

Sower.

WINTER 2025
BIBLE SOCIETY AUSTRALIA



Dear Reader,

This edition of Sower reflects on the mission of Bible Society Australia, with the theme 'Open the Bible, Opening Hearts,' which has me wondering about what happens when each of us open the Bible.

Amazingly, we can be 100% sure, when we open the Bible, that God will speak to us, his people. How good is that? But what is not so certain is the condition of the hearts of those who open God's word, and how the Bible is received.

When Jesus teaches the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:4-15), he talks about different types of 'soil' — hard soil, rocky ground with shallow soil, and soil with thorns already growing. Yet there is also good soil, which represents people who hear, understand and accept the word of God, allowing it to grow deeply in their lives and produce heaps of fruit.

This winter, Bible Society Australia is seeking to reach the hearts of those who are ready to receive Scripture around our country. Will you pray with us that we can reach as many people as possible with God's word? Pray that as the Bible is opened around our country, hearts would be opened too, and God's word would be planted deeply, nourished, and bear much fruit in the lives of his people.



GOD BLESS,

Chris Melville

CHIEF MISSIONS OFFICER,
BIBLE SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

In this edition of Sower, you will read about the faithful men and women who are learning to translate Scripture into their own Indigenous languages, which can be a long and lonely task, made easier and lighter by joining together in community workshops. You'll find encouragement, too, in the special Bibles produced for ministry among the Australian Defence Forces, reaching open hearts among those serving our country.

As you read, pray for the work of translating, publishing and distributing God's word, that it would bring blessing and transformation to all who open it.

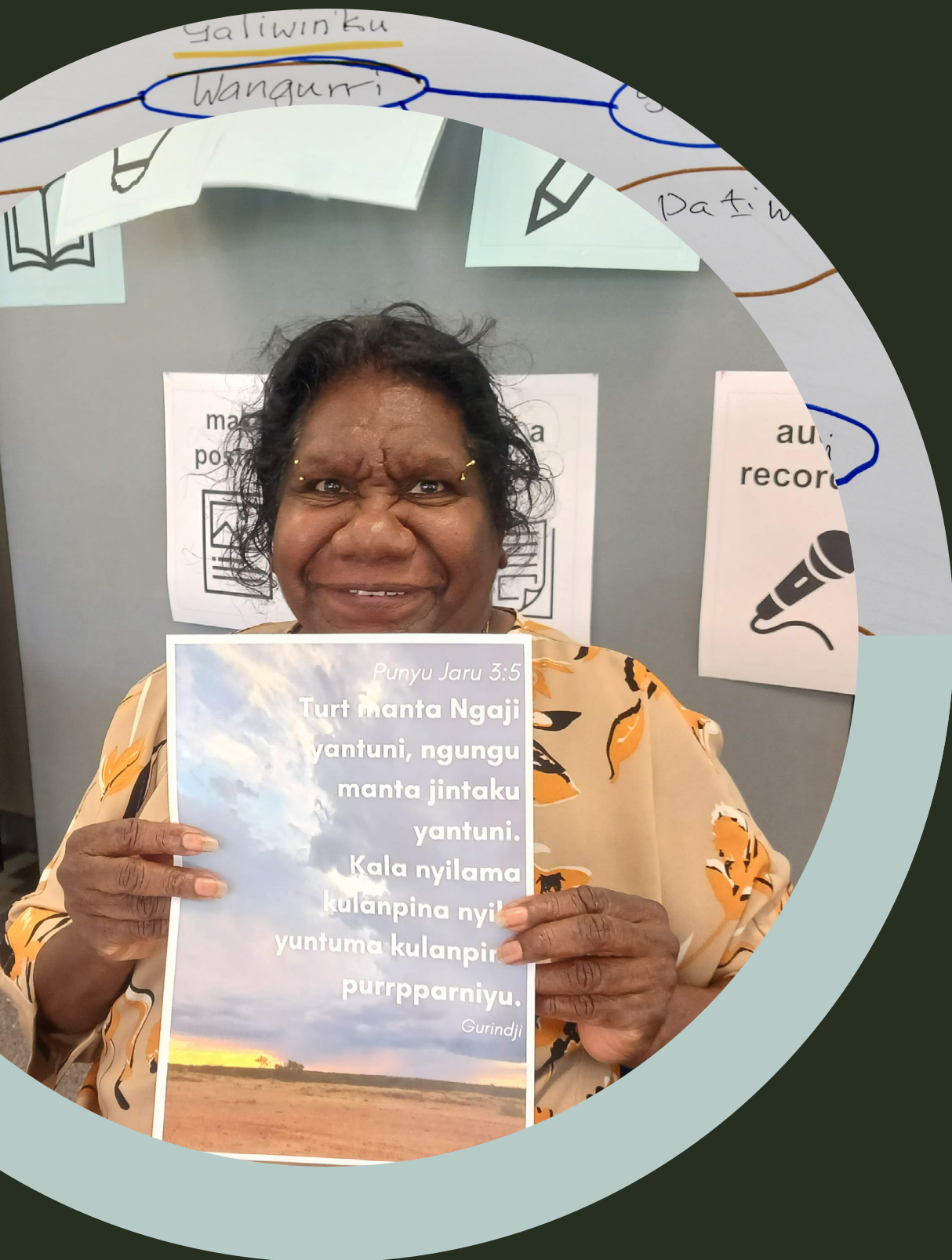


"Pray that as the Bible is opened around our country, hearts would be opened too, and God's word would be planted deeply, nourished, and bear much fruit in the lives of his people."

‘After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.’

— Revelation 7:9 (NIV)





“God will direct you.”

Indigenous Christians Translating the Bible in Community

“I told my sister, ‘I’m not good at translating in Iwaidja,’ Serina recalls. “Then she encouraged me, ‘Well, if God is giving you this work, he’s ahead of you and he will direct you.’” Serina was one of many who gathered in Darwin for a Bible translator’s workshop at Nungalinga College in November last year.

Marisa Hylands, of Bible Society Australia, helps organise the logistics of these Bible translation workshops and admits, “There’s a constant challenge in getting people to a workshop, and on the day it’s even, ‘I don’t know who’s going to make it’. Many translators require carers; in February we tried to arrange three different carers to attend a workshop to assist a translator ... and all fell through due to sickness, travel restrictions, or other logistical limitations. The fact that people get here is kind of a miracle!”

Despite challenges like these, the Short Passage Multi-Language Translation Workshop in November saw nearly 50 translators from 16 different language groups represented. Bible Society Australia’s Amy Cruickshanks and Sarah Williams assisted with translation consultancy support.

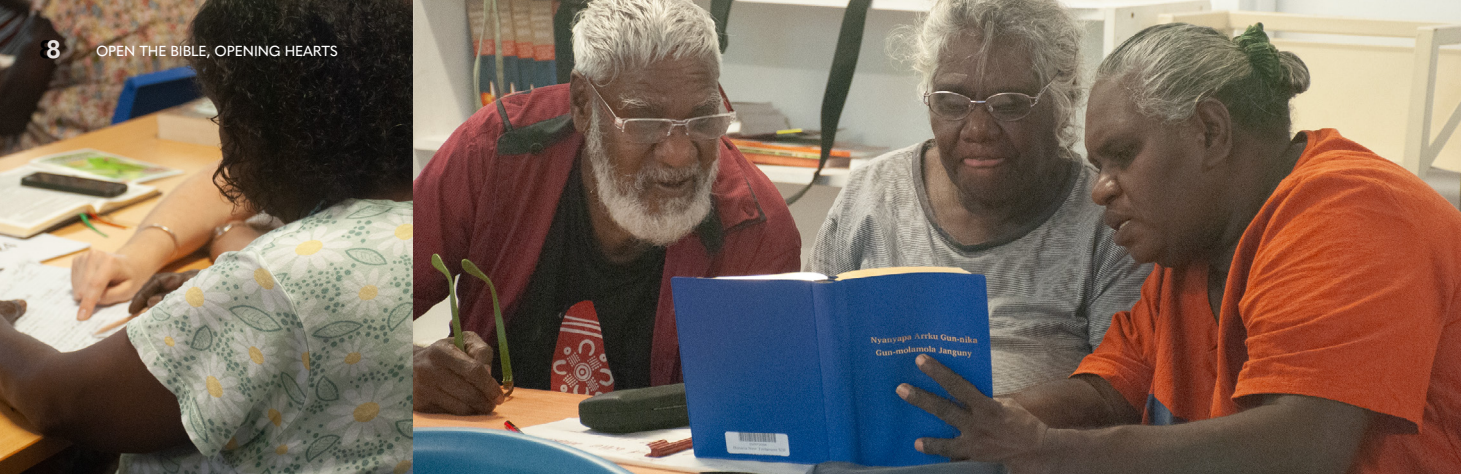
BSA’s Stuart Cameron, who manages the Aboriginal Bibles website as well as the Rev79 Bible translation software, was astonished by the number of participants and the success they had with short passage translation. He reflects on the importance of workshops like this one,

saying, “Indigenous people learn by doing and the taste of translation experience means they feel they want to be more involved in the translation experience.”

These workshops meet many needs among Aboriginal Christian communities, as they provide training, community and fellowship for those working in many different languages. Another translator, Lorna, who speaks the Gurindji language said, “It’s really a pleasure being here with other language speakers from all different communities, getting to learn from each other. We are family, God’s family.” Lorna and others were encouraged to continue in their challenging and long-term task. She says, “We will ... finish the Bible in our language and that will make me so proud and so happy that we’ve done it, you know. I look forward to it each year, when I come back, to be with these other brothers and sisters so we could go home and share with our families, our people.”

George, who was working in the Warumungu language also shares how important it is to meet together. “When you’ve got your team with you, like your language, they’ll lift you up. Same thing when you’re singing your gospels through your language, you know. The young people will lift you up, yeah. And you just want to keep on singing.”

Workshops like these have an ongoing impact, reaching into the future and changing lives.



“Back home, I will teach God’s message for future generations,” says Theresa, who is translating into the Djambarrpuyngu language. “So they can see and they will learn so together we will help each other and understand fully the word of God, what the word of God is saying to all of us.”

Justin’s parents encouraged him to work on Bible translation in the Golumala language. “[They] put me in this job but I’m still learning bit by bit,” he explains. During the workshop, Justin described how he was feeling: “That Scripture makes me feel excited, happy, that Scripture goes in my heart ... It goes to make me strong, make me confident to speak that Scripture, and then other people can hear and they can do it too.”

In February, Bible Society Australia collaborated with the Uniting Church’s Coordinate ministry and AuSIL to run another translation workshop at Nungalinga College, this time for experienced translators. This was the first workshop for experienced translators since 2019, and 24 translators from 11 language groups flew into Darwin. Ten of these languages are spoken in Northern Region Christian Communities (NRCC) communities from Waruwi Goulburn Island and Maningrida in West Arnhem, to Milimngimbi, Ramingining, Elcho and Yirrkala in North-East Arnhem.

The theme of the workshop was ‘The Names of God’ and in the first week, training was given on

the names of God from the Old Testament. The second week’s focus was the names of God from the New Testament. Louise MacDonald, from the Uniting Church’s Coordinate ministry, explains, “Each morning session ... translators discussed the topics in relation to their own languages. The rest of each day was devoted to translators continuing with their own projects. Everyone want[s] to see a workshop like this happen every year and then smaller workshops happening in community. The encouragement of gathering together was a blessing to everyone who attended.”

Stuart Cameron, noting the great camaraderie shared by all the languages groups represented, was also ‘blown away’ by how well the participants’ laptops were functioning. As IT support for the workshop, Stuart noted that, “The last time I saw the participants’ laptops was in 2019 in Arnhem land and I thought the laptops would be dead by now. To my utter surprise, almost all of the participants laptops were functioning and still being used for translation!”

Alanga attended the multilanguage and experienced translators’ workshop, working in the Murrinhpatha language. During the first workshop, Alanga and her team worked on translating Psalm 23. She shared, “It is so very touching because of how we live our life, and there’s the good, the bad and the ugly ... we follow Jesus, follow God to get to the end of the tunnel ... This Psalm, it also helps us to reflect on it, to pray



on it, to remember how we can ... trudge along this journey. It’s not a perfect road, it’s sort of a zigzag, narrow, crooked, up, down, but Jesus is guiding us, always guiding us.”

In the second workshop, Alanga continued work on short passages from the Psalms and Lamentations. She is certain that having these verses in Murrinhpatha will help people.

“It doesn’t have to be in a big book,” she shares, “It can be in a little chart, cards, or on the walls ... just something for ... people walking around and something for them to see to help them. To click in their mind when they read it in Murrinhpatha ... We can use these cards at home. Yes, and then even take it out bush, to reflect on it. Maybe sit high up on the sand dunes and read it and pray.”

During the workshop, Alanga was deeply impacted by the discussion about the names of God. “My interesting one was the names of God, God having many names, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus. All three of them that really touched my heart because it is what I believe in here,” she said, pointing to her heart, “but not from up here,” indicating her head.

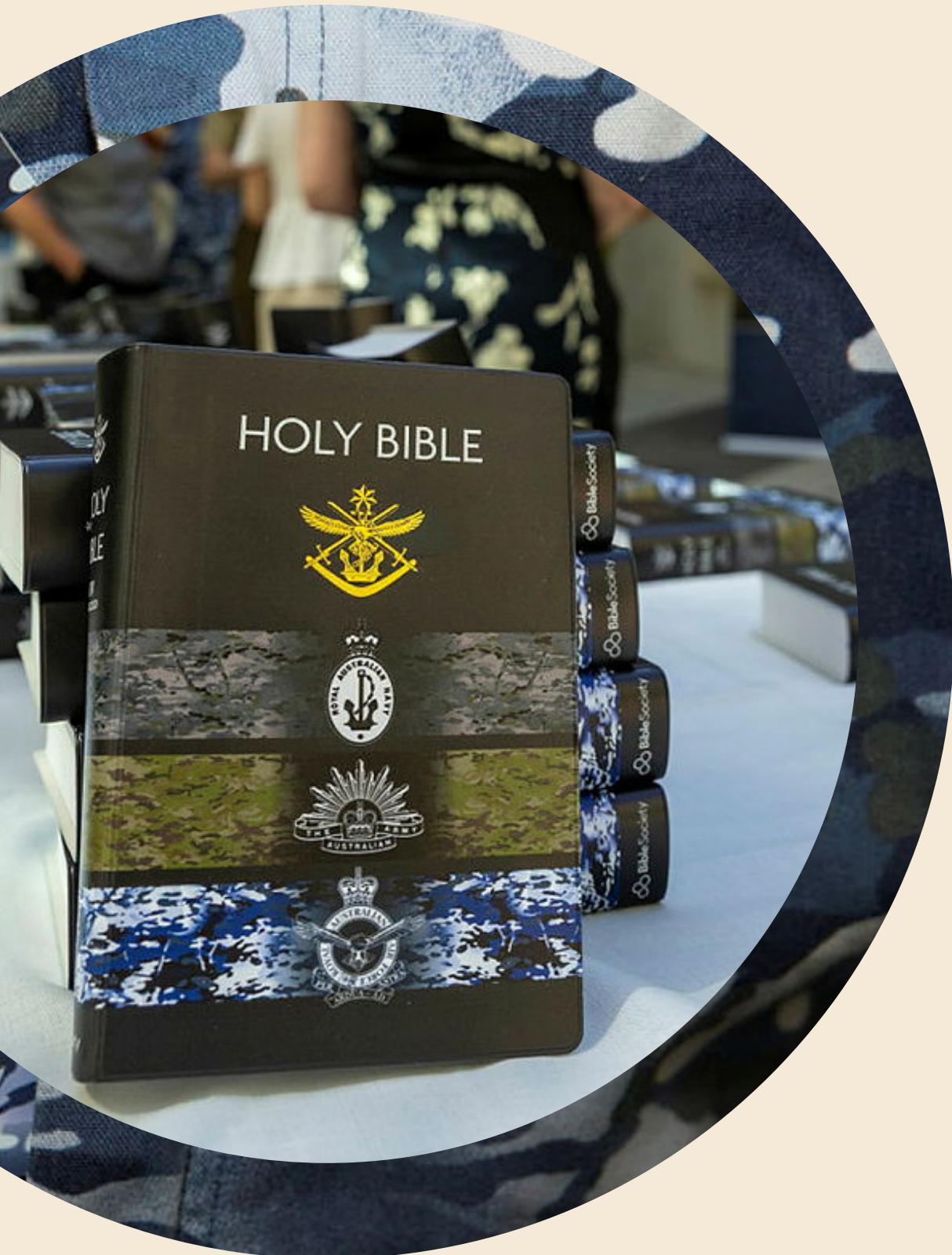
Alanga thought she was the only one finding the work of Bible translation hard, but she was encouraged to learn that many other students felt the same way about ‘nailing the message’. She shared, “Hopefully ... we can do something to make

people understand ... what we have learnt here, either verbally, talking about it, or showing what we have learnt from the book or chart or even the painting.”

Alanga shares that she came to the translation workshop because she was thirsty for God’s word. “I see our people in our community are suffering, not many people go to mass these days. But many, some of us, maybe a handful of people still carrying on, still wanting, still spreading the news, with the hope for our young people and our people to live in harmony but it’s hard, sad.”

Alanga and her team are working on short passages from several Old Testament books and is hopeful for the work to be finished. She is hoping and praying hard that people who have been taught this work can continue and finish it. Alanga sees a need for young people to carry on the work of Bible translation but realises the difficulty in getting them to a place to learn about God’s word and translation.

The translation workshops are important, because as Alanga shares, “Coming to Nungalinga I feel it’s peaceful, so peaceful, loved, being with other students, learning together, telling stories, singing and dancing, praying, normal good way. In a good way and good people, we mix and still praising to one God, Jesus.”



“This is for you as a soldier.”

Providing Hope and Purpose to the Australian Defence Force Through Scripture



During World War I, a young Australian soldier named Philip J. Davies carried a small New Testament in his breast pocket. While laying telephone cables, two large shells struck, injuring him and killing other soldiers. At the hospital, he found shrapnel buried in the thin pages of his New Testament — only stopped by the book's stiff back cover, saving his life. This Soldier's Bible, given to Australian soldiers by Bible Society Australia (BSA), is now part of the BSA historical Bible collection. It was recently showcased at the launch of the newest military-specific Bible by Bible Society Australia in Canberra in March 2025. The event introduced the NIV Anglicised Tri-Service Bible, specifically designed to support today's soldiers, sailors and aviators with God's word.

The launch of this latest Australian Defence Force (ADF) Bible marked another milestone in the partnership between Bible Society Australia and the ADF. Bible Society has a long-standing history of supporting Australian troops with Scriptures — from the Boer War, the World

Wars, and though to subsequent conflicts — ensuring that service members have access to God's word in times of uncertainty and hardship.

Today, BSA supports the ADF through its Scripture Grants program, which aims to equip ADF chaplains with Bibles, New Testaments, devotionals and gospel resources, ensuring that chaplains have what they need to minister to ADF service members.

Meeting the Unique Needs of Service Members

One Army Chaplain explains that while service members share common human needs — such as forgiveness, hope, meaning, and purpose — the military environment amplifies these needs. “The ADF puts a unique pressure on people that exacerbates those needs,” he says. “We move families around every two years ... away from extended family; they [can] become isolated. We put our soldiers in arduous circumstances ... situations that are dangerous and risky.”

These intense experiences force service members to grapple with life's biggest questions — questions about morality, life after death, and the purpose of their existence. Unlike civilians, who may encounter these existential thoughts only a few times in their lives, soldiers must confront them regularly in training and operations.

The Impact of ADF Bibles and Gospel Resources

For many service members, having a Bible in their hands during difficult moments can be life-changing. “In those extreme moments, we start asking those big questions about meaning, purpose, life, and death,” says the Army Chaplain. “To have an actual physical Bible on hand where they can go, ‘Oh, I’ve been told that this book has some answers ...’ is incredibly valuable.”

Another Navy Chaplain recalls a young recruit who, on the day he started training, received a personal text message with really bad news that devastated him. A few days later, he picked up the Navy waterproof New Testament and started reading Matthew’s Gospel. “He came across Jesus’ teaching on worry,” shares the chaplain. “He said he had been filled with so much worry, not just about [his personal situation] but everything that was happening, but that Jesus’ words cut through and reminded him that he was really loved and valued. ‘Do not worry about your life’ wasn’t just a platitude but a real recognition that he could rely on God no matter what and keep everything else in perspective.”

The Bible also speaks to experienced soldiers, who struggle with the moral weight of combat. “Being able to open up the book of Romans and talk about authority and what it means to have a moral authority to conduct yourself as a soldier is crucial,” explains the Army Chaplain. “I pulled out the *[In the Forces and a Christian... is it possible?]* tract and went through that with a soldier. The Bible gives people permission to follow God and affirms the range of human experiences within that.”

Why Military-Specific Bibles Matter

While any copy of the Bible is powerful, the ADF-designed Bibles are particularly impactful because they connect with service members’ identity and culture.

“I could give any copy of the Bible anywhere to a soldier and that would have a good effect,” the Army Chaplain acknowledges. “But you can see around here [at the ADF Bible launch event], it wears an identity as part of that. I had to earn the right to have that rising sun [badge], and at the front of the [ADF] Bible is the rising sun.

“There’s something very special about giving a soldier the ADF Bible and saying, ‘This is the Army’s new Bible; this is for you as a soldier.’”

This thoughtful design means that more service members are likely to accept the Bible as it embraces and includes them, their service, their camo colours and their badge.

Bible Society’s Scripture Grants for the ADF

For BSA donors, supporting the ADF Scripture Grants program means they are directly participating in military ministry. As BSA funds all these Bibles in their entirety, without BSA donors, the amount of Bibles given out each year would be severely limited, impacting chaplains’ effectiveness, and their contribution to service members’ spiritual wellbeing. “You may not be here wearing a uniform, but you are empowering and enabling us to do what we do,” says the Army Chaplain.

The Navy Chaplain echoes this, thanking donors for their generosity and faithfulness. “It is making a difference,” he says simply. He also highlights that the Bibles provided through BSA aren’t just left on shelves. “People who receive ADF Bibles and New Testaments aren’t forced to. They choose to. They are interested.”

If you would like to support this ministry of Scripture Grants and Bible Publishing for the ADF, visit biblesociety.org.au/sow.

Open The Bible, Opening Hearts

Every \$50 could expand and accelerate the Auslan Bible project, providing deaf people with Scripture in their heart language.



Every \$100 could equip chaplains across the country with Bibles and resources, as well as fund specialised Bibles for military personnel, hospital patients, prisoners and disaster survivors.

Every \$150 could help those translating Scripture into Indigenous languages and improve Bible distribution to remote communities.



Donate today at biblesociety.org.au/sow or call 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537).



“Where can we get more of these?”

Bible Engagement Resources in High Demand in Indigenous Communities

Lily Neville, an 80-year-old Adnyamathanha translator, has found herself distributing Bible engagement resources in her language faster than she can request them from Bible Society. Just before Christmas 2024, Lily received 23 boxes of resources, and her daughter took them to a funeral to distribute to family and friends ... returning with only two boxes!

When they saw the Bible resources in Adnyamathanha, Lily’s family “went crazy for them” and asked her daughter, “Where can we get more of these?” They found the Bible Storybooks in Adnyamathanha so easy to read. These booklets have been translated from the series illustrated by Kees de Kort and published by Bible Society Australia.

Lily’s cousin Rev. Denise Champion is also using the Adnyamathanha Bible engagement resources from Bible Society. Denise meets with a group of Adnyamathanha speakers every month on a Saturday morning at a church in Port Augusta

and they read the books together. She reports that the books are ‘really good’ for their language work. These translations by Lily are helping them revive their language. Louise Sherman, Head of Bible Society Australia’s Australian Languages Team, says, “This is something Lily and I have been praying for [for] a long time.” As Denise is also looking for audio resources for the group, Louise has arranged to send her the recordings of Lily reading the stories in Adnyamathanha, so they can listen to them as a group.

Because so many Indigenous Australians are Christians, the Scriptures are important to them. Bible Society’s Maryanne Cameron is working to create Bible engagement resources in Indigenous languages, particularly those which help develop literacy among Indigenous communities.

“The Christians in those communities are so eager for resources, and if possible, in their own language. Even if they don’t find it easy to read their own language, they still persevere so that

they keep their language, culture and spirituality alive. For those Indigenous people whose first language is English, the Plain English Version resources are very much appreciated!”

Maryanne drafted some resources and took them up to North Queensland to show those she met with. “They just loved them,” Maryanne reports.

“I came back with nothing because they wanted my drafts, the printouts I’d made at home ... they were so hungry for the Plain English resources which were something that they could read that they related to ... all the illustrations are of Indigenous people, and that was something that they really liked.”

The people of Wujal Wujal an Aboriginal community north of Cairns, speak their traditional language of Kuku-Yalanji as well as English. The New Testament in Kuku-Yalanji was dedicated in the 1980s, and Maryanne found

that the people are very keen to read Scriptures in their own language. It was this desire that prompted her to create a simple bilingual booklet with illustrations of Aboriginal people and verses of encouragement in both Kuku-Yalanji and Plain English. She printed 10 of these little booklets and took them on her visit. “Whenever I hesitantly showed one of these bilingual booklets, people’s faces lit up, some of them nearly cried, and every single one of them was overjoyed to see their language in an attractive, reader friendly format.”

A storybook for the Kuku-Yalanji, *God’s Words for Life When You Feel Worried*, is ready to be published in 2025, as well as 15 other Bible engagement booklets (colouring books and storybooks) in nine languages.

To support the development and distribution of more Bible engagement resources, visit biblesociety.org.au/sow.

Urgent Need for Bible Translation Consultants

Bible translation is a complex and collaborative process, requiring skilled teams to make God’s word accessible to local communities. Bible Translation Consultants who are experts in biblical languages are vital to this process, as they guide and support local language translators to ensure accuracy, clarity, and faithfulness to the original text. With linguistic and theological expertise, translation consultants ensure the integrity of translation work. As Sam Freney, Translation Consultant for Bible Society Australia, explains, the demand for qualified consultants is increasing as the current generation nears retirement.

An Essential Role

“Translators are the locals. They are the experts in their language,” Sam explains. “The reason [consultants] have all this academic training is that we are essentially the experts in the original languages of the Bible — Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.”

With a PhD in biblical literature or linguistics as a prerequisite, alongside training in translation principles, consultants serve as the bridge between the original biblical texts and the local translators. Their role is to help navigate the complexities of translations, ensuring that decisions are theologically sound and culturally appropriate. “Every translation, ideally, should be accurate, acceptable, beautiful, and clear,” says Sam. “That is, it should mean the same thing, be acceptable to the community, sound natural, and be understandable.”

To support this Bible mission work in the South Pacific, scan the QR code below.



“The bottleneck in most translation projects around the world is consultants,” Sam shares. “There aren’t very many of them, and they’re getting old.”

This shortage is particularly evident in the Oceania region. “In the South Pacific, we recently lost Rev. Apenisa Lewatoro, who was looking after 20 projects,” he says. Sam illustrates this need by noting that consultants in other parts of the world may support six projects each, whereas he has 18 projects across Australia and the South Pacific.

New Solutions

The path to becoming a consultant involves at least a decade of academic and practical training. New approaches are needed to train consultants and meet demand. In a recent initiative, Sam began working with Bible college lecturers who already have expertise in biblical languages but need translation experience. “I’m taking a few lecturers with me [to projects] to get exposure and experience,” Sam explains. “In a couple of years, they’ll be able to assist with translation projects during their seminary breaks.”

Efforts are also underway to train local translators from the South Pacific and PNG as consultants. These initiatives, however, will require significant investment in training and mentorship.

The need for Bible translation consultants has never been greater. Without them, many communities may face significant delays in receiving accurate and meaningful translations of God’s word. “Prayers for translators in remote and difficult conditions are essential,” says Sam.



Reverend Apenisa Lewatoro Memorial

It is with great sorrow that we share the passing of Rev. Apenisa Lewatoro, beloved Translation Advisor at the Bible Society South Pacific (BSSP). Rev. Lewatoro faithfully served BSSP since 2001, dedicating his life to Bible translation and Scripture projects across the Pacific. His dedication to Scripture and his community never wavered, and his passion for Bible translation and commitment to his faith shaped the lives of many.

He was a devoted Methodist Church Minister and a Master Facilitator of Trauma Healing, always striving to bring hope and healing to those around him.

He was laid to rest in his village, Naimalavau, Nakelo, Tailevu, on 1st March 2025.

Photos: (left) Bible Society and its mission partners at the South Pacific Bible Forum 2022, (above) Reverend Apenisa Lewatoro



Open The Bible, Opening Hearts

Many Australians still wait for the Bible in their heart language. Bible Translators and gospel workers are ready — but they need your help.

Your gift will help translate and publish the Bible in Indigenous languages, provide free Bibles to those in need, bring Scripture to the Deaf community in Auslan, and more.

Give today and help Open The Bible to more hearts.



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



Pray With Us



Loving Father,

We thank you for your word that reveals to us who you are, your great love for us, and your faithfulness throughout the generations. Thank you that your word is living and active, speaking directly into our struggles, giving us peace in our pain and wisdom for our daily lives. Thank you for the mission you've given us together through Bible Society, working to make the Bible accessible to every person in their heart language.

Father, we lift up our beloved Indigenous Australian translators, translation consultants and coordinators who work with dedication and passion to translate the Bible into Indigenous heart languages. In every challenge they may face, please strengthen them. With your Spirit, guide them in their work, and grant them the wisdom they need to complete it in a way that is pleasing to you.

We also pray for those involved in Indigenous publishing and distribution — editors, illustrators, and community leaders — who help ensure that these Bibles reach children, youth, elders, and non-literate audiences. May their work grow in reach, and may your word bring delight, comfort, strength to all who receive it.

We pray for the Auslan translators and ministry partners working to make the Bible more accessible for the Australian Deaf community. Lord, bless the clarity, accuracy, and impact of their work. May it be a powerful encouragement and draw the Deaf community into a deeper, richer engagement with your word.

Lord, bless the chaplains, and gospel workers ministering in times of disaster, in prisons, hospitals, and the armed forces. Equip them through your word to bring hope, healing, and peace to those at the crossroads of life.

May all who receive these Bibles — whether in print, audio, visual or sign language — encounter Jesus, and be drawn into a deeper relationship with you.

IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY,
AMEN.

DOWNLOAD OUR MONTHLY PRAYER GUIDE

BIBLESOCIETY.ORG.AU/PRAY

IMPACT REPORT: AUSTRALIA

Auslan Bible Translation



Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is a distinct visual language with its own grammar and vocabulary used by over 16,000 people in Australia. In 2024, Bible Society Australia and Wycliffe Bible Translators collaborated to establish a state-of-the-art video recording studio to produce Auslan Bible resources for the Australian Deaf community. With only 4% of the Old Testament, and 37% of the New Testament translated into Auslan, the Auslan Bible Project aims to translate more of the Bible, allowing Auslan users to engage with Scripture. In 2025, work by the Auslan Bible team includes:

- the development of a new Auslan Bible website to be launched this year, making translation more accessible to Auslan users;
- the translation of more Bible stories for children, with the goal of having completed 12 stories about Jesus by the end of 2025; and
- editing and releasing eight Auslan interpreted sessions of the Alpha course developed in partnership with Alpha Australia.

To see and share Bible stories in Auslan, visit Auslan Bible's YouTube channel at youtube.com/@AuslanBible.

IMPACT REPORT: PAKISTAN

Literacy Skills, Eye Health and Bibles



In 2024, Pakistan Bible Society (PBS) marked the tenth year of providing Bible-based literacy classes for non-literate women in Pakistan. This literacy program has helped these women develop essential literacy skills, boost their personal development, and grow spiritually through a deeper understanding of the Bible.

In November 2024, 3,819 students graduated, exceeding the targeted number, and a total of 30,000 Scripture materials were distributed, including:

- 3,500 Urdu Large Print New Testaments
- 400 Urdu Large Print Bibles.

This initiative also included medical eye camps caring for the women's eyesight health, which benefited 1,550 learners, with 550 pairs of glasses distributed.

Many who participated in the literacy course throughout the years began Bible study groups in their communities. Zara*, a participant, shared: "I am standing in front of many people because of learning through women's literacy classes ... We have started a Bible study group in my home with 13 women ... This program impacted our lives, and we are now enjoying more of our lives as we are aware of many new things."

To read more, visit biblesociety.org.au/blog.

*Name changed to protect privacy.



The new mum group chat can be perilous. A simple rule can help navigate the minefield

Natasha Moore

Natasha Moore is a senior research fellow at Centre for Public Christianity.

This article first appeared in The Guardian on 24 February 2025.

Everyone knows that parenthood – especially motherhood – is a minefield from the get-go. You're sleep-deprived, you're hormonal, you're riding some serious emotional highs and lows, and embarking on probably the highest-stakes venture of your life.

Everyone has their opinions, and pretty soon you do too. You urgently need advice, and there's no shortage of it. Sure, lots of this advice is not only dogmatic but contradictory, and the algorithm

floats all the most guilt-inducing content to the top. There's little consensus (unless it's that you're definitely not doing enough tummy time).

The group chat with other new mums can be a lifeline. It may be the blind leading the blind, but at least you're all going through the same things together.

Except when you're not. It's a perilous journey out on to that limb, to say to a fellow mum that I'm

CPX

struggling with this or I'm loving that. There's payoff in the solidarity of the "me too". But if you share something difficult and get a blank face in return – not their experience – you can feel cast down and even more isolated. If you share something positive and the experience is not shared, they can easily be cast down or unsettled by it. Nobody's fault; still, a minefield.

How do you share somebody's experience if you don't, well, share their experience? The piece of advice that keeps recurring to me as I step gingerly through the minefield is this one: rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. It's from the Bible, the Apostle Paul's letter to Christians in Rome, and it neatly sums up how to do life with people whose circumstances are sometimes much better and sometimes much harder than your own. When any one member of the group has something to celebrate, we all have something to celebrate. When any member is cast down, we're all cast down.

When it comes to motherhood, there's been a huge swing in recent times towards the "mourn with those who mourn" side of the equation. There's a whole genre of social media post that begins "What nobody tells you about having kids is ..." followed by whatever is currently driving them crazy about their kids. But as parenthood loomed for me, it felt like all anyone tells you about having kids is the hard stuff: the loss of sleep, time, autonomy, even self. Practically every mummy blog for the last 20 years has gone into great detail about what a hard job this is.

All this is a great advance on the conspiracy of silence that (to some extent) once existed – the sense that it would be betraying your kids and your sacred vocation as a mother to acknowledge that you don't exactly love everything about it, all

the time. The solidarity of mourning with those who mourn – venting with those who vent? – is hard-won, and cathartic. But have we lost the knack of the opposite – rejoicing with those who rejoice?

Joy is definitely a word we associate with becoming parents. But there can be a strange iffiness about sharing the good stuff. Laments for lost sleep or lost sanity meet a sympathetic ear, but to enthuse about time with your baby can sound like bragging, or trigger an uneasy competitiveness. It's basic politeness, of course, not to mention to other new parents that your baby is sleeping through the night. (And prudence, maybe; sleep deprivation makes us a bit murderous.) But why does it sometimes feel like it's only acceptable to be open about what sucks?

I flip back to that rejoice/mourn passage to find another key to navigating the minefield: love must be sincere, it says. Love, the simplest and the hardest thing in the world. If we're genuinely – sincerely – seeking the good of the other person, then it becomes not only possible but intuitive to enter into their joy or pain, and to regulate our own decisions about what and how much to share. Love can rush in where the prudent fear to tread.

It also makes space for our mistakes. Love covers over a multitude of sins: another nugget of wisdom, from elsewhere in the New Testament. You can forgive a lot from someone who you know wants only good things for you. To rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn is an art. The art of celebration and the art of empathy – both crucial to the art of community. It takes a village, they say. Even if that village is built on a minefield.

Find out more about CPX at:
publicchristianity.org

Faith Stories

Jyothi's story



'My mum moved to a village in India where there were head-hunters'

"My mum was a missionary to India. Before that, she was a single lady, living in England... and then she was called by God to India. She was 21 and she moved to a little village where there were head-hunters. After years of learning the language, she started a radio station and recorded the Gospel on big reels. She and another British missionary would drive into little villages and set up the reels in the car and play the Gospel. All the village people would come out and listen, including the head-hunters. 95% of the people in those villages became Christians and now their children and grandchildren are going out as missionaries.

After that, my mum moved to another place, where she translated Christian biographies and other books into Telugu. There was no printing press, so she started her own press, which became well-known all over India. In between times, she adopted children. People would come to her with orphans who had no one to look after them. I was the ninth of her adopted children, aged three. When I was brought to her, I'd been living in an orphanage. My birth mother died, and my father couldn't look after me, so he gave me up to her.

After I came to live with my adopted mother, my dad would visit me occasionally. Each time,

he would bring me a bunch of bananas he could ill afford. I remember the last time he came he held me tight and cried and cried. He didn't come after that because he moved to a different area.

My mum lived by faith. She had no regular income. People would just send money when she least expected it. She had such a deep commitment to people and a concern for their souls. As well as adopting children, she regularly had 20 girls living in her home. She was training them in the Bible. Every Sunday, she would have 300 children in the home, and she would train these young women how to teach Sunday school. Those young women often came back and said it was the happiest years of their life! Sometimes, we would go on picnics in the local area, and she would sing hymns in Telugu and preach the Gospel. Other people would join in, and she had such a love for them.

For me, I went off to a Christian boarding school where I heard the gospel constantly and I would go forward for the altar call almost every Sunday. When I was 16, I was at a Christian conference, and I was challenged to accept Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I did, and it was a turning point for me. At the time, I told one of the boys at the conference that I'd accepted the Lord, and he said he would pray for me... which he did, and then we got married 10 years later, in India.

Twelve years after our marriage, my husband and I came to Australia, with our two children

and four suitcases. We didn't know why God brought us here, but we were sure it was God's leading. We joined the local church in Sydney and now, years later, my husband is the caretaker of the church since we have no pastor.

In the meantime, my mum went back to England, when she turned 60, after 40 years in India. I remember one day, when I was a kid, I was walking to school with her, and she told me about her favourite Bible verse. *"Those who honour me, I will honour."* (1 Sam 2:30) She told me that she came to India with nothing. She was single and alone. "But now look at me!" she said, "God has honoured me. I have this huge family of children and grandchildren!" As she finished talking, she said, "Look!" and there in front of us upon a gate of a school was this very same verse.

My mum passed away ten years ago. She made such a big impression on my life. I've seen how much she loved people, and she loved their souls. I've seen how much she honoured God in everything she did, and how much he honoured her. And now... I've seen that Bible verse at work in my own life too. Those who honour God, he will honour."

Jyothi's story is part of the Faith Stories series, compiled by Naomi Reed. To read more Faith Stories visit biblesociety.org.au/faithstories.

Daily Bible

Day 1

Exodus 12:40-42 (NIV)

Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD'S divisions left Egypt. Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come.

Each of us today struggle against various forms of slavery. It might be addiction to our phones, the pressure of social expectations, struggles with our eating, drinking or finances. If it's something keeping us from the life God has for us, then it's slavery and God wants us to be free from it.

The pathway out of slavery remains the same today as it was all those years ago. As the ancient Israelites did then, today we are called to reach out to God and to trust him with what enslaves us. Freedom might not come quickly or in the way we expect, but God's promise to us remains unchanging. He will always be with us, and our relationship with him will overcome anything that enslaves us. We are already free.

Prayer:

Father, thank you that you are a God of freedom. I bring to you the things in my life that I'm struggling to be free from. Help me focus on my relationship with you so that I can freely worship you and follow you with everything that I am. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2

Romans 6:17-18 (NIV)

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

The Christian author C. S. Lewis talks about freedom through the illustration of a goldfish in a bowl. For it to be fully free, we would need to take it out of its bowl and drop it on the table. It might be free, but would it be flourishing? We see in this reading from Romans, that the same principle applies to us.

When we submit to God and his will for our lives, we are blessed with the righteousness of Jesus, we are freed from slavery to sin, and we become slaves to righteousness — and all the wonderful things that come with that, including relationship with God, identity, meaning and eternal life. True flourishing and true freedom come through the right kind of submission.

Prayer:

O God my Father, help me to have the strength and courage to submit to you so that I can be a slave to righteousness. I trust you to know what's best for me, so I can truly flourish in the way you want me to. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Finding True Freedom

We are Opening The Bible with Priyan Max Jeganathan, speaker and writer for the Centre for Public Christianity. Max gave the keynote address at the 2024 National Prayer Breakfast in the Australian Parliament, where he spoke on 'Australian Grace.' His new book *The Freedom Trap* explores the nature, power and beauty of Christian freedom, in a distracted world; it is available at Koorong.

Day 3

Philippians 2:5-7 (NIV)

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Today's passage is from the beautiful and famous Christ hymn from Paul's letter to the Philippian church. It's a famous declaration of freedom underpinned by humility and purpose. Jesus is in very nature God, but instead of using equality with God for his own advantage he humbled himself for us. We always have the freedom to do any number of things. But true and beautiful freedom begins with humility. Being humbled to what God would have us do enables us to deploy our freedom for his higher and greater purposes, just like Jesus.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have given me so much freedom. Help me not to be driven by self-interest in the use of my freedom, but to humble myself — as you did for me on that cross, through your Son. May my freedom always be in joyful humility before you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4

John 10:7, 9-10 (NIV)

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep ... whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture ... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

In a world where success is often measured by material wealth, popularity and reputation, it's easy to assume that the objective of our freedom should be material and earthly convenience.

However, when Jesus promises 'life' and 'life to the full,' he's talking about more than mere material flourishing. In the original Greek, Jesus' sentence is translated by way of two different words for 'life': 'bios' and 'zoe.' One of these refers to earthly biological and material life and the other refers to spiritual and supernatural life. For Jesus, relationship with him gives us the freedom to 'come in and go out,' as we please, but this happens within a specific and beautiful model of human flourishing, that fits with who we are and what we need.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your promise of salvation and freedom in Jesus. Help me rest in the assurance that when I use my freedom in relationship with you, I know I will always have pasture, in the most important ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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