



# Why we are thinking and praying for Ukraine now.

**W**atching the suffering of Ukrainians over the past months has been heart-breaking and has driven me to prayer. What can we do to come alongside our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in Christ in their time of need?

I commend to you this edition of *Sower*, which features stories from our Bible Society colleagues at work in Ukraine, through the darkness and difficulties. You will read the testimony of Andriy and Yana, who through the devastation of war have come to recognise the provision of a loving God, and have found refuge and strength for the future through diving into his word.

I am so encouraged by the work of our Ukrainian colleagues, who are meeting the needs of their people in whatever way they can. My colleague Vasyly\* says that after the shock wore off, they realised, “The Bible Society together with the churches can do much to support people, refugees, Ukrainians who are suffering.”

Bible Society is giving away thousands of copies of the Bible, and providing practical aid such as shelter, food and medicine, through their partnership with churches and other organisations. I so admire these servants of our God, who are counting it a blessing to be used in his service in these dark times.

You'll also find some updates to uplift and encourage you. There's the report on our Oceania Alliance Bible Translation Gathering, a story of almost 1,000 young people coming to faith at Youth Alive and receiving a New Beginnings Bible, and an article on the Bible distribution figures across the United Bible Societies in 2021.

Friends, I trust that as you read, reflect and pray for the people of Ukraine and the Bible work happening there, you will feel encouraged in the midst of the sadness. As Dr Nick Hawkes encourages us in his Bible reflections, remember: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9, NIV)

As always, I am humbled and grateful for the way our supporters walk with us as we seek to Open The Bible all over the world, and in this season, to those suffering in Ukraine. Together, we are offering Ukrainians the chance to find refuge and strength for the future in God's word.

GOD BLESS,

*Grant Thomson*

CEO, BIBLE SOCIETY AUSTRALIA



\*Name changed for security reasons.



**God is our refuge  
and strength,  
an ever-present  
help in trouble.**

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**- PSALM 46:1 (NIV)**





# God's word brings wisdom, perspective, and strength for the future

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## How it began

Andriy and Yana met, married and started their family in the same province they grew up in. They were content, and travel to other parts of Ukraine was only ever a passing dream. Then in 2014, life changed. Soldiers, threat, unrest. Their two-year-old son, traumatised, stopped talking. With no good option available to them, Andriy and Yana took their family and fled to another part of Ukraine.

A new life formed for them; work, and an old house to restore. Their children grew, healed. Then in the middle of their re-established life, violence erupted again. February 2022, the shelling began. The root cellar near their kitchen garden became their refuge. Their whole family, their whole life, in a 2.2x1.8m hole. Survival was the agenda of every day. The children rarely moved beyond the shelter. Andriy recalls, “The kids stayed inside the cellar for that month. Well, they did go out – when it was sunny and quiet, for example during the lunchtime when the Russians had a break. So, we prayed and let kids out.”

Prayer was a new practice for Andriy and Yana. “We started believing in God because, very often, we were miraculously spared. Indeed, we only started praying when the shelling started. When we started praying, not a single shell fell on our plot.”

This new faith in God came into sharp focus when, after two weeks of hiding in their property, Yana risked a visit to the only store that remained open, 8km away. As they lined up outside the store, explosions were still heard but they were far away. Once they were almost inside, missiles started falling closer. One missile landed on the other side of the store, narrowly missing them. The shelling eventually stopped just as Yana and her son were able to enter the store. “We started believing in God after we went to the store,” Yana says. “We were able to get home safely. That was the moment when our faith was tested: I was praying for protection all the time. And that was

the moment that pushed us into faith. We did attend churches before. But the real faith started at that moment when we saw that God spared all of us.”

## God’s gentle hand of protection and provision

Andriy and Yana both had some knowledge of God before the violence which shook their lives, but it was not a personal knowledge. Then, as their lives became uncertain, God’s presence and provision became known. They saw God’s hand in many things; in the unusual urge which Andriy felt a few days before the war to buy a month’s worth of food; in a friend getting a call through to urge them to store tap water, just moments before the phone network was turned off; in answered prayer that Andriy’s mother made it safely to where his grandmother lived. All these circumstances and more built on their growing faith in God. “All our neighbours’ houses were damaged, and God protected us. When a mine hit the neighbour’s house, we were in the cellar at that moment, although, usually, we were out cooking at that time.”

## Their terror and flight

It became clear that they could not remain in the house they had restored into a home. To survive, again they needed to flee. In this endeavour, they also saw God’s hand, over and over. Phone coverage was scarce; but Yana managed to get a call through and got advice from a friend to leave. All the cars in the neighbourhood had already left; but a neighbour with an SUV returned after a failed attempt to leave the area, and the family were able to join with 18 other people the next day, with the SUV towing an old diesel truck straight through many check points.

Andriy says, “We were so lucky with that car to escape. I was telling Yana... look – one group of people experienced real horror, the others had to crawl through a field to get here, yet we were

spared. It can't be a mere coincidence. So it was like God was guiding us again and again and again. Indeed, God has led through a very sparing way.”

## God's comfort and direction

For now, Andriy and Yana have settled with their children again. Permanence and certainty they do not have. They have something new, though. They have the comforting knowledge of God's love, his provision, his providence, and his wisdom. As they reflect on the trauma they have come through, and seek to find healing, they take comfort in God's care. Andriy says, “When we read the Bible, when we attend the church service, it does comfort us. And, slowly, we recover. Over the last two months when we are here, we try to get busy with work and studying the Bible. So everything that happened to us before, it slowly departs. And the wound in your soul becomes smaller because - and this is how we understand the Bible - we don't focus on losing our home, we focus on retaining our lives. This is exactly what we are coming to know, that the most important [thing] is not the fact that you lost your house, your material belongings, everything, the most important [thing] is that we found God and we found good people.”

## God's word giving strength for the future

Diving deep into God's word for themselves is giving both Andriy and Yana strength for the future. They are discovering new truth, every day; truth that deepens as they share their hearts together, and with God's people.

Yana shares, “We got our Bibles when we came here. And we started reading it from the very beginning. When we started studying it in more detail, what has touched me the most was the story of Abraham. There were so many situations where God intervened and helped him. He didn't abandon his people. Looking at our situation, it

is very similar - we were non-believers, let's put it this way. But he was still pushing us to what was right. Just like with Abraham.”

God's word is vital to Andriy and Yana. It is wisdom, perspective, and strength as they face the type of life they never wanted or imagined for themselves or their children.

Yana says, “I think that God helped us greatly. Particularly in gaining the understanding that life is much more important than material things, than the house. Yes, we put in so much effort - I won't argue - but we may have a better home in [the] future. You just need to trust in God and follow in the right direction.”

Other Ukrainians are desperately in need of God's word too. “We all see people's incredible openness to the Bible across the whole country and, again and again, this means that we will need many more Bibles to meet the existing needs of millions who were affected with this war,” Bible Society's Rostyslav shared at the end of April.

Bible Society Ukraine is distributing all the Bibles, New Testaments, and Scripture resources they can get, supported by Bible Societies around the world.

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“... the most important [thing] is that we found God and we found good people.”

- Andriy



# On the ground help and hope for Ukrainians

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**O**ur work has changed just as life has changed in Ukraine,” says Vasył\*, Director of the Western Branch of the Ukrainian Bible Society. “In all areas it was a shock and a stupor, we did not know what awaited us, how we would work. But over time we realised that we are needed now in this situation, and the Bible Society together with the churches can do much to support people, refugees, Ukrainians who are suffering.”

From the outbreak of conflict, Bible Society has utilised their unique position to directly provide practical aid to those in need. In most cases, the Scripture distribution field trips are combined with partners' efforts to provide food, practical aid as well as shelter to displaced people.

A couple of months into the war, a Bible Society team, together with ministry partners, visited the hard-to-reach town of Tsyrukun north of Kharkiv. Bible Society leader Petro\* recalls, “Since it was the first visit, most people weren’t really open, being suspicious and scared. The period of occupation has significantly affected them. Yet, and this is huge, in case of these ladies and most of other people, it was when we offered the Bible when this distance started to shorten...”. When sharing the physical food, the volunteers also shared spiritual food: they prayed, shared God’s word, and supported people in these difficult times. Petro explains that while the practical aid and food were important, it was combining the practical care with Scriptures that calmed people’s suspicion and fear. “In general, people are terrified, exhausted not so much physically as emotionally and spiritually. Many women wept, especially when we prayed for them and gave them printed and audio Bibles – it was a truly a wonderful gift for them at this time!”

“Along with giving these people shelter, housing, food, clothing, and lodging, they can also be given

confidence and hope for the future,” says Vasył. He goes on to explain that peace and tranquillity of mind are both found in the word of God, which Bible Society have the privilege to print and distribute in Ukraine. One volunteer who was loading supplies to be transported to a province where towns and villages were being regularly shelled said, “The key in this load is the word of God, which is an equally nutritious food, spiritual food!”

At the end of July, Bible Society Ukraine’s Deputy General Secretary, Anatoliy, shared “Huge problems are becoming more and more visible. There are now almost 14 million internally displaced people and every day we receive calls from churches who have groups of refugees from many cities. They need food, medical care and so on.

“The Trauma Healing Program is the champion now in our ministry! This has also become very popular among the Orthodox churches. The Greek Catholic Church has asked us to run this training three times for their priests only. And every week, our teams have different Trauma Healing training sessions in different places in Ukraine.”

At the beginning of August, Bible Society Ukraine began a weeklong Trauma Healing program for the first time, for 75 children aged 10-14 years old. These children are from a previously occupied territory, and many have lost their parents and other relatives.

Bible Society’s Rostyslav says that, together with churches, chaplains and volunteer organisations, “...Bible Society continues to work hard to bring physical and spiritual relief to our people, despite all risks...The good Lord is acting powerfully in people’s hearts, and it is our greatest privilege to be participants of his work!”

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\*Names changed for security reasons.



# Strength and solidarity for Bible Society Ukraine

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**D**aily life is heavy,” says Anatoliy the Deputy General Secretary of Bible Society Ukraine. “You feel so tired. I haven’t slept the whole night through for five months. I’m talking on behalf of millions. There are funerals every day. Every day we know someone who knows someone who has been killed. As the weeks go by, we are getting used to bad news like this, but we don’t realise how much it is changing us, how much harm it is doing to us.”

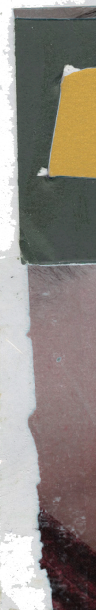
Bible Society staff are working with all their might, despite the inevitable risk to their lives, to maintain Bible work as their nation goes through one of the darkest times in its history. Staff have been forced to leave their homes and shelter in bomb shelters; volunteers have been helping to man Bible Society offices and warehouses. Anatoliy explained early in the conflict, “It is not about heroism - staying in Kyiv and keeping the Bible House open - but about the message being sent to our partners that we are together, that we support them, and we rely on God.”

Four months later, he adds, “We try to do our best to stand, to stay. Together with churches, we’re doing our best to bring light to the darkness. The darkness is very deep.”

Unity among Christians across the world is crucial at this time. “Other countries have received many Ukrainians,” says Anatoliy. “Our president even mentioned that Christians receive Ukrainian people with Christian love. This is a big testimony - how the world sees we help each other. As I said before, it is light in the darkness.”

Without the strength and support offered by Christians and Bible Societies in other countries, Bible Society Ukraine staff would be adrift. Anatoliy remarks, “I want to express gratefulness for all the support. [The Scriptures] printed for us have been a great blessing - the New Testaments, the Gospels, the Word of Hope book. These have been excellent for people on the move who can’t take much with them.”

“Close to seven million Ukrainians are out of the country. It really helps that we, as a Bible Society, can concentrate on the people here inside the country while our neighbouring Bible Societies are helping those outside. We are so grateful to our neighbours for caring for Ukrainian refugees.” Bible Society Ukraine is experiencing immense pressure but, together with support from around the world, are working to preserve their most valuable resource – their staff who are and will be very much needed by their people as they try to withstand and recover from this tribulation over the years to come.



# Pray with us

**“Please continue praying - for peace, for the political leaders, for God’s protection of his servants and for people’s hearts to be open to his helping and healing hand.”**

- Rostyslav, Ukranian Bible Society staff member

This month, we bring the troubled nation of Ukraine before God in prayer. Our Bible Society family continue to work with all their might amid the hardship and the danger, and they report an unprecedented hunger and openness to God’s word among their people. Let us pray for the Ukrainian Bible Society team, for strength, endurance, wisdom and hope as they love those around them. Let us pray for all those suffering unfathomable loss, darkness and sadness, that they would know God’s love, comfort and hope. Let us pray, above all, for God’s peace and restoration in Ukraine.

**“Thank you so much for praying for and supporting our people both inside and outside the country! Please continue praying - we know God is standing near to his children!”**

- Rostyslav,  
Ukranian Bible Society staff member

## Pray for Bible Society’s leadership role

Please pray for Bible Society Ukraine in their role as chair of the National Council of Churches and Religious Organisations, as they unite with all religious leaders “to respond to the war, to appeal to international bodies... to urge to end this war.” Pray for Bible Society Ukraine’s Deputy General Secretary, Anatoliy, and his team, who are responsible for all work of the Council. Thank God that several leaders of major churches of Ukraine have been encouraged by Bible Society staying open and active at this time. Anatoliy explains, *“it is not about heroism - staying in Kyiv and keeping the Bible House open - but about the message being sent to our partners that we are together, that we support them, and we rely on God.”*



## Pray for the churches in Ukraine

Please pray that the Church would continue to grow within Ukraine and would have the opportunity and resources to help those who are eager to learn about God. Thank God for their work in supporting victims of the war, organising humanitarian corridors and in negotiations for the captives' release, and that they are serving as a witness of God's love.

*"The churches, chaplains, volunteer organisations and the Bible Society continue to work hard to bring physical and spiritual relief to our people, despite all risks..." says Rostyslav, from Bible Society Ukraine. "The good Lord is acting powerfully in people's hearts, and it is our greatest privilege to be participants of his work!"*

## Pray for all Ukrainians facing incredible darkness, sadness and loss

*"...it is still very painful and hard to comprehend the reality of what has happened ... and the depth of evil this war...has brought to our land,"* reflects Rostyslav, Ukrainian Bible Society staff member. Pray for those who have lost homes, villages, livelihoods, stability, safety and any assurance about their future. Pray for those who are losing loved ones and constantly grieving. Pray that God's word would provide comfort, hope and the certainty of his love to those facing such immense loss. *"It is God, and God alone who can provide his heavenly light amidst of this darkness. Thank you all for your support, for your prayers, for remaining with us during this dark time! And let's continue praising the Lord for being our true Shelter!"*

## Thank God for the hunger for Bibles among Ukrainians

Thank God for the efforts of churches, volunteer organisations, and Bible Society teams across the country as they serve by providing the Bible to people in need and helping with practical aid. “People are so eager to have a Bible, many of them never had/read it before,” says Rostyslav. “We all see people’s incredible openness to the Bible across the whole country and, again and again, this means that we will need many more Bibles to meet the existing needs of millions who were affected with this war.”

**“Our hope is on God only today, as all days before... May the resurrected Lord, who has already won the battle once and forever, be with all of you and protect you under his wings!”** - Rostyslav

**“Thank you again for prayers for Ukraine and all practical help you may have been providing to our people! Please continue interceding for peace, for protection and that God is glorified amidst of all of this!”**  
- Rostyslav

The leader of Bible Society Ukraine asked to convey his deepest gratitude to all partners, colleagues and prayer supporters. “We see [the] Lord’s hand in very tangible ways every day, he gives strength and peace that surprise even ourselves, he gives opportunities to share our faith in ways that were unimaginable before.”

### Will you help restore hope for the future in Ukraine?

Every

**\$40**

can help fund Bibles for Ukrainians seeking words of hope and strength.

Every

**\$70**

could contribute to the daily needs of Bible Society workers.

Every

**\$120**

can help provide urgently needed practical aid.

## PLEASE GIVE NOW

Use the DONATION FORM on page 33, call 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537) or visit [biblesociety.org.au/sow](http://biblesociety.org.au/sow)







# RESTORING STRENGTH for Ukrainians

Support our brothers and sisters in Ukraine so they may have hope and strength for the future.

Donate today at:  
[biblesociety.org.au/sow](https://biblesociety.org.au/sow)





# Steadfast through the storm

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Bible Society Australia is part of the United Bible Societies (UBS), who operate across 240 countries and territories worldwide. The latest UBS figures show that worldwide Bible distribution topped 32.6 million in 2021, showing the extraordinary commitment of Bible Societies to provide the hope of God's word in the midst of a global pandemic.



**32.6 million Bibles were distributed in 2021**

Despite staffing challenges, supply chain disruption and ongoing lockdowns, Bible Societies persevered to meet the huge demand for Scripture. Five out of seven regions provided more full Bibles in 2021 compared to 2020.

When the pandemic hit, restrictions meant that Bible ministry in around 90 nations was at risk. But supporters around the world responded generously, enabling Bible Societies to keep their doors open and continue providing Scripture to people in need. Many found new and creative ways to carry out their ministry. As a result, Bible Societies operating in some of the world's poorest countries were able to double or even triple their Scripture distribution in 2021.

The distribution figures also revealed that 5.1

million New Testaments were distributed globally in 2021.

In total, 169.8 million Scripture items were provided during 2021. Michael Perreau, UBS Director General, said, "Just as our hope in Christ is an anchor for the soul, so Bible Societies were steadfast through the storm of the global pandemic. Across the world, our people persevered throughout 2021, doing everything possible to provide God's word and meet the huge demand for Scripture."

He added, "Every single Bible in someone's hands has the potential to change a life. My prayer is that through his word, God will touch hearts, bring hope and strengthen faith."

Although Bible Societies were able to provide around two million more full Bibles in 2021 than in 2020, rising costs, shipping delays and stock shortages meant that distribution was still below pre-pandemic levels. And Bible Societies are still affected by ongoing supply chain challenges in 2022.

## Growing Bible provision in Oceania

Within the global fellowship of UBS, our region of Oceania stands out, with a remarkable story of growing Bible provision. Despite our region enduring some of the most severe lockdowns in the world, Bible distribution in Australia, New Zealand, Micronesia and Papua New Guinea increased by more than a third during

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the pandemic, coinciding with increasing collaboration in the region.

Back in 2019, just over a half a million full Bibles were distributed in Oceania. That went up to 635,000 in 2020 – and rose a further 13% in 2021, with every nation providing more Bibles. The islands of Micronesia saw the biggest Bible distribution growth, with three times as many Bibles provided in 2021 compared to 2020.

# Global Scripture Distribution by Bible Societies in 2021



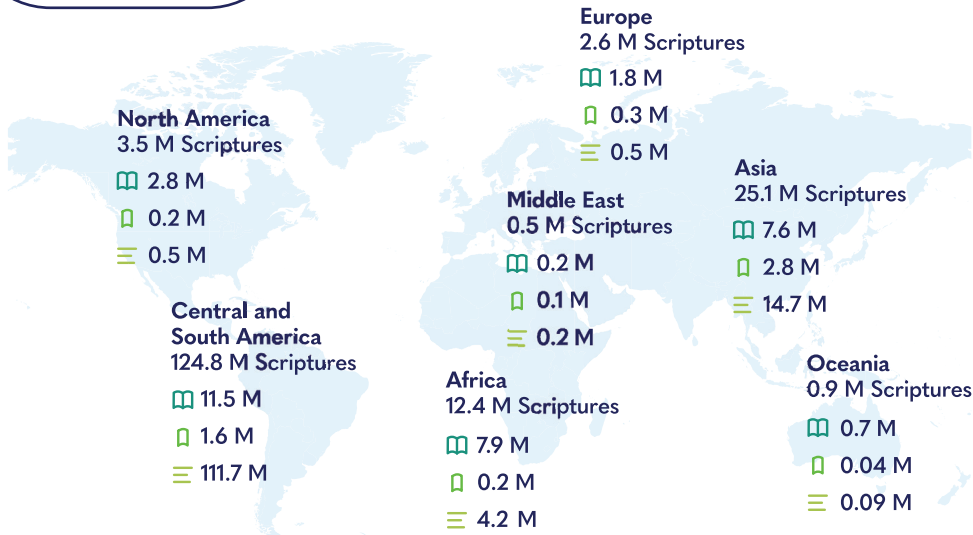
**169.8 million**  
**Scriptures**

- 

**Full Bibles**  
32.6 million  
(20% downloaded)
- 

**New Testaments**  
5.1 million
- 

**Portions/Selections<sup>1</sup>**  
132 million



<sup>1</sup>Portions are at least one complete book of the Bible or 24 pages of Scripture text. Selections are Scripture verses grouped by theme or at least one section as defined by section headings in the Bible.

# Oceania Alliance

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“We want to get the word of God into the languages of the people as accurately as possible, but how is that possible? How accurate will we be? There are challenges in the time we are in.”

- Joel Peter, General Secretary,  
Bible Society Papua New Guinea





Bible translation is an urgent need in the Oceania region, and many groups and organisations are working to meet the need. One example of this need is Papua New Guinea (PNG), which has a population of 8.9 million and over 800 known languages, 300 of which have no Scripture at all.

As a part of the recently formed Oceania Alliance between BSA, BSPNG and BSSP, in July BSA hosted the Oceania Bible Translation Gathering. This Gathering drew together 45 delegates, representing over 20 countries in the Oceania region. The Gathering provided an opportunity to discuss how people and organisations might collaborate in the work of Bible translation in the region, and how the work might be strengthened.

Delegates at the gathering came from several different organisations, including the American Bible Society, Every Tribe Every Nation, Mission Mutual, SIL, Wycliffe and Bible Translation Association. A vote was taken for more coordination and collaboration. Together, delegates affirmed:

**“We commit to building a spiritual foundation of relationship, trust and prayer, in order to join God in reaching all people in Oceania with the word of God. This will require prayer and coordinated partnerships at regional and local levels.”**

# Youth Alive

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“The altar was opened up, and it was jammed. We saw scores of young people responding to the Gospel. We saw close to 1,000 young people give their life to Christ... Our team was able to give Bibles out to young people in that moment, and that is going to change their lives, as they get the word into them.”

- Dave Edgar, Youth Alive, Victoria





Bible Society Australia recently partnered with Youth Alive in Victoria, supplying the New Beginnings Bible for those responding to the Gospel at events. On 13 August, Youth Alive saw an amazing response at their Main Event, held in the Victoria Festival Hall in Melbourne. "We saw thousands upon thousands of young people descend on Melbourne from right across the State," says Dave Edgar. "We had schools tour during the week, more than 40 schools, and then on the Saturday night the Gospel was preached with great sharpness, great clarity, and with great conviction."

Around 1,000 teens responded to the message of the Gospel, coming forward to be given Bibles. On the night 800 Bibles were given out - 600 supplied by BSA supplemented with an extra 200 from the host church helping with the night. "The response was much bigger than expected," says Dave with a laugh, "Praise Jesus!"

The Bibles were crucial to the event, as Dave reflects, "It really was a special moment, as we could put Bibles in the hands of new young people who have given their life to God, many of them for the first time. I want to say a massive thank you to everyone involved at Bible Society for really helping play a pivotal part."

Earlier this year at regional events, Youth Alive teams saw 1,256 teens respond to the Gospel and handed out 1,000 Bibles across those events.



# SCREEN TIME, FACE TIME:

## ANDY CROUCH DELIVERS RICHARD JOHNSON LECTURE 2022

CPX's Richard Johnson Lecture is an annual lecture that seeks to highlight Christianity's relevance to contemporary society. It's named after Richard Johnson (1755-1827), one of Australia's forgotten pioneers who embodied 'public Christianity'.

Richard Johnson was the first chaplain to the British colony of Sydney. His pioneering efforts in farming, education, the law, convict welfare, and indigenous relations made an invaluable contribution to the life of the community.

Johnson's efforts serving the public of his day were driven by the convictions of his faith, leading him to be known as a "physician of both body and soul" – someone not merely interested in people's spiritual lives, but their general flourishing as well.

Accordingly, the Richard Johnson Lecture seeks to examine the place of Christianity in public life – its legacy and contribution to the common good.



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In September, writer and thinker Andy Crouch delivered a very human – and humanising – lecture about relationships in a technological world.

A 2021 study by Monash University found that 99% of phone users experience ‘nomophobia’: the fear of being without their phones. Moreover, the average Australian spends about 5.5 hours per day staring into their screens.

We seem addicted to our devices – and helpless to resist.

In the lecture, Andy considered our attraction to technology – its promise of connection and power – and yet also its costs – increasing isolation, loneliness, and an addictive attachment to our devices.

He explored the emotional and psychological roots of our attachment to screens, arguing that ultimately, we seek in our devices the connection we realised was difficult to seek in each other.

Andy also sketched out a compelling vision of resistance in the face of not only our compulsive habits with our devices, but also the “empire of Mammon” that guides the profit-making spirit of Silicon Valley. Drawing on the early church’s formation of deep communities, Andy argued that “households” of faith embodied a life-giving alternative to the mainstream, one powerful enough to resist – and eventually overwhelm – the Roman Empire of the day.

Could a similar revolution in our relationship with technology be possible? Andy argued that there’s only one way to find out: for households – or groups of people committed to knowing and being known deeply by each other – to start modelling an alternative way with our devices.

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Find out more about CPX at:  
[publicchristianity.org.au](https://publicchristianity.org.au)

# Faith Stories

Ben's story is part of Eternity's Faith Stories series, compiled by Naomi Reed.

## 'I WAS ACTUALLY AN ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT'



"I was born in South Korea, and we immigrated to Australia when I was one. My father was a farmer so we rented land in western Sydney. I was actually an illegal immigrant. I didn't receive my Australian citizenship until Year 11, so it caused a lot of issues and anxiety for me. Even if I did graduate from school, would I be able to receive my HSC?"

I was also angry with my dad. Why did he call us over here, if we couldn't settle

*Eternity*

properly? Then my parents divorced, a week before I started Year 7. It was a really stressful time and it added more fuel to the fire. I joined the wrong crowd and I was pretty violent. A lot of my friends were drug dealers. They weren't from the best backgrounds either.

My parents were actually second-generation Christians and they went to a Korean church. I used to go with them, but I didn't understand much of the sermons. I knew about God but I never believed in him ... and after a while, I stopped going. It was much more enjoyable to go to parties with my friends.

But back in Year 5, I had made a friend whose family went to Mongolia as missionaries. He came back to Australia when I was in Year 10 and I went back to church, just to see him. It was a bit awkward. They were still happy and innocent and I was very angry. But he kept on messaging me, asking me to hang out at church. I did once in a while. Then one day, I heard a sermon on iniquity. It struck me to the heart. I started to go back to church more regularly. I was studying acupuncture by then. I even joined the worship team as a singer.

But then I had a bad breakup with my girlfriend. I was awful. I really saw how wicked my heart could be. It was so bad I was contemplating suicide. For four months, I didn't eat anything. I was just drinking alcohol and energy drinks. Then one of my church friends told me he wanted me to meet someone. Apparently, there was a group having a mission conference and they were looking at sending a mission team to the Middle East. I met the guy in charge and he told me they were looking for acupuncturists as part of the medical team. Then the worship service began. That's pretty much where I met Jesus for the first time. The Bible verse was from Isaiah 43. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See,

I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." (vv18-19)

While the verse was being read out, I just completely broke down. I knew that God was calling me back. I had done so much wrong, but now he was doing a new thing in me, in Christ. He was bringing new life to me. He had forgiven me and covered me. He wanted me to look to him and have hope. From that day on, I stopped drinking.

In the next year and a half, I went three times to Lebanon with the mission team. The first time I was there, I saw Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including kids working on the farms with no hope. It was just like me as a child. They could be expelled at any time. I got really emotional and God spoke to my heart, saying, "This is what I will be using you for – to bring joy to their hearts."

Later, I went back to Lebanon for two years, and I worked with the refugees and I helped out at a youth centre for boys. It was an interesting time – there was the Beirut explosion as well as the economic crash and the start of the pandemic. But I saw the grace of God in the small things. At first, the boys wouldn't open up to us, but over time, they began to sing with us and laugh a bit more. Those were the moments.

In 2021, I came back to Australia and married my wife. I'm now studying at Bible college, but I'm most grateful to God that he doesn't leave us there, in pain. He treats our wounds gently and he even brings something wonderful out of the hardest times in our lives. He gives us hope."

READ MORE FAITH STORIES:  
[ETERNITYNEWS.COM.AU/FAITH-STORIES](https://ETERNITYNEWS.COM.AU/FAITH-STORIES)



# Are we there yet?

Reflections and encouragement from somewhere near the end.

*Dr Nick Hawkes is a scientist, theologian and writer. He also describes himself as an absent-minded, slightly obsessive man who is pathetically weak due to cancer and chemo, who has experienced, and needs to experience, the grace of God each day.*

## Day 1 - Be Strong and Courageous

*'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9 (NIV)*

As I write, there is brutal war being waged in Ukraine, a war featuring unspeakable horrors and evil. Elderly women, overcome by grief, cry out, 'Where are you God?'

We weep and we know that Jesus wept. We are angry at the lies and the evil and know that God will ultimately judge all things. We help where we can because that is what love does. We do these things because God is with us. The elderly widow in Ukraine is not alone. An angry powerful God is with her... a God who will have the last word – if not in this world, then certainly in the next.

Loving Father, you will allow nothing to separate us from you. Not only are you with us, but you command us to be strong and courageous as we pursue your purposes. Please be our strength when we falter.

## Day 2 - Treasures in Heaven

*'...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.' Matthew 6:20 (NIV)*

It is only in the purposes of God that we can laugh in the face of decay and death. That's quite something, isn't it? When you partner with the God of eternity, the things you do will count for eternity. That confers a huge significance to every minute we are alive. Every minute is an opportunity to do something of eternal significance – even if it is as humble as giving a thirsty person a cup of water (Mark 9:41). So, who do you know who's thirsty?

Heavenly Father, I am so ordinary. But you are not, and you make all the difference. Please help me to live faithfully... in a way that fuels the stories of eternity.

## Day 3 - Of First Importance

*'...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...' 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NIV)*

# Bible

The only thing that can give confidence about an eternal future is a dead person being resurrected back to life. Nothing else will do it. No philosophy will do it. No religious ideology will do it. No personal lifestyle preference will do it. It needed a concrete event in history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ... His resurrection proved to the world that our resurrection was a possibility. It was, and is, the event that gives hope. I pray that it is a hope you share. For this I promise: it will radically change your thinking about death (1 Corinthians 15:26,55).

**Dear Father, you resurrected Jesus back to life and in doing so gave me the gift of hope. That hope is precious. Thank you so much.**

## Day 4 - Pure Love

*'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'* John 3:16 (NIV)

Looking at God's love can be a bewildering thing. It is not tainted with conditions. It is not an 'I'll-meet-you-half-way' contract. Nor is it a love that is reluctantly given or which is flawed by poor character. It is a love so pure that it has to be partly veiled by faith if it is to be seen. But once seen, it will spoil you forever, for you will have a hunger to honour the one who loves you. God's love is extraordinarily safe because it is not dependant on my good behaviour. It is a love that evokes in me honesty, repentance, gratitude, worship and service.

**Heavenly Father, I cannot yet fathom the full depth and significance of your love. Your love is safe, unchangeable and beautiful. I want to thank you with all my heart.**

## Day 5 - I Have Overcome the World

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'* John 16:33 (NIV)

Jesus says to his followers that they will face trouble in this world. Circumstances that make us happy can't be relied on. And whilst our secular society sees no hope in eternity, Jesus says that he has 'overcome' our temporary and flawed world.

In saying this, Jesus is pointing to his victory over sin and suffering – to a kingdom that lies beyond it. The implication is clear: we should invest in eternity. That's where hope and justice meet... and that's what gives us joy.

**Dear Lord Jesus, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the greed and cruelty of the world. Please take me by the hand and assure me that you have overcome the world... and I have everything to look forward to.**

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