to serve them. I want 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.'

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