

Bringing the Bible to life

Over the last few months, we've been reviewing the way we engage with our supporters and have made some refreshing changes.

Some of you may have seen at Spring Harvest, or heard at the training day in March, that our new awareness raising campaign is called *Bringing the Bible to Life*. This campaign will provide an exciting opportunity for you to tell our story in a fresh and engaging style as it summarises everything we do and what we're about under one umbrella. As part of this we've also refreshed our logo, introduced new colours and clarified our messages.

Our vision (how we want the world to be): A world where everyone has access to the Bible and can recognise its value for them, their families and communities.

Our mission (what we're doing to achieve our vision): We offer the Bible to the world.

And why do we do this? Because when people engage with the Bible, their lives can change, for good.

All of the above will give our messages a greater level of clarity and consistency, and your role as a Speaker is crucial in helping us to achieve this. This is just a head-up, we'll go into more detail at the ReFresh Weekend.



*Elizabeth Kalli from Ghana, delighted with her Bible. Thanks to your work we are Bringing the Bible to Life across the world.
Photo: Layton Thomson.*

Open the Book

Please consider getting a speaking slot in your own church to highlight the impact – and need – of Open the Book.

This programme now reaches over 2,300 schools regularly but more could be reached if we had more teams.

Crucial

Because the government may, in a few years, take away the need for assemblies reflecting Christian worship, it's crucial that we get into schools now and build relationships, so they will keep the assemblies going if the legislation does change.

If you'd like ideas of how to make this presentation – including featuring one of the stories with props and costume – please contact Susan on susan.wingrave@biblesociety.org.uk

Inside this issue

- Refugee roundup
- News from Syria
- Susan's visit to refugees

Syria Update

Nearly five years into the conflict in Syria, which has killed or displaced half the population, staff members of the Bible Society there are continuing their ministry to provide Scriptures for all who want them.

'The thirst for Scriptures among Christians here has only increased with all the unrest,' notes the Society's director*, who, along with other staff members, has stayed despite the dangers.

'The past five years have been very traumatic for Syrians in general, and for Syrian Christians in particular. Every family has a sad story. With this loss of hope, people are turning to God's word for comfort and encouragement.'

While nearly four million Syrians have fled their country, another 7.6 million have been internally displaced, leaving their bombed and besieged towns and villages to shelter in safer areas. Many are living in overcrowded houses and apartments with friends or family members.

Amid this trauma, the Bible Society there has received more requests for Scriptures than ever before. In 2010, the year before the conflict began, just under 15,000 Scriptures were distributed. By 2014, the demand had increased tenfold, and nearly 159,000 Scriptures were distributed across Syria that year.

Rocket, sniper attacks and fighting

Distribution takes place through its two Bible bookshops in Aleppo and Damascus, and through partner bookshops, churches, monasteries and volunteers. Incredibly, the Damascus Bible bookshop has remained open throughout the conflict, while the one in Aleppo only shut for two days when the nearby fighting became particularly intense.

A rocket hit the second floor of the building in which the bookshop is housed, but it didn't explode and there were no casualties or damage to the Scriptures.

Although life in Aleppo has become very difficult, most Bible Society staff based there have remained, risking sniper attacks as they make their way to work and carrying out their duties to the rattle of gunfire



Refugees from Syria and neighbouring countries at Keleti railway station, Budapest, Hungary, in September 2015. The Hungarian Bible Society and other Bible Societies are responding to the mass flow of refugees with a wide range of assistance. Photo: Marosi Nagy Lajos.

just down the street. They welcome many visitors to the bookshop each day, including a steady flow of young people who are being offered free Scriptures through a joint project between the Bible Society and local churches.

Risky journeys

Transporting Scriptures around the country is a challenging task, especially to Christians in the more remote areas. But the Bible Society uses all means available – buses, trucks, church volunteers – to ensure that those who need Scriptures receive them. Staff members themselves often make risky journeys to encourage Christians and deliver Scriptures to them, sometimes getting caught in battle zones.

The Bible Society has also begun to equip churches to offer Bible-based trauma healing to the many Christian families who need it. Late last year a group of church representatives spent a week in a remote monastery in Lebanon learning from a Middle Eastern trauma healing expert and sharing their own experiences of trauma.

'Some of the participants were from Aleppo, which was being besieged at that time,' one staff member recalls. 'They were so worried about their families and kept phoning them in the breaks.'

* Names not provided for safety reasons.

Refugee Round Up

- There are 14 million refugees living in what United Nations calls “protracted situations” – lives on hold for five years or more as they wait to be granted asylum.
- The global displaced population is now at 60 million.
- The world’s largest refugee camp is in Dadaab, northeastern Kenya.
- Designed for 90,000 people, 330,000 Somalis are sheltering there.
- The migrant death toll on the Mediterranean this year is expected to top 3,000.
- 250,000 Syrian school age children do not go to school in Lebanon.
- 70% of newborns are not registered at birth.

As the refugee crisis continues to grow, we invite you to join us in following God’s command to:

‘consider all people the same’

(Numbers 15.16)

and ‘show love for those foreigners’

(Deuteronomy 10.19)



Some of the many Christians who have fled to Iraqi Kurdistan to escape persecution. The Bible Society team in Iraq has been providing aid packages and Scriptures to the pressured Christian community for a number of years but the arrival of ISIS has caused thousands of Christians to flee their homes and the need for help is immense. Photo: United Bible Societies.

Read about Susan Wingrave’s visit to Austria to talk to the Bible Society there and how they’re working with refugees – see pages 4/5.

Resources

Creation Arts Pack

Don’t forget to get our extensive ‘How-to’ pack to host Creation: A Celebration, an awe-inspiring display featuring 42 panels of embroidery, painting and mixed-media. The pack includes advice from how to set up a working group, right through to contacting the media. Request a copy so you can see this great resource for yourself and promote it to the relevant people when you meet them. For your copy or copies please ask the contact centre on contactus@biblesociety.org.uk

Making Good Sense of the Bible Together

This six-session introduction to biblical interpretation is ideal for home and study groups. These studies will help your friends read the Bible with greater understanding, examine the authors’ original meaning, engage with the biblical message and discover what it means to you today. Talk to your church leader about ordering copies of Making Good Sense of the Bible Together from Bible Society’s online shop for your home groups.

Meeting the Refugees

Susan Wingrave, Volunteer Development Officer, saw first-hand the plight of the refugees in Austria in January. She was visiting the Bible Society there to discover more and help make a film for this year's volunteer pack on refugees.

Susan reports...

Thursday

After travelling from Chippenham to Austria by coach, plane and taxi I finally arrived in Vienna. I'd been warned to bring all my winter clothing and I'm glad I did – it was cold. Vienna is a lovely city. The Bible Society there has just three staff and they're grateful for the help of volunteers to cope with the influx of refugees.

In the evening I caught a tram by myself. I had to change trams and make my way to the outskirts of the city. I felt lost, alone and, if I'm honest, a bit scared – but that must be the tip of the iceberg for what refugees feel like.



Photo: Oasis

I was visiting a friend at The Oasis, a centre which works with refugees. They provide a friendly ear and

a social gathering for people to get together. There were tables with games, coffee and they showed the Jesus film in Farsi and Dari languages. It was really busy – men were arriving from the detention centre at Traiskirchen. They're allowed out, it's not a prison, it's a place to get food and shelter while they wait. I sat with six others; we were colouring in and chatting. A young Iranian guy came in. He spoke English, he had no family with

Susan Wingrave and Richard Franklin from Bible Society packing Bibles with staff from the Austrian Bible Society.

him. He was not interested in Christianity but he had nowhere else to go on a cold night. Friday

I went to Bible House, where staff and a volunteer packed Bibles with stickers from supporters at home. Our cameraman Alex filmed it all. The Director, Dr Jutta Henner, is amazing. She told us that in 2014 they had 20,000 people seeking asylum. In 2015, 100,000 people turned up in Austria.

Jutta has been working for Bible Society for over 20 years. She hasn't lost her love and passion; it's almost as if she's hearing it all for the first time when she talks to people. They get requests for Scriptures from all over: emails from refugees who found out about them on the internet, churches, the refugee service, people who offer German classes, the police and the prison chaplains.

Saturday

In the night the temperature went down to minus nine and it started to snow. Jutta came and we took a taxi to the Syrian Orthodox church, where we met Father Aydin. He drove us to a church member's home. This is the man we talked about in our Christmas appeal. He was keen to tell us his story, despite the fact that his wife is still in Syria. As a Christian, he was guarding the church door when ISIS moved into the area and made a death threat – he had to convert or die.



Susan's story cont...

He currently lives in a nice flat owned by the Catholic church but there was nothing of his in the flat. He arrived with just the clothes he wore. We gave him a large print Bible as he was struggling to see the regular print. He put it to his forehead and kissed it. He's really keen to read his Bible so he can forgive; he knows Jesus teaches that he needs to forgive the people who are doing this. He believes that the Bible is making a difference in people's lives.

His asylum is being processed, but his children are still in Syria with his wife.

Sunday

Another full day. We went to an Arabic-speaking Catholic church, which is the oldest church in Vienna. It was so cold that I wore thermal long johns, knee high socks, jeans, vest, base layer, jumper, coat, heavy boots with thick soles, scarf – and I was still cold!

The service was so touching. Every seat was full and around half the congregation were asylum seekers or are now residents, including the guy leading Junior Church. He talked to us last year and we told his story in the autumn. He is now just getting on with normal life and using the Bible to help him.

We interviewed Father Harb. We asked what difference the Bible made and it was the same story again – people come and want to know what Jesus said and they want to apply it to their lives. They want to move on and forget the past. They're using the Bible to learn how to live, how to forgive.

Monday

Back into Bible House before heading home. I met refugees with hideous stories that didn't feel real but when I saw their eyes and heard their voices, I could start to grasp the horror they'd been through.

You can find out more on the five minute video in the refugee pack, or the whole interview with Jutta Henner is available on YouTube.

Please pray for the refugees, that God will help them forgive and move on with their lives, and for the Bible Society there as they try and cope with the demand for Bibles.

Speakers' Corner

Speaker Peter Amoss (*pictured right with his son and grandson*) used to work in the construction industry, the Health Service and in prison chaplaincy, so his daily motto became 'expect the unexpected'.



This has served him well as a Bible Society speaker and he advises, 'Never be put off by not getting what you expect!'

He explains, 'My first speaking engagement was a men's meeting, which should have had about 20-30 people. I provisionally planned breaking into smaller groups, each having a prayer or interest focus. On arriving, there turned out to be only eight and therefore the whole meeting could be run on a cell group structure.

'This enabled us to use a lap top without a projector for some items. Those attending included some who knew people who worked for Wycliffe Translators or whose favourite mission was MAF – featured on the DVD we played! Even the song I felt I should sing was more than appropriate, for some of those attending.

'So run with what God does in front of you. On getting home I found that this small group had graced us with a gift of more than £70! Praise God!'

Discount

We're delighted to announce that until 31 December 2016 all volunteers will be able to get 10% off any product in our online shop.

The only exceptions are: Open the Book handbooks, which are already discounted and The Lion Storyteller Bible.

When you order via our online shop just type in VOL16 in the promo tab when you check out/confirm basket stage.

And finally...

Cairo Bookfair

Ramez Atallah, General Director of the Bible Society of Egypt, reports at the time of the Cairo International Bookfair....

For the past several years, attendance at the Bookfair was much lower than during the heyday of the 1990s when millions thronged the fair grounds.

To our great surprise this year, the Bookfair is being extremely well attended. Hour-long queues form at the entrance with tens of thousands of eager visitors!

That's why I had a lot of difficulty getting in last Saturday, but was so encouraged to see our booths crowded with eager shoppers looking for bargains and new products.

One of these new products is our large print edition of the Cross-Reference Bible. Another is the Arabic translation of The Story. This combines Scripture selections and bridge text into 31 easy-to-read chapters, covering the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. This is particularly useful to first time Bible readers who would find reading the whole Bible a daunting challenge!

We also have a host of new children's products. These include a new DVD with two episodes of the extremely popular Kingo series, and a colloquial Arabic edition of Princess Stories, which tells the stories of 15 women in the Bible in a creative and simple way for young children.

'Moving experience'

I spent quite a bit of time that afternoon watching people coming to our stands, looking at products and buying what they wanted. What touched me most was seeing those who bought our specially discounted New Testament for an Egyptian pound (around 9p). Today one can hardly buy anything for a pound in Egypt and to see the man actually give the salesman a pound and receive his New Testament was a moving experience.

Events diary

2016

26 Mar:	Mary Jones World re-opens
2-6 Apr:	Spring Harvest Minehead
6-10 Apr:	Spring Harvest Minehead
17-20 May:	CRE International, London
27-30 May:	Big Church Day Out
1-7 June:	Volunteer Week
17-19 Jun:	Vision Refresh Weekend
15-17 Jul:	Mary Jones Challenge
16 Jul-5 Aug:	Keswick Convention
23 Jul-6 Aug:	New Wine, Somerset
8-14 Sept:	Vision Visit to Austria
1 Nov:	Mary Jones World winter closing
1 Dec:	Start the Advent Challenge

Your generosity allows us to sell this New Testament at a nominal price. The easy access and freedom at the Bookfair makes this available to many who would otherwise never even see a Bible.

Our sales department recently told of a customer who bought 200 Bibles to give away as memorial gifts to those who attended the funeral of his father. He said that at least 50 of those Bibles went to homes that did not have one.

'Touch hearts'

Please pray with us that through the many other outlets we have across the country God's word will spread and touch hearts of many people who are seeking him.