



## Dear Reader,

I wonder, what do you do when you face a 'roadblock' in your life? How frustrating is it to be on a path towards something you desire, only to be blocked by obstacles, few or many, which prevents you from reaching your goal?

In this edition of Sower, we are privileged to catch a glimpse of how our brothers and sisters in Asia, by God's grace, are overcoming all obstacles to gain access to the Bible – which is their heart's desire.

All over Asia, Bible Society is working to help people Open The Bible for themselves. In Pakistan, Bible Society has realised that many of the students in their Bible-based literacy course are blocked from attaining literacy – and access to the Bible – by undiagnosed problems with their eyesight. So, this year, the students will be offered eyesight tests and be provided with glasses if they need them, to open their path to literacy. What a blessing it is to hear from one of the students, Maryam, who says, "I am so thankful for the Bible Society for giving the light of wisdom through education."

I was amazed to read that in China, Guo lived a life of faith in Jesus for almost 44 years before she held a Bible of her own! She desperately desired to have her own copy of God's word, yet her path was blocked, until the United Bible Societies blessed her with one at the age of 57. I can't imagine what it would be like to love God and be seeking to follow him, yet not have access to his word. Guo's words are so enlightening, when she

says, "Owning a Bible is not merely a desire; it is a spiritual necessity. The Bible contains God's teachings, and without it, my faith would be weak and incomplete, like a vessel floating on uncertain waters. I would feel like a sheep without a home."

You'll read these and other stories in this edition of Sower, all pointing towards how important it is that we work together to help people in Asia access the Bible for themselves, whether through attaining literacy skills, or through producing and distributing Bibles. I trust that you will be as encouraged as I have been to read about how roadblocks and obstacles are being removed by the work of Bible Society across Asia.

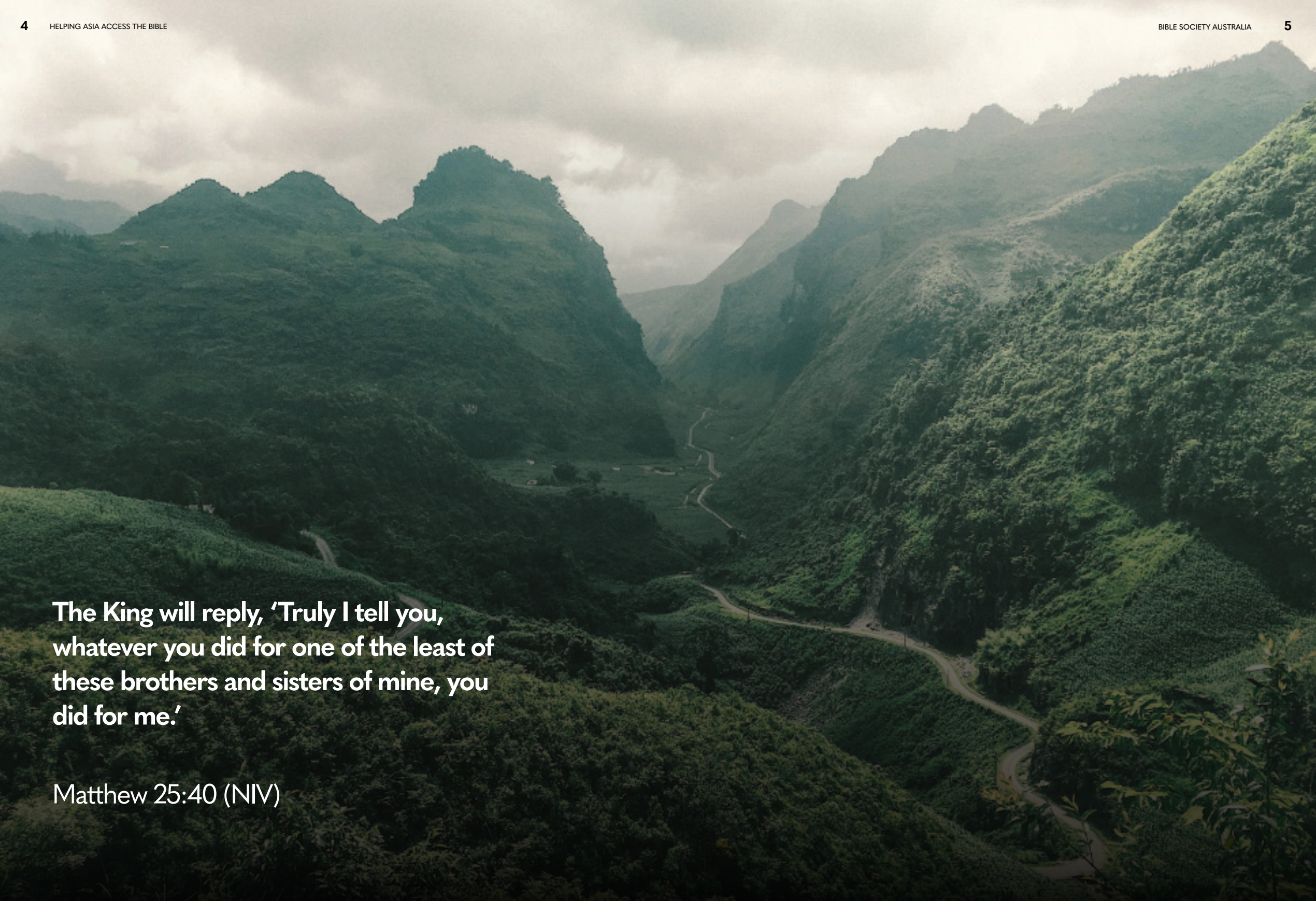
We know that the Bible is essential for our lives as Christians, 'for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' so that we 'may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV). This truth has become clear to me as I think of our brothers and sisters in Asia who dream about having access to the Bible. Let me leave you with Guo's words, which sum up the importance of the Bible in her life: "It is more than just a book; it is a lifeline, a source of hope, and the key to a beautiful life. Every word of the Bible has made a dwelling in my heart."



GOD BLESS,

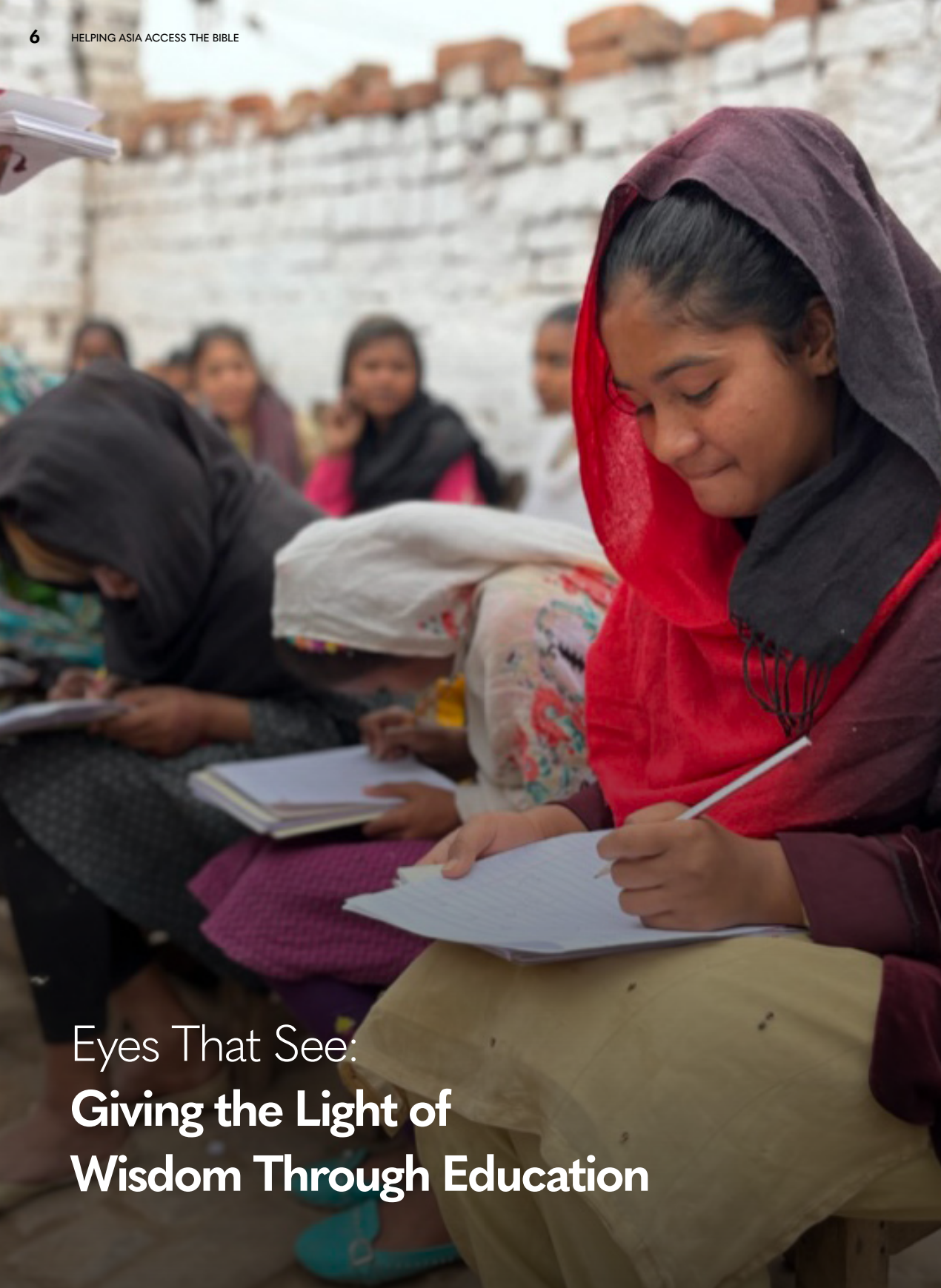
**Grant Thomson**  
CEO, BIBLE SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

**"Owning a Bible is not merely a desire; it is a spiritual necessity. The Bible contains God's teachings, and without it, my faith would be weak and incomplete..."**  
— Guo



The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Matthew 25:40 (NIV)



Eyes That See:  
Giving the Light of  
Wisdom Through Education

In present day Pakistan, Maryam\* remembers her childhood, working with her mother in other people's homes, trying to write numbers on scavenged bits of paper. "I never wrote them correctly," she recalls.

At 36, Maryam is grown now, with children of her own. Yet the many obstacles between Maryam and literacy remained. "It was my desire from childhood to learn to read and write, but unfortunately my parents could not afford to send me to school. At the age of 19 my parents settled my marriage."

Many women in Pakistan have similar stories to Maryam, with multiple lifelong challenges in the way of achieving literacy. Justus, from Pakistani Bible Society observes, "One obstacle often encountered is gaining permission from the family patriarch — a requirement for many of these women. Another hurdle is finding time amidst their domestic duties and work commitments. Resistance also arises from landlords, brick kiln owners, and house masters, who fear the consequences of their tenants or workers becoming literate. These landlords worry that they will lose their labour force if the people gain an education. They also fear that people will start to demand fair wages. An additional concern is that these newly educated people will improve their children's education, meaning the children will not work for the landlords in the future."

Yet Maryam's obstacles to an education were overcome, very recently. "Our priest announced that 'women's literacy classes are starting in the

Church building'. I asked my husband if I could join the class and learn to read and write. He gave me permission and I started learning."

These classes are a part of Pakistan Bible Society's (PBS) 'Beacon of Light in the Darkness of Illiteracy' project, which have run in churches across Pakistan for a decade now. Bible Society has been working to help women like Maryam. Many women who are desperately poor, uneducated — and many who are enslaved and oppressed — are given an opportunity to learn to read, write and calculate simple mathematics. "For most of these women, becoming literate is something they could only dare to dream of before," says Belinda Faulks, Bible Society Australia's (BSA) International Missions Project Manager. "It honestly changes their lives forever."

Many women are inspired by their leaders to join the literacy classes, while others recognise the importance of being able to accurately count their wages, ensuring they receive fair payment for their work. Moreover, learning to read and write aids in advancing their careers. Maryam remembers, "I could not count the money because I could not read the currency value on paper money." Because of the literacy training, Maryam can calculate whatever money she has in hand. "Now my husband is so happy, and he is giving the money to me in the evening which he earned in a day," Maryam relays joyfully. Maryam's husband, a motorbike mechanic, now gives all his income to her, to count and save for the future. He has confidence in Maryam, that she can manage the household budget.



Classes have begun in churches across Pakistan in 2024, with PBS' goal this year to change the lives of 3,500 women across 350 literacy groups. For the first time this year, PBS staff will address an additional obstacle for many students, by conducting eyesight checks as a part of their regular class visits in the first term of study. If students require them, glasses will be provided. Justus says, "In remote areas, many students are unaware of their own vision deficiencies, as they have little to no access to eye care. When they attempt to read, they experience eye fatigue, suggesting the need for eye tests. Therefore, we plan to organise eyesight camps within the classes. Our resident doctor will prescribe corrective glasses and medication as necessary."

In addition to this, Justus shares, "In the last session (August and September) we will provide the students with a medical guide which will teach them essential health precautions. The literacy course will help them to follow the medical guide. It will enhance their awareness about hygiene practices like handwashing to steer clear of germs and will underscore the importance of heeding basic health advice. We

believe that this health focused curriculum will help students to live healthier lives."

"These additions are so exciting," says Belinda. "At BSA we are totally committed to making the Bible accessible to all people, yet it became obvious that many women enrolled in the literacy course, especially older women, were having difficulty with reading due to poor eyesight. This is a way we can ensure that each woman can engage fully in the program and have every opportunity to graduate as fully literate members of society," says Belinda.

These additions to the course were inspired by literacy training provided for United Bible Society staff in 2023. "It was a wonderful time of learning and growth," Belinda reflects. "It gave each Bible Society present the opportunity to conduct an evaluation of their project with assistance from literacy experts." It was through this, and taking the time to explore the needs of their students, that PBS staff were inspired to add eyesight and health assistance to their literacy program. Belinda concludes, "It's so important that Bible Society listens to the needs of the communities



we serve and do what we can to ensure that every person has the opportunity to engage with the word of God in a meaningful way."

Bible Society's literacy course in Pakistan has been Opening The Bible for women for a decade, upon completing the course, students can read the Bible. "Providing glasses to vision-impaired Bible-based literacy students is yet another way of making sure that Bible Society provide equitable access to the Bible and the message of the gospel," says Belinda, "for all people in all their unique situations." Not only can the women who graduate now personally engage with God's word, but they can participate more fully in their communities and churches, manage the household budget, read utility bills, buy and sell in their local marketplace because they can now calculate prices and change, and their standing in the community is lifted.

"I absolutely love the transformational impact that this project has on the lives of so many women!" says Belinda. "We see that women who participate in literacy classes become wonderful advocates for the program and encourage their neighbours and friends to join too. Their husbands see the

value and benefit to the whole family and attitudes towards educating females begin to change with many then allowing their daughters to go to school. It truly transforms communities."

Maryam says, "I am so thankful for the Bible Society for giving the light of wisdom through education." During her interview with Bible Society staff in December, Maryam was so excited by her new ability to read the Bible that she started to read from the Gospel of Matthew. "Christmas season is coming," she said, "and I am so glad that I learnt the story of the birth of Christ." Maryam has plans for the future too. "I [asked] for permission for my daughter to go to school," she explains... and her husband responded happily in the affirmative.

If you would like to support this Bible-based literacy project and other similar projects in Asia, please visit [biblesociety.org.au/sow](https://biblesociety.org.au/sow).

\*Name changed to protect privacy.



## Building Brighter Futures: How Bangladesh Bible Society is Changing Lives

**K**risna\* came to realise that she was living in darkness without Jesus when she attended a Bible-based literacy course run by Bangladesh Bible Society (BBS). Krisna comes from a Hindu family, but she was curious to learn about Jesus, so when she heard that a nearby church was running an adult literacy class, she took the step. When she felt conflicted with what she was learning, she went to the church pastors and members. They told her that following Christ is a decision that she had to make on her own.

Today, Krisna has come to accept Jesus as her Saviour, saying, "I am grateful to Bangladesh Bible Society for their Advanced Literacy program that changed my life and I [received] salvation." Within a year of joining the literacy program, Krisna also acquired the priceless skills of reading and writing.

Krisna's testimony is just one of the many life-changing stories from the women of this Bible-based literacy program. Every year, BBS

aims to reach around 1,500 non-literate or semi-literate women to teach them basic literacy skills whilst engaging them with God's word. For decades, Bangladesh Bible Society has run their literacy program in partnership with local churches teaching women from disadvantaged communities.

With a dire need to boost the literacy rate in the country, BBS took action in starting the literacy program 30 years ago, making it one of the longest running projects in the United Bible Societies (UBS) Fellowship. "I have been involved in the literacy work of the Bangladesh Bible Society during the past three decades. The country is a fertile ground for literacy work as women and children need education. In the early nineties, our research revealed that people who spent several months learning in adult literacy programs run by the government could not read the Bible when they graduated from such programs. That was the reason why the Bible Society got involved in literacy," shares Julian Sundersingh, UBS Global Literacy Coordinator.

Many women learn about the literacy classes from their churches, and their primary goal of enrolling is to learn to read the Bible. Yet the literacy groups have done more than just enable them to read and write. For Priya\*, her newfound confidence and skills in numerical literacy are changing her life. She and her husband own a small grocery business. Being illiterate in basic numeracy, she found managing the store difficult when her husband wasn't there. But after one year of participating in the literacy program, Priya is now able to manage on her own. "I learnt about addition, subtraction, multiplication and division beside Bible learning ... Now I'm helping my husband in our shop. When he goes to bring grocery material from the market and [is] busy with other activities, I ... continue our small business and keep accounts."

During the first year of their literacy course, these women revise the alphabet and learn basic word to sentence construction. Among their reading materials are New Testament stories and an



audio Bible for learning pronunciation. Their second year involves engagement with the entire Bible story while honing their reading and writing skills. Recently, BBS introduced a third-year 'fluency' level to enhance their linguistic proficiency. By the end of the program, graduates are expected to confidently read the Standard Common Language Bengali Bible on their own.

There is still room for improvement in this well-established course, explains UBS Literacy Advisor for the Asia Pacific, Cito Casquite, particularly in the use of the Bengali language. This is because some students are accustomed to speaking in native languages other than Bengali, the country's national language.

During his recent visit, Cito facilitated a project collaboration between SIL Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Bible Society. Cito found that Reverend Liton Mrong, BBS's General Secretary,



was particularly helpful in advancing the collaboration with SIL, jokingly remarking, “he was leading the discussion instead of me facilitating it ... because I think he got really excited to get the help from SIL ... the folks from SIL have been doing literacy in the past and they have materials that are more appropriate for the learners.”

The team was thrilled when SIL Bangladesh offered four workshop opportunities with BBS this year to develop learning materials. Cito elaborates, “Because the Bangladesh government has commissioned SIL’s help in terms of materials development ... we are really on the right partnership with SIL.”

This partnership will also benefit another literacy program by BBS focused on pre-primary school children who speak in mother tongues other than Bengali, including those in the Garo, Santali, Chakma, Marma, and Tripura tribes. These children often struggle when entering primary school, since Bengali is the required language in formal schooling.

BBS saw this need and intervened by creating a two-year pre-primary literacy program for rural children designed to equip them with oral proficiency in Bengali in preparation for primary school. The program includes activities like learning Bengali vowels, counting from 1 to 10, the English alphabet from A to E, reciting rhymes, drawing a flower freehand, identifying Bangladesh’s national flag, learning to pray and that Jesus loves them.

“Presently, there is a lot of interest in running the literacy program of the Bible Society. Many churches come forward to sponsor the classes within their premises while the Bible Society provides materials and training,” remarks Julian, as many locals see the tangible effects of these literacy programs and are eager to see it greatly impact their communities.

To give to this project and help people in Asia access the Bible, visit [biblesociety.org.au/sow](http://biblesociety.org.au/sow).

\*Names changed to protect privacy.

## Helping Asia **ACCESS** The Bible

### EVERY \$45

could help develop Bible translations like the new Vietnamese Study Bible, giving millions an opportunity to discover the Bible for themselves, in their own heart languages...

### EVERY \$80

could help women in Bangladesh gain access to literacy education, giving them the skills to better provide for their families and new opportunities to grow spiritually in Christ...

### EVERY \$130

could help produce resources in Sri Lankan sign language and conduct classes in Sinhala and Tamil to reach more people, enhancing literacy and spiritual understanding...

**Donate today at [biblesociety.org.au/sow](http://biblesociety.org.au/sow)  
or call 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537)**



## A Lifeline of Faith: The Bible in China

Guo lived a life of faith in Jesus for almost 44 years before she held a Bible of her own. Guo became a Christian in her early teens through the faithful witness of her elderly aunt. “She told me that there was a God who created the heavens and the earth, that the kingdom of heaven was near, and we needed to repent quickly.” With a simple faith, Guo believed and gave her life to Jesus. Guo had only her aunt’s Bible by which to anchor her faith, yet she held on to her aunt’s teaching.

Throughout her life, Guo persevered in her faith, as she wrestled with health challenges, her son’s troubled teen years, and the subsequent break down of his marriage. Guo sought help and peace in Jesus through prayer, and counsel from her church pastor. Yet without the Bible, Guo’s understanding of God remained limited. “I wasn’t very clear about many things regarding my faith. I only knew that there is a God who created the heavens and the earth. I didn’t really know anything else as I didn’t have a Bible to read for myself.”

Guo is one of the millions of Christians in China who long for their own Bible. This need among Chinese Christians led the United Bible Societies (UBS) to establish the Amity Printing Company in 1986, with the first Bible printed in 1987, as Guo entered her mid-twenties.

Mary Andrews, an Australian who was (amongst other things) a missionary to China, referred to Bible Society’s work in China in 1987, saying, “One of the most exciting things was to hear when I was in Nanjing last year about the way the Bible Society has been sponsoring a program to set up a project for a printing press called Amity Printing Company outside Nanjing. Where they have already started to print Bibles at the rate of some 200,000 roughly at a time to help meet the needs of a growing Christian population in China ... Christians in China are making a tremendous impact on the life of China because although they might be only a minority ... they are teaching people to work hard, to be loyal to the country, to care for other people, especially

the underprivileged, and to live a good, moral life which everybody in China respects, probably more so than in most Western countries.”

Since 1987, the United Bible Societies have supported the printing and distribution of 94 million Bibles across China through churches. In 2020, Guo was one of those who, at the age of 57 and after 44 years of living out her faith, received her first Bible. Upon receiving her Bible, Guo explained, “It is more than just a book; it is a lifeline, a source of hope, and the key to a beautiful life. Every word of the Bible has made a dwelling in my heart.”

Even with the Bibles distributed so far, there are likely more Christians in China than there are Bibles. The Chinese church continues to grow; unofficial estimates indicate there are 100 million Chinese Christians now. UBS has supported Bible printing in China for over 30 years by subsidising the cost of Bible paper, allowing more Bibles to be printed and making them more affordable. In

2024, the United Bible Societies, in partnership with Chinese Churches, have plans to distribute 70,000 free Bibles to Christians like Guo, who says, “Owning a Bible is not merely a desire; it is a spiritual necessity ... The Bible contains God’s teachings, and without it, my faith would be weak and incomplete, like a vessel floating on uncertain waters. I would feel like a sheep without a home.”

The impact of the Bible in Guo’s life extends beyond herself; she credits the word of God for transforming her and strengthening her faith. In turn, her life and testimony have deeply influenced many others, prompting them to place their trust in Jesus. As she reads her Bible, Guo has found joy in knowing God and his will. Her faith and prayers are now guided by the Bible, which is her light.

If you would like to help others like Guo receive a Bible, visit [biblesociety.org.au/sow](https://biblesociety.org.au/sow). Giving to this project is non-tax deductible.



# Pray With Us

Join us in praying for our Bible Society projects in Asia in the areas of literacy, Bible engagement and translation.

## Bangladesh

Pray for the team at Bangladesh Bible Society who are teaching a literacy course for non-literate women in rural areas so that they may learn to read the Bible for themselves. Pray for the first-year students who struggle to read and write, that God may give them wisdom and the diligence to learn. Pray also for the protection and provision of the participants who also strive for food, shelter and health.

Please also pray for the literacy program for pre-primary children in rural Bangladesh that they be encouraged to come to classes regularly and that teachers of this program successfully guide them in their learning. Pray as well for the full support of this program by church and community leaders.

## Sri Lanka

Thank God for the Ceylon Bible Society and the literacy classes run by church networks and Christian organisations in Sri Lanka's rural and underdeveloped areas. Pray that the students would be empowered as they learn to read the word of God, and for the protection of the participants and their families who are often at risk of natural disasters.

Pray for the translation of the gospel parables of Jesus into Sri Lankan Sign Language. This translation will benefit the Sri Lankan deaf community who are often marginalised due to the lack of Sign Language interpretation support. Pray for the current editing and recording of the 'Life Story of Jesus' series. Thank God that as these resources are released to the community,

they testify to feeling inspired, uplifted, and motivated to deepen their faith and relationship with God.

## Pakistan

Pray for Bible Society's literacy project in Pakistan seeking to equip underprivileged non-literate women with literacy skills. The current literacy rate for women in Pakistan is one of the lowest in the world and without the basic skill of reading and writing, social and economic opportunities are also limited for these women. Pray that this Bible-based literacy project will reach more women with the life skills of literacy as well as the impact of God's word. Pray as well for the wisdom and safety of the Bible Society staff working on this project.

## Vietnam

Pray for Bible Society Vietnam as they reach ethnic minority groups in Vietnam and help them engage with God's word in their heart languages. Praise God that in 2023 Bible stories and the Gospel of Mark were distributed to different tribes. Pray that Christians would be empowered as they learn to read God's word, and that non-believers would come to know God through this program.

Please pray for Bible Society Vietnam and the translation of the Old Testament and related content to complete a Vietnamese Study Bible. Pray that this Study Bible will meet the needs of Vietnamese Christians and pray that God provides the translation team with guidance

and wisdom as they complete the work. Pray for the project completion of the content planned in 2024 and publication in 2025.

## China

Pray for the printing and distribution of Bibles in China and for the rapidly growing number of Christians in the country. Pray for the ongoing support for Bible printing and publication to ensure an uninterrupted supply of the Bible as well as the annual approval to issue Bible print permits. Pray most of all for Christians and new believers in China, that as they receive their copy of God's precious word, they will be nurtured and transformed.

## Papua New Guinea (Urgent Prayer Point)

Severe flooding and an earthquake on the 24th of March have severely impacted the villages in Papua New Guinea and halted on-going mission work. Please pray for the people of Papua New Guinea and the team at Living Child, who partner with MegaVoice and BSA to minister to families in the East Sepik Province with Bibles and Maternal Health Care information. Pray for continued protection among the villagers and the team at Living Child as they attempt to help coordinate disaster relief. Pray also that health efforts will reduce the spread of malaria and other diseases.

DOWNLOAD OUR MONTHLY PRAYER LETTER:  
[BIBLESOCIETY.ORG.AU/PRAY](https://BIBLESOCIETY.ORG.AU/PRAY)

*Helping Asia*  
**ACCESS**  
*The Bible*

In parts of Asia, thousands of Christians are unable to read the Bible for themselves. Whether it's due to a lack of literacy skills or resources in local languages, a lack of access is a barrier to Christians in Asia understanding God's word and learning more about Jesus.

Join our mission to make the Bible more accessible in Asia!

Your giving will help underprivileged women and children gain literacy in Bangladesh, progress Bible translation work for marginalised Christian communities in Vietnam, print affordable Bibles for Christians in China and more.

**Make a tax-deductible donation** today at  
[biblesociety.org.au/sow](https://biblesociety.org.au/sow)

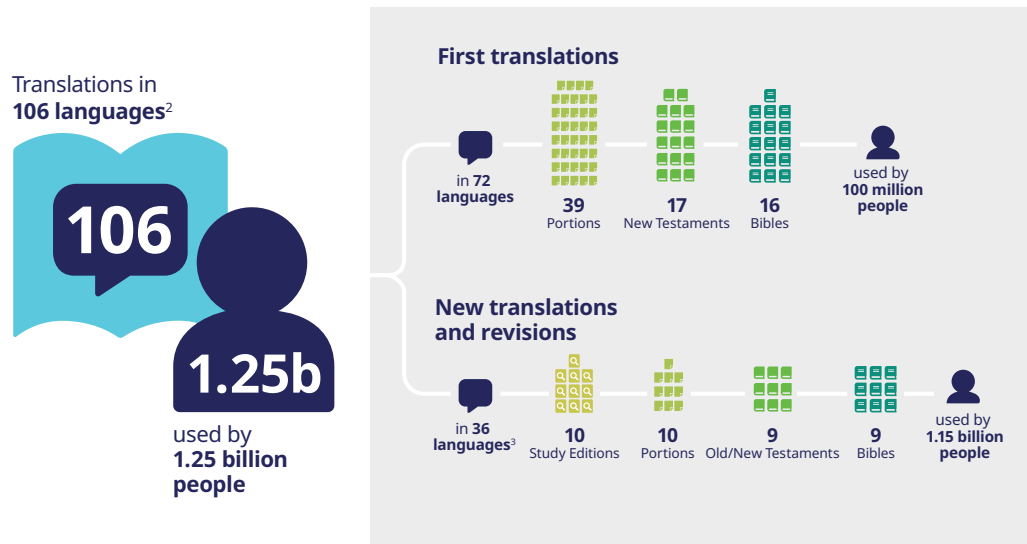


# Scripture translations for over 1.25 billion people in 2023

In 2023, Bible Societies across the world completed Scripture translations in **106 languages**, reaching over **1.25 billion people**. This amazing result is a testament to the unwavering dedication of Bible Societies worldwide to make the Bible accessible to diverse language communities across the globe.

The ongoing momentum in Bible translation is fuelled by partnerships with local Churches, technological advancements, and steadfast commitment. These factors contribute to the unprecedented progress witnessed in recent years and enhanced quality of translations, bringing us closer to a world where every individual, regardless of language, can engage with the transformative power of Scripture.

## Translations Completed by Bible Societies in 2023<sup>1</sup>



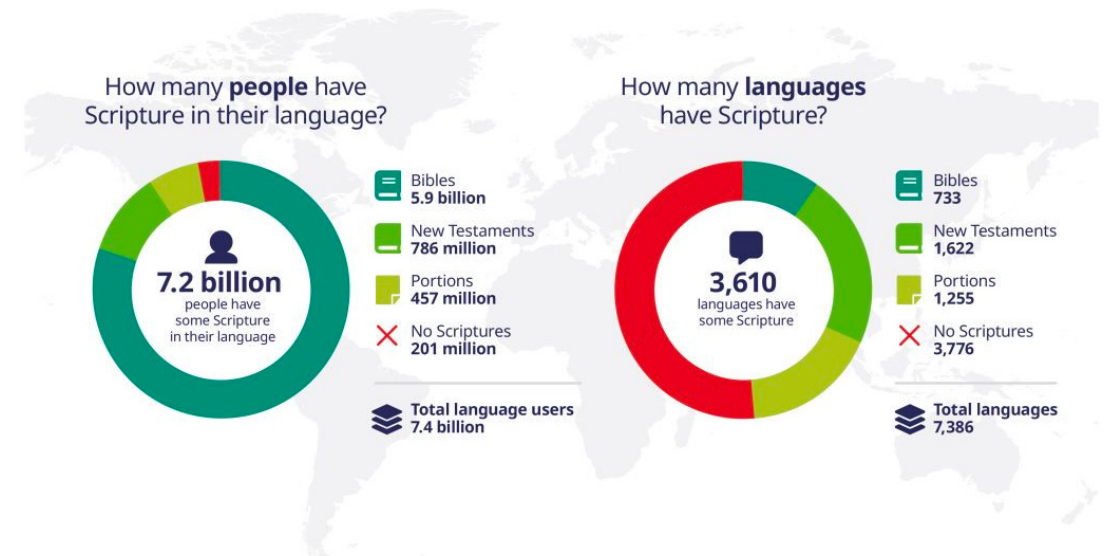
<sup>1</sup> Bible Societies often partner with other translation agencies in completing these translations. <sup>2</sup> The total number of languages (106) is lower than the total of first translations and revisions (108) because two languages have both first and new portions. <sup>3</sup> The total of New translations and revisions (36) is lower than the total in this section (38) because two languages also have Study Editions as well as a New or Revised translation.

# Commitment to achieve 1,200 translations by 2038

Since 2018, the United Bible Societies Fellowship has been focused on a vision to complete 1,200 Scripture translations by 2038. The progress made thus far is noteworthy, with **160 translations already completed and an additional 442 currently in progress**. However, **598 further translations still need to begin**, requiring the ongoing commitment and faithfulness of Bible Societies and their supporters.

“Together, we continue to play a pivotal role in bringing about a profound change in the lives of individuals and communities as we remain dedicated to our mission of spreading the transformative power inherent in the message of the Bible,” comments Dirk Gevers, UBS Secretary General.

## Bible Translation Landscape - January 1, 2023



Source: ProgressBible™ (January 2023). Figures for the number of language users are based on the best available data, which when rounded total 7.4 billion - less than the world population of over 8 billion people.

To read more, visit [biblesociety.org.au/blog](https://biblesociety.org.au/blog)

# Equipping chaplains with Bible resources for ministry expansion



**Bible Society Australia (BSA) continues to provide Scripture grants to chaplains and Christian ministries who are reaching people at the crossroads of life, equipping them with Bibles and Scripture resources.**

So far in 2024, BSA has given Scripture grants to 38 correctional ministries, 24 hospital ministries and 72 other ministries, distributing various Bible resources:

- 110 Bible Comics
- 763 Bibles, New Testaments and Gospels
- 66 Bibles in international languages
- 216 Bibles, New Testaments and Scripture resources in Australian Indigenous languages

Ron, a chaplain serving at a juvenile justice centre, shares, "Each week I go into the centre ... I take the Bible Comics and the Bibles provided by Bible Society and offer them to the young people. Rarely are they not accepted. The openness of these young men is astounding. When it comes time for church (each second Saturday) of those eligible to come, generally 100% attend. There is a great hunger for God's word of grace. Thank you so much for providing all the resources ... They are making a huge difference in many young men's lives, giving hope, joy and revealing grace."

**BSA's Scripture Grants are available for chaplains and parachurches. Apply now for the next financial year.**

To learn more, visit [biblesociety.org.au/our-work/grants/](https://biblesociety.org.au/our-work/grants/)

\*Photos: (left) Andy Corley, Prison Fellowship International president, chaplain and Daniel Tetteh, Prison Fellowship Australia staff member; (above) Longriders Christian Motorcycle Club

"Our God is the  
God of all nations"



**The newly translated and published Eastern Cham New Testament opens the way for church growth in Vietnam.**

- Almost 70 years after hearing the gospel in Vietnam, there are only a few tiny house churches and around 500 believers among these people.
- There are around 100,000 to 150,000 Cham people, who practice Islam, Hinduism, and traditional beliefs.

For the Cham people, the Christian message and faith is hard to accept, given their history and their cultural identity. Many Cham people also find it difficult to understand Vietnamese language Bibles.

"Cham people often thought that Christianity was a foreign religion that was not meant for them," says Pastor Daniel\*.

To overcome this challenge, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and some house churches approached Vietnam Bible Society to help translate the Bible into the Cham language.

The Eastern Cham New Testament, a translation project initiated in 2015, was finally published in March 2024 after nearly nine years of work.

**On receiving the first copies of the New Testament, Pastor Daniel said "The truth is our God is the God of all nations. We are so proud of our heart language; we pray in Cham and feel God so close to us." Pastor Daniel declares, "I believe the Cham church will grow in number in the coming years."**

To read more, visit [biblesociety.org.au/blog](https://biblesociety.org.au/blog)

\*Name changed to protect privacy.



## From Superman to Jesus: how my fascination with greatness was overtaken by desire for something else – goodness

CPX

Max Jeganathan

At a time when the popular imagination is so captured by hero narratives, the Easter story of a man on a cross remains a worthy one – for people of all faiths.

I've always loved Superman. The power. The speed. The whole "good fighting evil" thing. Growing up, the story offered me the perfect combination of inspiration and escapism.

In primary school, I regularly held the unenviable rank of being the shortest kid in the class. Thankfully, I always had great friends and good

teachers, but being an undersized refugee in a nation besotted with sport, strength and skill, wasn't the best recipe for self-confidence. One of my coping mechanisms was to imagine that I was Superman. He had just the right amount of what I thought would make me whole – height, strength, speed, popularity and, of course, the ability to fly.

As time passed, my heroes got less super but more relevant. Less famous but more encouraging. Less glittering but more relatable.

My parents, grandparents and friends (well, some of them). My old playground longings for extraordinary strength came – it turned out – from ordinary people in my life. Real life demanded that abstract fantasy be supplemented with something more concrete, more personal, more resonant.

The need for relatability in our heroes is not lost on the writers of fiction. Superman was a refugee. Catwoman is a plane-crash survivor. Iron Man was a prisoner of war. Spider-Man was an orphan. Superheroes' backstories are replete with suffering and survival. Adversity helps us identify with them. Our celebrity real-life heroes bear similar scars. Nelson Mandela's 27 years in prison. Helen Keller's physical impairments. Barack Obama overcoming the loss of his father. The path from heroism to human hearts often runs through the gauntlet of struggle.

Joseph Campbell, the 20th-century scholar of comparative mythology, suggested that our interest in heroes is a clue to our spiritual nature, striking chords with latent human needs. The desire for comfort amid suffering. The yearning for strength in struggle. Ultimately, the longing for rescue. But there's a difference between chiming with our needs and meeting them. When a firefighter saves someone, it's easy to see them as a hero. But when a firefighter saves *my* family, he becomes my rescuer. In the act of saving, he becomes something more than a hero. He becomes a saviour.

The sociologist John Carroll notes that while the ancient Greeks honed the archetype of the hero with warriors like Homer's Achilles, it was Jesus who introduced the paradigm of the saviour. Heroes epitomise greatness. Saviours embody goodness. Carroll goes on to conclude that when goodness coincides with heroism, there are often traces of Jesus. From Mother Teresa to Harry Potter, it's easy to see where he's coming from.

Over time, my fascination with greatness has been gradually overtaken by desire for something else. Goodness. Greatness might light up our screens, but it's goodness that lights up our hearts.

In his dialogue *The Apology*, Plato speculates on what humankind would do with someone who had lived the completely good, wise and virtuous life. His conclusion was that it would be too much truth and goodness for us to take. Our discombobulation would lead us to kill him. We can't handle the truth.

Four hundred years later, a short boat ride across the Mediterranean from Plato's Athens, the Easter story unfolded. Jesus, we're told – like Superman – began life as a refugee. He went on to perform miracles, love indiscriminately, revolutionise moral reasoning and model sacrifice, all in ways that changed lives and shook empires. He was murdered – not for being a hero, but for claiming to be a saviour. Three days later he rose from the dead.

Whatever one's beliefs, the Easter story melds some of humankind's most powerful motifs, resonant myths and deepest needs. Greatness and goodness. Sacrifice and rescue. Heroes and saviours. Crazy? Far-fetched? Implausible? Perhaps. And yet at a time when the popular imagination is captured so readily by glittering hero narratives – in movies, music and mythology – this old story about a man on a cross remains worthy of our attention, whatever our beliefs might be.

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## Faith Stories

Jacob's story:  
A love that leads to  
truth-telling



## God loved the real me, not the narrative I created

"I grew up in an orthodox Christian household. It meant that I always believed that God was there, and I learnt to pray from a very young age. But the liturgy was conducted in Arabic, and I never learnt Arabic, so I wasn't really hearing the message.

Then my family went through struggles at home, and I saw the ugly side of some people in my extended family – and in the church. I became quite disillusioned by hypocrisy and lies. I became a very angry kid. I guess I wasn't open to the Spirit of God.

Then at high school, there was a lot of bullying. As well as being angry with everyone, I felt hurt and empty. In my emptiness, I turned to everything I could find, including underage drinking and drugs at the age of 16.

It became an addiction. My life went pretty much downhill from there.

A couple of years later, I met a female colleague at work. It wasn't a romantic interest. But I knew she was a Christian. I can't remember how I found out, but I knew, so I watched her. I was waiting for the hypocrisy or the double standards. But it never came. She was a genuinely nice, calm person. And I was really taken aback. There was no other side to her. She was filled with grace (and with the Holy Spirit, although I didn't know that then). It was just inspirational. If anyone tried to gossip around her, she just shut them down. She didn't engage in any of that.

**"I was waiting for the hypocrisy or the double standards. But it never came."**

I found it incredible. I don't know why, but because of her, I started to read my Bible. Perhaps it was osmosis from my colleague. I read all four Gospels, and I was so inspired. I was finally reading the Bible and understanding who Jesus was: the Son of God. And Jesus was a rebel; he was against the religious authorities of the day. He called them hypocrites, which was kind of funny. He was calling out the supposedly religious people, and I found that amazing!

That was the beginning of my journey. I didn't change overnight. I still struggled with addiction, and I knew I had to slowly address my sins, one by one – all the things I was holding on to. It was easy to find justifications and excuses. But I'm on the journey. I'm in a new church now, and I've moved to the country, NSW. I am finally submitting to God. It's a really freeing feeling! I have found a wonderful peacefulness.

**"When I accepted that God, in all his greatness, made me and loved me, it was amazing."**

I've also become a radical truth-teller. As a child and teenager, I was a compulsive liar. It was a habit. I used to lie about who I was or what I'd done. I think that anyone who hates themselves is drawn to lies. I felt a lot of shame, so I put on a show, and I created narratives and backstories. I tried to become other people, to fit in. Then, at one point, it all came crashing down.

Bible Society Australia will continue to share Faith Stories. Stay tuned, a Faith Stories book by Naomi Reed is coming soon!

After that, it wasn't instantaneous, but when I accepted that God, in all his greatness, made me and loved me, it was amazing. God actually loved the real me, not the narrative that I had created. And realising that God knew me and loved me was amazing. It meant that I could grow in loving myself and being authentic. It meant that I could become a truth-teller.

Ephesians 2:4-5 is the verse I always come back to:

**But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. (NIV)**

I really love that verse, because for a long time I felt dead inside – unforgiveable and unredeemable. But then I saw that God's mercy and grace had redeemed me. It was a game-changer for me. I've slowly been able to let go of the anger and all the lies. I have understood God's forgiveness! It has been the most beautiful gift I could ever receive. God's mercy is so great!"

# Embracing Reconciliation

We will be reading the Bible with Rev. Priyantha from the Bible Society of Ceylon. He will reflect on Bible passages which speak of embracing reconciliation, on the importance of loving one another, and remembering that God helps us to say 'Yes, I can', even when faced with many of life's challenges.

## Day 1

**John 13:34 (NIV)**

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*

Jesus gave the New Commandment to express his love for all, and requested his followers to love one another just the way he loved us. Jesus loved me, saved me and called me to do his ministry among the people with the least opportunity.

When I started the ministry with the least privileged children, I identified that their education level was low. They belonged to a low caste and had been neglected; some were misled to engage in the wrong activities. These children felt that they were worthless, with no one to care for them. When I started to get close to them, arranged teachers to educate and guide them, showed and explained about Jesus' love for them, it changed their lives, the lives of their parents and even their entire village.

God is inviting us to love one another just the way he loved us.

### Prayer:

*Dear Lord, we thank you for your new command of loving one another. We pray for the ability to love others as you have loved us. Fill our hearts with your selfless and compassionate love, that we may reflect it in all our interactions. May this love bring glory to your name and draw others closer to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## Day 2

**Philippians 4:13 (NIV)**

*I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

The above passage was written by Apostle Paul when he was in prison with no freedom or comfort, it was very hard. But we can also know, without any doubt, that the Apostle Paul had confidence that Christ strengthened him.

Our motto for the literacy project — "Yes you can" — was based on the above Bible passage. A year after the commencement of the project, we are happy to discover that the children who attended the literacy classes are now able to say: "Yes, we can!"

It is a great encouragement for us, and we are grateful for all the generous supporters who immensely help us. In our present living condition and challenging times, when we place our trust in God we can be assured of the truth in this passage.

### Prayer:

*Dear Lord, grant us the courage to face each day with the assurance that your strength is within us. In moments of doubt, help us remember that we are not alone, for you walk beside us, guiding and empowering us to overcome challenges that come our way. Thank you, Lord, for the promise that through Christ, we are empowered to navigate the journey of life, victoriously. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## Day 3

**Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)**

*Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

As parents, elders and caregivers, the Bible teaches us to play a crucial role in instilling values, principles, and a moral compass in children from the very beginning. It is necessary to give children a good foundation — like a house built on a rock — so that they will not perish.

In our society today, we can see the breakdown of families, sometimes due to alcohol and drugs. These parents set a bad example and their children do not receive the love they require. Some children end up in children's homes or living with relatives, and some may be misled down the wrong path.

It is so important for parents to have good relationships with their children, setting a good example so their children can grow up to become fruitful individuals, following the right path.

### Prayer:

*Dear Lord, we come before you with hearts filled with gratitude and a desire to raise our children in the ways of righteousness. We entrust our children into your hands, knowing that your plans for them are good and purposeful. May they remain anchored in your truth all the days of their lives, bringing honour to your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## Day 4

**2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

Those who are 'in Christ' are given a new identity rooted in their relationship with him, no longer defined by worldly standards or past mistakes but by their status as God's children and heirs to his promises.

Are we excited about this new life in Christ? Embracing a new life in Christ often begins with a realisation of a need for deeper connection with God, involving a change in attitudes, behaviours and priorities.

Before becoming new, we need to decide to be in Christ and become a New Creation. God doesn't give us a used, rebuilt or reconditioned life. He gives us a new life in Christ and old things pass away. God delivers us, giving us a new blessing, calling, destiny, faith, heart, life and mission to glorify him.

### Prayer:

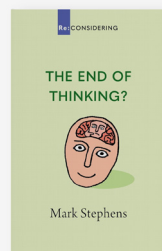
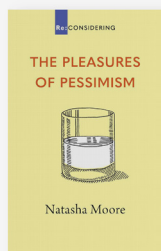
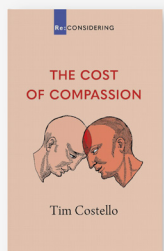
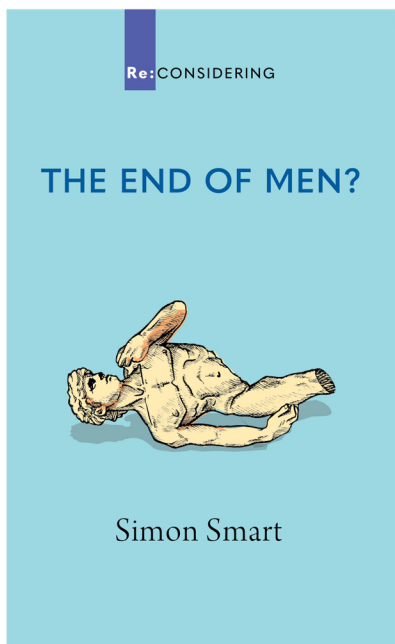
*Dear Lord, we humbly ask for the strength to embrace the new life that you provide. Help us to walk in the light of your truth, to live according to your will, and to spread the message of your love and redemption to those around us. May our lives reflect the transformational power of Christ's sacrifice, inspiring others to seek the beauty of a life renewed in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



# Coming Soon...

In this new addition to the Re:CONSIDERING series Simon Smart asks, 'What does it mean to be a good man today? How do we go about creating spaces that increase the likelihood of boys growing into men you'd want to be around if you were a child, a teenager, a woman, or another man?'

Drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan, a case is made to model and cultivate environments where boys will come to understand the beauty and satisfaction that comes from a life lived in service of others.



Re:CONSIDERING invites you to look at what's familiar from an unfamiliar angle. To consider how we consider things - and how to do it better.

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“My diagnosis is that we’ve reached a tipping point in our culture where I think the secular story of reality is running out of steam for people.

— Justin Brierley

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