





About the Cover Photo:

This is Suzanne, a trauma healing facilitator in Vanuatu.

The photo above is of other facilitators at a trauma healing workshop in February 2026.

Please see page 10 for more about this story.

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Welcome.

Happy Easter! I'm praying that you'll have a chance to stop and reflect on the gift of salvation we've received through Jesus' death and resurrection. I hope you also get the chance to share the amazing sacrifice of Jesus with those who don't know him yet.

For me, this Easter, I am thinking about the new life Jesus gives us through his death and resurrection. A life transformed by God.

So many people here and around the world long for that transformation. They need God's love and the hope he offers. But there are barriers in their way, like trauma, illness, hardship, poverty. These things can keep people from hearing the Truth that can change their lives.

This Easter, will you join with me in praying for them? Pray that nothing will stand between them and the Truth. Pray that God will remove the barriers they face, so they can hold his Word in their hands, and know the transformation Jesus offers.

In this edition of Sower, you'll read how God's healing Word is bringing hope in Slovenia through Bible-based trauma healing. One woman said it so clearly: **"God's Word is alive and has the power to heal various traumas and wounds that are passed down from generation to generation."** How powerful is that?

You'll also see how Scripture-based trauma healing is helping address domestic abuse in Vanuatu. Women, families, communities and churches are finding healing. Renata, who leads the project, told us: **"They share stories that make you cry with them ... but the good thing is, the Word of God is there. God can do anything."**

It is a privilege to be writing this as the new CEO of Bible Society Australia. I love that our mission is simple and central to the Christian life: **to Open The Bible with all people, everywhere**, so lives can be transformed. We do this together — with churches, chaplains, ministry partners and supporters like you.

Jesus told us that, "... whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24 NIV). I praise God for that truth. And I'm praying that this Easter, **nothing will stand between people and the transforming power of God's Word.**

Thank you for standing with us. And please keep praying. We rely on God for everything.



Chris Melville
CEO, Bible Society Australia

LIVES TRANSFORMED THROUGH GOD'S HEALING WORD: Bible-based Trauma Healing in Slovenia

STORY

ONE



“The *Healing Word* truly heals,” Ana* says of the Bible Society of Slovenia’s trauma healing program. The *Healing Word* ministry began in 2019, guided by the Trauma Healing Institute model developed by the American Bible Society. It brings together the wisdom of Scripture and proven psychological insights in an ecumenical effort led by a growing network of trained facilitators, made up primarily of laypeople, but also doctors, psychologists and counsellors. It isn’t therapy, but a safe, Scripture-centred community where people can grieve, lament honestly, pray together and bring their whole selves before God.

Ana and other participants were invited to choose a picture that reminded them of their father, which opened a place of deep pain for Ana. She had never known a father’s love. As she looked over the images, one stood apart — a picture of Jesus holding someone in a tender embrace. Ana chose that image. “I now keep that picture on my bedside table so that every day I can look at my Heavenly Father and feel his incredible closeness, love, and connection. Jesus truly heals — here and now — every day!”

Marko, who coordinates the Bible Society of Slovenia’s *Healing Word* project, understands the burdens faced by many. He has grappled

with the reality of inner wounds, human distress, and suffering since late adolescence, and has learned that when people suffer, their world shrinks, and they question God: ‘Where are you? How can you love us if we suffer?’ The healing groups do not rush to answer; they make room for lament. “We allow space and time for these questions, because they are heavy.”

Marko observes that “when things are going well, a person maybe becomes an idol in their own world, putting themselves in God’s place, no longer feeling the need for him. But when life narrows because of illness or the loss of a loved one, everything shifts into proper perspective. In distress, a crack appears in life, and God can enter there ... when we give up on ourselves, God steps toward us and offers his hand. It seems we must first give up on ourselves in order to truly accept God’s help.”

Diana*, a doctor and Tina*, a psychologist, both trauma healing facilitators in a town in eastern Slovenia, say the program is the approach they longed for: “a holistic approach to the human person and trauma, addressing the physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions. In the light of God’s Word and his presence, it gently opens wounds and allows God to bring healing.” ▶



Why Trauma Healing is Needed in Slovenia

Across Slovenia, many carry deep, often hidden wounds: anxiety, depression, violence, abuse and the legacies of past conflicts.

More than 70% identify as Christian, but only 15–20% regularly attend church — a sign of secularisation that leaves many without spiritual support. With one of Europe's highest suicide rates, Slovenia urgently needs safe, Scripture-centred spaces to process pain and encounter Jesus' healing presence.

Through Bible Society Slovenia's partnerships with churches, Caritas and local facilitators, the *Healing Word* project is offering hope

where it's needed most. When people open the Bible in the company of others who are suffering too, healing begins in ways that feel nothing short of miraculous.

Lives Transformed by Connecting with God's Word

"I came because I wanted to connect more deeply with God's Word," shares Neja*. "What drew me was precisely the word healing. I am a woman ... shaped ... into a wounded, bitter, abandoned, unwanted, sometimes hopeless — yet deeply sensitive — being. A being that longs for God and his healing touch, his strength."



“God’s Word is alive and has the power to heal various traumas and wounds that are passed down from generation to generation.”

Neja found a warm, sincere small group that helped her open her heart and let God bring hidden darkness to the surface. She shares, “I allowed God, through prayer, reflection, and conversation, to shine his light into those dark places of my heart.”

Neja is grateful for the program. “It’s worth becoming aware of the wounds of our hearts and giving them a place in our lives. It’s worth praying for forgiveness. It’s worth grieving over the events that have marked us.” Neja drew closer to God, listened to his comfort, and invited him to take charge of her life. “The deeper I go, the more alive I become,” she shares. “My life gains colour and fullness.”

Mateja* was deeply moved as she realised that “God’s Word is alive and has the power to heal various traumas and wounds that are passed down from generation to generation.” What especially touched her was the experience of bringing her pain before the cross of Jesus and hoping in God’s mercy. She describes the beauty of letting go of burdens, being transformed, and choosing forgiveness — discovering that she truly has a choice, and can move forward in life. “I am thankful for everything,” she said. “Everything I received was presented so beautifully.”

Anže* was also inspired by the meetings. He shares, “In the space, the silence, the ▶

“For a long time, I searched for meaning. Now I have a goal, and I know that I am walking with the Lord on the path that leads me back home.”

listening, the words, and the relationships, one could feel God’s presence, love, and the power of his living stories.” Anže moved through his fears, traumas, resentments, illusions, and distorted identities, and was guided by God’s message about inner transformation, eternal faithfulness, and freedom. He shares, “For a long time, I searched for meaning. Now I have a goal, and I know that I am walking with the Lord on the path that leads me back home. I am grateful to the facilitators and to everyone with whom we discovered together the joy of new life.”

The Growing Reach of God’s Healing Word

Today, the *Healing Word* ministry is growing steadily across Slovenia, with around 40 trained facilitators now leading more than twenty groups each year — in homes, parishes, online gatherings and weekend retreats. New Teen Trauma Healing groups are beginning too, reaching young people still carrying the weight of recent years. To sustain this ministry, the team is developing a Trauma Healing Bible, new facilitator training books, and an audio series that will bring Scripture-based comfort into hospitals, retirement homes and communities across the country.

By the end of 2026, almost 24,000 people will have been reached through *Healing Word* since it began. Your support helps place Scripture into the hands of wounded people like Ana, Neja, Anže and so many others and creates safe spaces where they can be heard, prayed for, and gently restored by God’s love.

God’s Word is not just read — it is lived in community. And where God’s Word is welcomed, transformation follows. To support this project and other trauma healing work, visit biblesociety.org.au/sow.

*Names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Transforming Lives Through God's Word

This Easter, you can help share God's Word with those searching for hope, guidance, and healing.



Every \$60

helps provide Scripture resources for people in crisis through chaplains in Australian hospitals and prisons.

Every \$120

can help equip a trauma healing group for women in Vanuatu with Bislama Bibles and Scripture-based healing resources.



Every \$250

can help provide tens of Bibles for young people in Kenya or prisoners in South Africa.

FINDING GOD'S PURPOSE, FACILITATING GOD'S HEALING

God's Calling to Open The Bible With Those Who Hurt

STORY

TWO



Renata at a trauma healing workshop for facilitators.

Renata is a mother of two adult sons and a committed Christian leader serving with the Bible Society of the South Pacific in Vanuatu. Renata raised her two boys and supported her husband as he studied in Australia and worked in Fiji for nine years. Then they returned to Vanuatu, and after some time, her husband died and she buried him on his home island of Malekula. Then she entered the traditional 100 days of cultural mourning. Renata spent the 100 days seeking God's purpose and direction, praying for something else to do with her life.

"I was praying to God and asking him to give me something exciting to do with my life," she remembers. "Something closer to my heart. Something ... that will give me fulfilment and satisfaction."

Near the end of those 100 days, Renata saw an advertisement for a Project Manager for the Bible Society's Domestic Abuse Trauma Healing project. At first, she felt it was too big a responsibility, but with encouragement from Ledua, Bible Society's Operations Manager, she applied. She was interviewed and offered the role the same day, and within the week she had flown to Port Vila to take on the project.

Domestic abuse is widespread in Vanuatu, often hidden behind closed doors and sometimes normalised as private family business. Homes are breaking down. Much of the abuse, whether

physical, verbal, emotional, financial or sexual, happens behind closed doors. In many cases, victims don't even recognise their experience as abuse.

Renata quickly saw how urgently communities need safe places to talk, heal and turn again to God's Word. Renata says, "I could see clearly that it's something that's affecting our future generation now. If we don't address these issues early, it will affect the next generation."

Bible Society's project seeks to address the need for grounding communities in the Bible, for family restoration and open conversations. "We want to strengthen the home," explains Renata. "If we can have Bible reading and prayer in the home, I'm sure it will help. God will help those people who seek after him."

How the Trauma Healing Project Works

Through Scripture-based workshops across all six provinces, Renata sits with participants as they explore what abuse is, share their experiences and discover the healing power of God's love. She guides sessions gently, moving slowly through each lesson, giving people space to breathe, to think, to find themselves in the stories of Scripture. She also mentors apprentice facilitators, helping them gain real experience so they will be ready as demand grows. ▶



“They share stories that make you cry with them ... but the good thing is, the Word of God is there. God can do anything.”

Healing Homes, Strengthening Churches, Changing Communities

Renata says the impact of the workshops is deep and often moving, as people find courage to speak for the first time and discover hope through Scripture. “They share stories that make you cry with them ... but the good thing is, the Word of God is there. God can do anything.”

Community leaders and police officers have told her that the program is meeting a need no one else has been able to address. One

officer told her plainly that he is reassured by the work of the Bible Society, because “You go out ... with the Word of God.” He sees that the Trauma Healing Workshops are bringing “healing and hope to the people through the Word of God, because God provides everything.”

Room to Grow as Hearts are Opened

But Renata dreams of more: more facilitators trained and ready, more communities willing to open their doors, more churches choosing to talk openly about issues once hidden, more



Trauma healing facilitators at a training workshop in Vanuatu.

people opening their hearts. Eventually, she hopes there will be safe houses, counselling spaces and practical support systems that do not yet exist in Vanuatu.

For now, she sees God's hand in every workshop, every conversation, every small step towards healing. "We can be agents of change," Renata says. "If our little group does something, then we're actually contributing to a change ... start small and hopefully God will increase this." Renata is deeply grateful for those who support the project and prays that the momentum will

continue. "We're only touching the tip of the iceberg," she says. "Let's build momentum and a lasting impression that we are here to help."

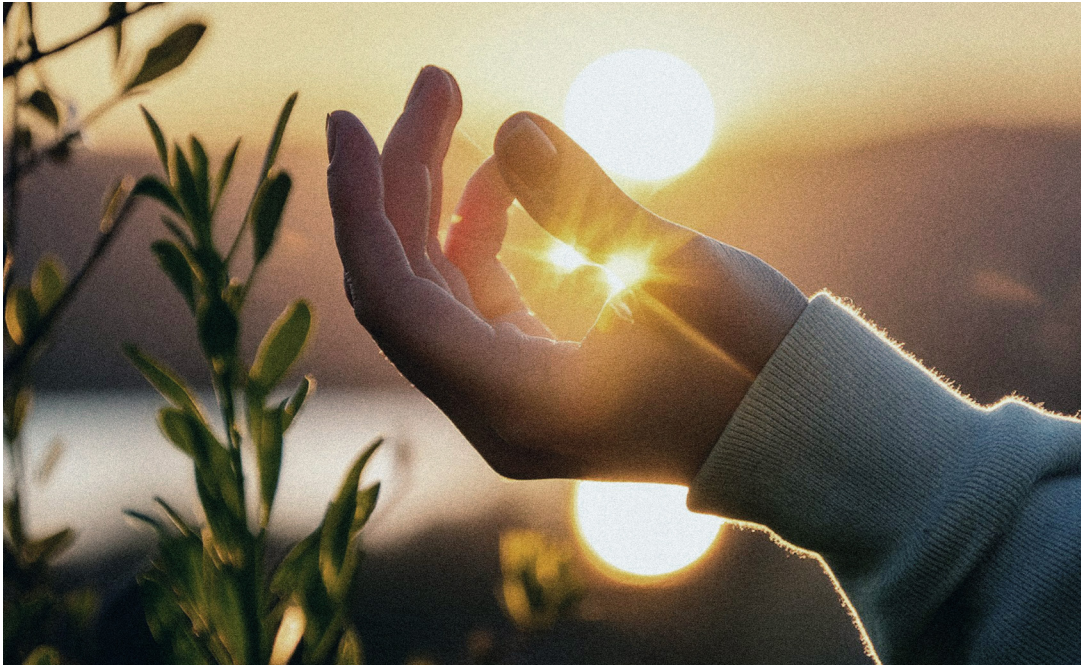
To support Renata in advancing this trauma healing project, visit biblesociety.org.au/sow.

AT LIFE'S CROSSROADS:

Bringing God's Word to Those Who Need It Most

STORY

THREE



Prisons, detention centres, and 'red-light' establishments — behind the doors of these places are people, broken for all kinds of reasons. Yet where lives feel fractured, God is at work, healing the broken-hearted and making all things new. Chaplains, volunteers and gospel workers in parachurch organisations step into these spaces, walking alongside individuals at the crossroads of life and placing God's Word into their hands — to inspire, encourage, heal and restore hope. These are the ministries Bible Society Australia (BSA) seeks to equip through its Scripture Grants program, providing Bibles

and gospel resources so that no one must face their darkest times without the light of God's Word.

A ministry* working with women in Victorian prisons expresses their thanks to BSA donors who make this Scripture Grant possible, "We are so grateful for these resources. Without these Bibles we would not be able to run our Christian Discussion Group efficiently ... for many, it is the first time they have encountered God's Word. We can only give these women this opportunity through your generosity."

The team love it when they see these women — most of whom have been impacted by violence, abuse and trauma — bring their own BSA Bibles along to their group sessions, highlighting passages from Scripture that stand out to them. This ministry is timely, and these Bibles are urgently needed, because it truly does help people at the crossroads of life make the next step in the right direction. “One woman who had been a regular attender of our group and had a good habit of reading her BSA provided Bible daily, was feeling quite anxious about being released from prison,” shares the team. “She wasn’t sure how she would cope and consequently withdrew from the group. But she continued reading her Bible and meeting with her support worker. She was encouraged by what she read and has re-engaged with the group. She is now excited and looking forward to her new life on the outside with God by her side.”

Another organisation* being equipped through BSA’s Scripture Grants is a ministry working with women who are trapped in the sex industry. Their team visit women in brothels and clubs, connecting them with the Word of God, encouraging faith and to look to Jesus for healing, affirmation and new life.

For this organisation and their volunteers, having the chance to mentor these women, and

see how God touches their lives, is the highlight of their ministry. “Some of the women are very interested in receiving a Bible and even ask for one and often will ask for prayer too ... Some of the women have even left the “red light” industry because of the impact of the Word of God and are attending church.”

For others, growing into a life fully devoted to Christ is a journey they walk at their own pace. A ministry worker shares the story of one woman who is very open to the gospel and regularly asks for tracts and books about Jesus. “[She] loves to talk about Jesus. It’s a real miracle. Though she is open, she is not ready to leave the industry just yet. One time we asked her what she would like to do if she left the industry and she said she would like to be a mum and a wife.”

These ministry partners are a gentle presence in people’s lives, walking with them patiently, Scripture in hand. By supporting Bible Society Australia’s Scripture Grants program, you are helping these ministries give Bibles to those who need it most so when they stand at life’s crossroads, God’s Word is there to guide and offer hope for the journey ahead. Visit **biblesociety.org.au/sow** to learn more and support the Scripture Grants program.

*Due to the sensitive nature of their work, we have left these ministries unnamed.

Pray With Us



Dear Lord,

Thank you for the privilege we have at Bible Society Australia to Open The Bible with all people, everywhere. Thank you, Lord, that your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, and it is through your Word that we truly live.

We lift before you all who long to read your Word, those searching for guidance, healing and hope; and those who are yearning to live their lives according to your ways, learning to follow Jesus in purity and holiness. We lift those for whom your Word is a lifeline, those who see your Word as their only means of survival. You see their hunger, Lord, and we trust that you meet them where they are.

We pray for those who are broken, hurting and standing at the crossroads of life. You know each one, you know their stories, their circumstances, the dark and difficult situations they face. You alone hold the perfect plan for their next steps. As they acknowledge you, seek you, and surrender their lives to you, we trust that you will make their paths straight. Thank you for our partnered chaplains, parachurch organisations and ministries who are working with these people. Lord, we ask that you continue to strengthen each one of

them in this mission. May your Spirit always be upon them as they do their outreach; may the lives they reach be forever changed as they read and understand the Bible, which is so precious placed in their hands.

We also pray for those who are suffering and affected by traumatic events that happened in their lives. We thank you that you are near them, our great Comforter and Healer. As our Bible Society partners serve them through Bible-based trauma healing programs, we pray that they will come to know your love deeply. As they read and understand your Word, please guide them and teach them all truth, help renew their minds so they can be transformed and learn your perfect will for their lives.

We are deeply grateful, Lord, to play a small part in equipping our Bible Society partners and those on the frontlines through Scripture grants and Bible distribution. Thank you again for this privilege and honour to carry out this Bible mission to many lives, and as we do, we pray that they will be transformed through Your Word.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

DOWNLOAD OUR MONTHLY PRAYER GUIDE:
biblesociety.org.au/pray

GOD'S WORD TRANSFORMING LIVES

Let nothing stand between
them and the Truth this Easter.

Through Bible Society Australia's partners — chaplains, frontline ministries, and trauma healing programs — God's Word is reaching people at life's most vulnerable moments, offering hope, healing, and guidance.

Your gift this Easter will provide Scripture resources to ministries across Australia and support Bible-based trauma healing in Vanuatu, Slovenia, and more, helping lives be transformed through God's Word.

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



The Patmos World Bible Attitudes Survey



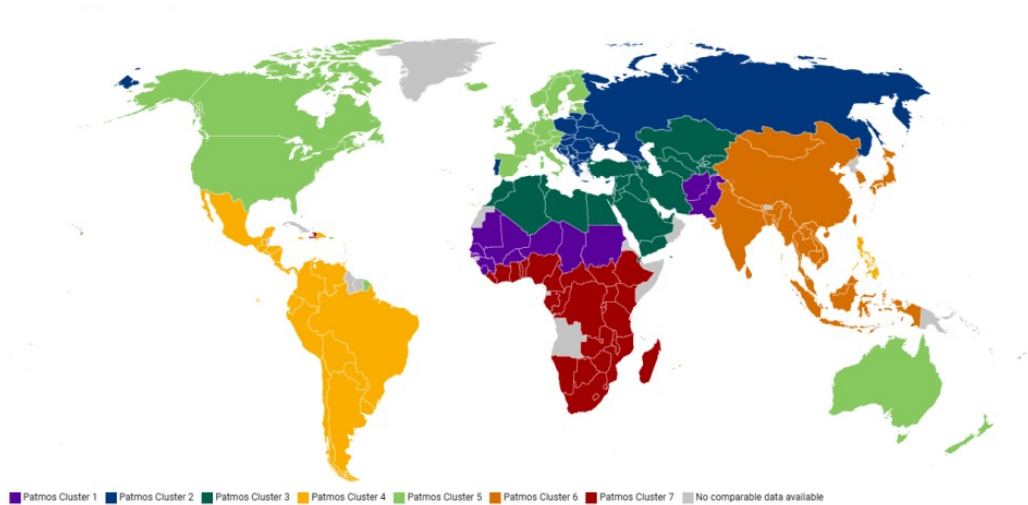
The Patmos World Bible Attitudes Survey represents the most comprehensive global picture of how people view the Bible and faith in our time.

Launched on 30 April 2025 after three years of research, The Patmos Initiative surveyed more than 91,000 people of different religious traditions and those with no religious affiliations, across 85 countries and territories. Led by the British and Foreign Bible Society alongside Gallup and the United Bible Societies (UBS), the research represents the attitudes around the Bible of 3.8 billion people worldwide.

*“The findings of The Patmos Initiative provide the most accurate and comprehensive picture yet of how people truly engage with Scripture. They represent both a source of encouragement and **a call to action for Christians around the world.** Our hope is that The Patmos Initiative will **inspire a renewed and widespread commitment to advancing both Bible availability and meaningful engagement.**”* — Rev. Dirk Gevers, United Bible Societies Secretary General

Country Cluster Map

The British and Foreign Bible Society and UBS, teaming up with Gallup, analysed data from 150 countries and identified seven unique mission contexts or Patmos Clusters.



Some of the survey's most striking findings include:

- Even in secular Western contexts, **62% of respondents believe in God or a higher power;**
- **240 million non-Christians worldwide express interest in learning more about the Bible;**
- **Young non-Christians (18–25) in secular contexts show a higher interest in the Bible** than older demographics do;
- In parts of **Asia, 56% of people have never heard of the Bible;**
- **70% of all respondents** globally, including many non-Christians, **agree it is good for children to know Bible stories;**
- A surprisingly **high number of Christians do not use the Bible regularly or want to find out more about it.**

"What this research provides is not just statistics, but strategic intelligence for anyone involved in communicating faith in the modern world." — Richard Powney, Project Lead of The Patmos Initiative

This research encourages us as we advance our Bible mission around the world, helping more people access the Bible and discover the value of God's Word in their lives. Whether it's through teaching non-literate people to read the Bible in their language, helping them heal from trauma through engagement with God's Word, translating the Bible in their heart language, or placing Bibles in the hands of those who need them, we Open The Bible with all people, by all means possible.

To view more findings from The Patmos Initiative visit patmos.bfbs.org

Learning through Listening Brings Lasting Change

IMPACT

REPORT

Cambodia





“Before joining the classes, I felt embarrassed because I couldn’t read well ... Now I can read Bible stories and help my classmates too.” — Vanna, 13, Takeo Province*

For more than two decades, the Learning Through Listening literacy program has equipped thousands of Cambodians to read Khmer using Scripture-based lessons. In 2025, as the program concluded, its impact was clear: lives transformed, families encouraged, and churches better resourced to Open The Bible with their communities and nurture their faith. Designed for rural and low-income learners, each class met for one hour a day, five days a week. Students listened to audio lessons while working through illustrated Bible-based textbooks. Many, like Vanna, experienced dramatic improvements in confidence, learning and faith.

As literacy rates have risen nationally and churches have grown stronger, Bible Society Cambodia has now transitioned the program

into the hands of local congregations — leaving long-term tools, trained facilitators and renewed hope.

2025 at a glance:

- **5,572 students participated across Levels 1 and 2.**
- **5,573 literacy textbooks were provided to learners.**

Thank you for helping Open The Bible and bring transformation for Cambodian families.

Honouring the Loxton Bible Society Group

SUPPORTER

UPDATE

Australia





In November 2025, the annual Riverland Hymnfest at St Peter's Lutheran Church in Loxton, South Australia, became a joyful expression of faith and generosity. Singing beloved hymns like, "He Is Everything to Me", the event raised more than \$1,800 to support the mission of Bible Society Australia.

For Keith (pictured above, second row, right), who has been part of a longstanding support group for Bible Society Australia for 15 years, the reason is simple. ***"God's Word is the most important thing that we can have,"*** he says. ***"To think the amount of Bibles that the Bible Society print each year and get out all across the world in different languages — that's absolutely fantastic. A wonderful mission."***

Another supporter, Judy (also pictured above, second row, middle) shares this passion, moved by the impact of Scripture in people's heart languages.

Judy shares, ***"we like to support the Bible Society because the Bible is the most important book that we can have and many people don't have the book in their own language and I think it's so important that we can finance and support and pray for people who are translating and who are endeavouring to bring the gospel of Jesus in people's heart language and see the difference in their lives ... So that's a wonderful thing to be able to support."***

If you want to consider fundraising for Bible Society Australia at your church event, please contact us at church@biblesociety.org.au. To read more, visit biblesociety.org.au/blog.

Why Bible Downloads Are Booming



CENTRE FOR PUBLIC CHRISTIANITY



Simon Smart

CPX's Executive Director, Simon Smart asks why the Bible remains the most published book of all time in this article that first appeared in *The Australian Financial Review*.

Some will consider me “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” by claiming a “sign of the times”, that is a “fly in the ointment” of accepted wisdom. But this is my “cross to bear”. It’s “crystal clear”, the “writing is on the wall”, the Bible – the source of every idiom in this paragraph – is making a comeback.

In fact, it never truly went away. The most published book of all time not only shapes so much of the English language, but it also perennially outstrips any competition. According to the United Bible Societies, the annual print run of 80 million Bibles saw a 22% rise in sales in 2024.

Why? The theories include global uncertainty and a post-secular malaise where people are searching for meaning and spiritual nourishment they are not getting elsewhere.

The Bible might be easily accessible in Western countries, like Australia, but in these highly secular places, levels of interest are very low. If it’s even on the shelf of your average home, it’s likely gathering dust. Might that be about to change?

YouVersion, the most popular Bible App in the world celebrated their billionth install in November 2025.

Find out more about CPX at publicchristianity.org

Some installs are repeat customers; others are people scrambling to find 1 Corinthians 13 to read at their sister's wedding. Either way, there is no denying the astonishing take up of this app that was one of the first in the app store in 2008.

Global app installs of YouVersion are up more than 12% year-over-year, with daily usage growing even faster. YouVersion has 3,600 Bible translations in 2,300 languages. The YouVersion family of apps sees one billion app opens every 39 days, across every country around the world.

This activity spans places where Christianity is booming – sub-Saharan Africa, China, parts of Asia, and South America – to those where death notices for the church were issued long ago. In Australia alone, YouVersion has been downloaded more than 7.4 million times.

In determinedly godless France the Catholic Church is scrambling to understand the 45% spike – more than 10,000 people – seeking baptism, alongside a 20% rise in Bible sales since 2024. The most in-depth investigation of this phenomenon has found Bible reading is playing a more foundational role in conversions than social media or the internet. Astonishingly, the 18 – 25-year-olds account for 42% of baptisms.

In England demographers are scratching their heads at “The Quiet Revival” report, which found the long-predicted, “terminal” decline of the church in England and Wales, has stopped – and reversed. Gen Z is leading the turnaround. In 2018, just 4% of 18 – 24 year olds attended church monthly. Today, it's 16% today, with

young men representing the largest growth. In Australia, for the first time ever, young men are more likely than their female peers to attend church.

These shifts coincide with a plethora of high profile conversions to faith in recent years. People like New York Times columnist David Brooks, historian Tom Holland, English writer and environmentalist Paul Kingsnorth, and high-profile couple, historian Niall Ferguson and his wife, the writer Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Even our own Nick Cave, haunted as he has been by the Bible, has arrived at a place of belief via terrible tragedy.

There is a cultural layer to all this. Even the harshest critics of Christianity have long acknowledged that the Bible has been the formative and shaping force of Western civilization – its literature, art, music and highest ideals. Even the atheist Richard Dawkins once conceded, “You can't appreciate English literature unless you are steeped to some extent in the King James Bible... not to know (it) is to be, in some small way, barbarian.”

The famous biologist is unlikely to be cheering these recent figures. But my sense is they will continue to grow because they represent a profound response to questions human beings always end up asking: What am I here for? Does my life have meaning? Where do I find hope?

Of course I would say that. I'm from the Centre for Public Christianity. You might protest that my arguments are “upside down” and “as old as the hills.” Don't know what I'm referring to? It's a good story. You should look it up!

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. (Rev 5:6 NIV)



I was utterly broken

Sue's story | Jesus, our refuge

Compiled by Naomi Reed.

"I've always been a person with loads of confidence and leadership abilities. I thought it was a formula. If you plan hard, you'll get there. It continued well into adulthood... a tendency to be self-absorbed, even superior and judgemental. I actually never understood how it was so hard for other people. Why couldn't they pull up their socks? After school, I did law and then I married, and we had four children. Probably my whole adult life has been spent gaining perspective and being humbled. My first big wow moment was after we married. I didn't really know how to love. Love was in the sentimental basket and my whole thrust was achievement and leadership. It was really hard for a long time. Then our second child became disabled from around 8 months old.

She collapsed and lost function. There wasn't a simple diagnosis, and it took us a long time to understand her unresolved, emerging problems. For the first ten years we thought she'd be fine. We've got this. We were good at parenting. She wasn't fine.

Before that happened, we'd applied to work overseas as missionaries. We had connections in India. I'd grown up in a very active Christian family and always known Jesus. My husband was from a missionary family. I remember at about 4, I invited Jesus into my heart, in a genuine way. I learnt to read the Bible well, and we also prayed for and supported a lot of missionaries.

When our daughter was five, though, we were visited by a medical doctor from India. At first, there was lots of excitement about the places in India where we could serve together. Then he saw our daughter. He watched her and he said, "You can't come."

He said we would need too many resources to manage her, and they weren't available in India. Looking back now, I'm so grateful we didn't go, not for my own sake, but for the sake of the people around me. I was still thinking I had everything to offer. They were in deficit, and I was in credit.

Things got harder and harder in the second decade of our daughter's life. She became very violent. Our methods of dealing with it were crude. We would go into lockdown, keeping the other children safe. There was lots of screaming. It was extremely traumatic. Then we'd emerge and keep going with the rest of life, work and church. We weren't faking it. We just had to carry on.

But it was terrifying. I got to a point where I thought we couldn't go on. She was in hospital for months that year, because of her complex behaviours... but hospital made things worse. We limped along. But my perspective was changing. My previous equation (that excellence and effort equals results) was breaking down. I wasn't normally sentimental, but I cried for three days. I was utterly broken. Then, in April 2021, our youngest son died. He was 18, a rock climber, in the second year of teacher training. He was the sort of person who walks into a room and lights it up. He loved Jesus. He was reckless, into everything. He

was larger than life. That day, he'd arranged for some friends to film him on a climb he'd been practising. He wasn't roped and he fell a long way. He died around noon, but we didn't know anything until the police came to our door at about half past four.

It was unbelievably awful. We have all grieved, our own grief, our joint grief. It's been wretched. I really grappled with what we are promised in the Bible. I looked death in the eye and saw how rotten it was. I guess, what I've really learnt (and I'm still learning), is to read the Bible and to wrestle with its griminess and paradox. I'm realising, in a new and profound way how much Jesus *loves me*. In Revelation 5:6, the picture of Jesus is of 'a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain.' Jesus is triumphant, and yet, he's a Lamb that's been broken and scarred. His scars are a deep sign of his love for us.

Now, I want to have a deep, growing love for Jesus, and I want that love to be what drives me, towards Jesus, towards others. In the last few months, I think I've had a new sense of how much of a *refuge* Jesus is. It's come to the core of who I am and used to be – the me that was trying to fix things. Instead, Jesus says, "*I, the broken One, I am your refuge.*" Even today, I have a deep sense of grace and humbling on this pathway. I feel grateful to be on it."

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

Daily Bible

Hope, Surprise & Holy Living: 1 John 3

We are Opening The Bible with Rev Dr Adam Dodds, a Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Alphacrucis University College, and a Teaching and Discipleship Pastor at Nexus Church, Brisbane. Adam has a PhD and two Master's degrees in Christian theology, a Master's degree in Islamic Studies, and has been a Pastor for over a decade. This series of devotionals is based out of 1 John 3.

Day 1

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! — 1 John 3:1a (NKJV)

Commentator David Allen explains: "Had you lived in the first century in a Greek seaport town, you might one day be about your business, and suddenly ... word would spread through the town that a ship was coming. People would ... look out on the horizon at the approaching ship. By the sail configuration they could tell whether the ship was from their own country or a foreign nation. You would hear people asking in Greek, "Potapēn?" which literally means, 'Of what country?'" What new people are coming to visit? What language and goods are we going to encounter? What new things are we going to learn? This is the word translated "what manner of" in 1 John 3:1. It bristles with surprise, astonishment, urgency, and excitement. What kind of love is this that the Father has given us?

Thank you, Father, that your love is literally out of this world. Please help me not to reduce and tame your love to a level that is familiar. Enable me to grasp how wide, long, high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.

Day 2

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. — 1 John 3:2-3 (NIV)

Do you love surprises when it is from someone who you trust? There was this time I told my son that I had a surprise for him, but I wouldn't tell him what it was. He kept asking and asking about it. I wouldn't tell him. I like to surprise my kids with good things. I don't keep things from them but for them. As a loving Father, God has a surprise for us — see verse 2. We will see Jesus and become like him. When Christ appears, there will be no more sickness or suffering; no more addiction, deception, and exploitation. We will be like him — sanctified, pure, holy, loving. And there's more.

Father, I thank you that you always give good gifts to your children. Thank you also that you have a wonderful surprise in store for us, your children, when Jesus returns. Help me to meditate on Christ's return, and thank you this releases in me power to change.

Day 3

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray... Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

— 1 John 2:26 & 3:7 (NIV)

The apostle John wants to warn us about false teaching, and the harm it can do. Don't be surprised at deception and false teaching. Sometimes the false teaching is very obvious. But other times it is more subtle. The good news is we cannot be led astray against our will. "Little children, let no one deceive you." How might a person let themselves be led astray? What do they give their attention to? What do they spend their time watching and/or listening to? Who do they give their attention to? Who do they spend their time watching and/or listening to? If you give your attention and agreement to something, or someone, you empower that in your life.

Father, help me and my loved ones live with wisdom and discernment. Holy Spirit please help me as I resolve to test everything by the Bible, and by godly counsel, and hold to what is true.

Day 4

But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him ... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them. — 1 John 3:5-6,9a (NIV)

Here the Apostle John is speaking about prevailing or habitual sin, or sin as routine, rather than occasionally lapsing into sin. What is your attitude toward habitual sin? Do you have sin in your life as a settled pattern of behaviour, not just a one-off momentary lapse? Like having a snake in your house, you've got to deal with it.

Positively, I've found that as I keep following Jesus, he changes me. He has changed my thought patterns, my desires, and my priorities. For Christians, ongoing change toward Christlikeness is the new normal — in our being, thinking, and doing.

Holy Spirit I thank and praise you that you are transforming me to become more and more like Jesus. Where I have been tolerant of sin in my life, I am sorry and repent. By your enabling grace I renounce sinful practices and consecrate myself wholly to you Lord and for your service.

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