

# SOWER

SUMMER 2019-20

*Healing in the  
Middle East*



**BIBLE  
SOCIETY**



# Sheep farmer takes reins in rural town



**Tim Lubke with his wife Bec and Simeon, 5, Louisa, 3, and Jude, one**

**H**enty is a small rural town in southern NSW, surrounded by sheep and grain farms.

This is where sixth-generation farmer Tim Lubke has been persuaded to take over as secretary-treasurer of Henty Bible Society from David Muller, 89, who had run the society for an impressive 51 years.

Tim has lived all his 40 years in Henty, growing up in a farming family with a strong German-Lutheran background and now taking over the family farm, where he raises sheep for meat as well as crops such as wheat and canola.

Tim considers himself a lifelong Christian, having been strongly influenced by his faithful

grandparents and parents, but says he made a commitment when he was 21 – as a result of reading the gospels.

“I read the full Gospel of Matthew and then when I was into John, I just felt compelled to make a commitment to follow Christ wholeheartedly instead of just motoring along,” he says.

“It pretty much governs my direction in life in general, in decisions that I make, in the small decisions and large decisions. Having a right standing with God has been very important in my life and continuing to get encouragement from God’s word has continually fed my direction in life.”

Tim believes it is equally important for his three children to know God’s word so they can be equipped for the challenges of a changing world, and is sending them to a local Lutheran school.

The family worships at a Living Word church in the next town of Culcairn, along with a lot of young families including Tim’s mates from his football playing days, one of whom has become the pastor.

The biggest event on the Henty Bible Society calendar is its annual Bike for Bibles, which happened this year on August 25, and attracted 80 riders – an impressive number for a town of 1100 – with all funds raised going to the Bibles for China appeal.



One of those riders was Tim's eldest son Simeon, 5, who was inspired to fundraise for the cause by being presented at church with a Bible for Sunday school.

"It was that same week he received his Bible that he started raising money for Bibles in China. So I thought it's already benefiting him, he's already wanting to raise money for other people who don't have a Bible. I reckon his first week he raised over \$30, so he's pretty rapt.

"It's brought him out of his comfort zone at a very young age and some of the church members could see that. There were a couple of families that had gone to the ride for the very first time this year as well and they can see the benefits and the impact it's having on their children too."

Tim says it's a joy to see all the churches in the community come together for the event. It acts as a community outreach too, with riders encouraged to bring their friends along and provide a way for people to "receive God's word or express an interest in coming to know Christ."

Seeing the support shown for Bike for Bibles this year, Tim now plans to support some of the surrounding towns to get another Bike for Bibles event happening in the near future.

## Dear friends,

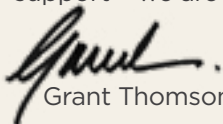
As I write this editorial, it's been 24 days since I commenced as Group CEO of Bible Society Australia, and I can honestly say that every day I go to work with a burning passion to see Bible Society's impact and influence grow. I'm humbled that God would grant me the opportunity to serve in this way.

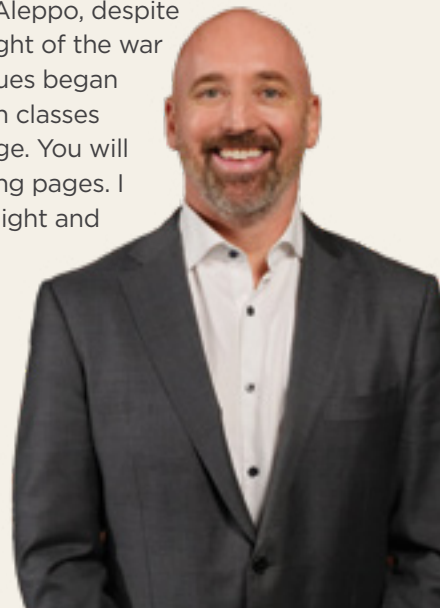
In October, I represented Bible Society and its faithful supporters at church conferences in NSW and Queensland, where the work of Bible Society was presented to more than 2500 church leaders and pastors who love the Bible mission work we do. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Towards the back of this edition you will read the story of our COO, Melissa Lipsett, who came to faith through a faithful Navy chaplain. She had the opportunity in October to launch the latest Navy Bible, which was the culmination of a collaborative endeavour between Bible Society and Navy chaplains at the highest level. You might also have read about the new releases of Bibles to both the Army and Air Force earlier in the year. This is the fruit of your giving and literally was not possible without you. Lives are changed daily as people encounter Jesus through God's word and the prayerful persistence of a faithful chaplain.

In September, I called on Australian churches to pray for peace in Syria, a country suffering renewed fighting following Turkey's intervention. Bible Society Syria has never closed its doors in Aleppo, despite the relentless bombing of its city at the height of the war a few years ago. In 2015, our Syrian colleagues began a Bible-based Trauma Healing Program with classes being provided in churches. The need is huge. You will read some personal accounts in the following pages. I urge you to dig deep in response to their plight and support our appeal for the training of more Trauma Healing facilitators to enable the growth of these classes.

Thank you again for your faithful support – we are very grateful.

  
Grant Thomson





# Pray for healing from war trauma





## nce again **Christians in Syria are facing desperate circumstances.**

Thousands of people have fled their homes after renewed fighting in the country's north and many civilians have been injured or even lost their lives.

For us in Australia, it's all too easy to turn away from the shocking reality of this war that has been terrifying and displacing people in the Middle East for the past eight years. Televised images of frightened families fleeing from fighting and grieving for lost relatives are confronting. Many viewers change the channel with just a twinge of guilt – after all, what can one person do?

Secretary-general George and his team at the Bible Society in Syria have said that at times it has felt impossible for them to pray, but this is when they have experienced the sustaining power of other people's prayers.

There is hardly a person in Syria who has not been traumatised by the constant war. Nearly all have lost at least one friend or family member. **Many have been numbed by grief and pain.**

**It was this that led Bible Society to develop a plan with Syrian churches to help locals overcome their trauma.** The aim is to equip churches to establish

trauma healing centres to look after organisations and people dealing with the experience of trauma.

But George realised that for the seminars to be effective, they had to work with the health workers who had experienced as much trauma as those they were trying to help. So he set up a trauma healing seminar in Beirut, Lebanon, aimed at equipping medical professionals for the challenging tasks they face. Participants were encouraged to speak of the trauma they had endured while treating victims of the war in Syria.

Ayla (not her real name), a psychologist from Aleppo, told the group of doctors, psychiatrists

and psychologists about how a bombing of the University of Aleppo had affected her.

"The smell is still in my nose," she said. "I cannot forget this smell of explosives, blood and concrete dust. I saw dead in the streets. There was blood everywhere. My own body was full of glass pieces from the windows that had exploded. I was in shock."

**Ayla told the group that the war had hit her as hard as those who came to her for help.**

"I have experienced many disasters. I have lost close relatives. We have lived with the sound of rockets and we've been in danger of losing our lives."

Another issue Ayla has had to confront is the stigma that is often







Image: © PA Images

associated with mental illness. She spoke of a little boy who jumped from a three-storey window after losing his father in the war. Although he survived, his mother never returned to collect him from hospital as his depression brought shame on the family.

“I just cannot forget his empty eyes,” Ayla said.

Leading the seminar, Ismael Smeir, an expert on treating survivors with trauma, said churches can take a leading role in breaking down this stigma.

“Churches have traditionally been suspicious of psychology.

They may have been afraid that this

would challenge the faith,” he said.

“It’s great that George and the Bible Society, in collaboration with Syrian churches, are now focusing on trauma treatment.”

Today there are many Bible-based trauma healing classes up and running but more are needed as instability in the region continues.

When bombs started dropping on a village near Damascus, Amira (pictured next page) and her family were forced to flee the home they had lived in all their lives. The bombs burnt down the house her father had built.

**Amira’s family escaped to a**

**neighbouring village but watched helplessly as their father, once so strong and decisive, slipped into a deep depression.**

“Things didn’t really change radically until my mum started going to Trauma Healing meetings,” Amira explained.

“She told us that she herself needed healing, and that she didn’t have the strength to go on without ‘a heavenly touch.’

“After each meeting she’d come home and talk about it with my dad. Papa might never have had that ‘meeting with Jesus’ like Saint Paul had 2000 years ago in our own home town, but he had



always had that beautiful simple faith guiding him in his life. The words of my mum spoke to his heart and one day I saw him cry like a baby.

"I believe my Dad's life was rescued and totally changed on that day. Yes, my mum cried with him. Maybe because they shared so much sadness, or maybe she was crying tears for joy seeing that her husband was breaking out of his prison.

"I'm thankful for the training, but it hurts inside me that the effects of our war and continuing instability have left people traumatised. But somehow I can see that God has been guiding me along a path, which at times has been very, very difficult to walk. I know that I wouldn't have been able to do it without him."

**In Iraq, Bible Society is supporting Christians under pressure in a way that provides for their physical and spiritual needs.** Since 2006 the Christian community in Iraq has been under tremendous pressure and is suffering hardships on a daily basis. Thousands of Christians have had to leave their homes due to sectarian violence, fleeing to other areas of Iraq. There are now well over one million internally displaced people. For this reason,



Bible Society has focused on supporting Christian families and other minority groups, many of whom are refugees and the most vulnerable in Iraqi society.

**By distributing Scriptures and relief packages that provide for physical needs, including food, medicines and hygiene supplies, Bible Society hopes to encourage a dwindling Christian population to persevere in their faith.**

In Lebanon, where many Christian Syrian families have fled, Bible Society Australia is supporting Bible-based literacy classes for refugee children who have missed out on a basic education.

Like many refugee children, Darine and her younger sister Asraa' had not learned to read and write before they fled Syria to live in a refugee camp in the east of Lebanon. They are now enrolled in a school for refugees set up by a church in Zahle, which has adopted the **Bible Society Arabic literacy program for children who are behind in their education compared to their age.**

The sisters live in one room with their brother, little sister, and parents. Asraa' loves to go to school. Her favourite story from the *365 Bible Stories* book is "They arrived to the shore safely." It's the story from Acts 27 about the shipwreck that happened as the Apostle Paul and other prisoners were being taken to Rome.

**Will you help us rebuild lives in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon through the power of God's word?**



## PLEASE GIVE NOW

Use the donation form on the back page, call **1300 BIBLES** (1300 242 537) or visit **[biblesociety.org.au/sowurgent](http://biblesociety.org.au/sowurgent)**

**\$39** teaches a young refugee in Lebanon to read

**\$52** provides a Scripture and aid package in Iraq

**\$85** helps restore someone affected by war in Syria, through Bible-based trauma healing





# Devotion

**D**ear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We give great honour to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness

and mercy. (James 5:7-8, 10-11)

"Hurry up and Wait" is often seen as typifying the tempo in the Defence Force. But waiting is a normal part of everyday life – perhaps in a queue or traffic, for an appointment or an opportunity, for change in someone or in our circumstances. Waiting isn't necessarily fun, but it doesn't have to be a waste of time. Not only can we "redeem" that time by using it to good effect but, more importantly, good things can be happening within us while we wait without us realising it.

Our character is developing – especially in qualities such as

patience and self-control. Our hopes, goals and desires are being refined as we persist and persevere in things we truly value. And our appreciation is growing and deepening. If things come too easily, we usually don't appreciate them as we should. So don't underestimate the importance of waiting. And remember, patience is not just the ability to wait but the ability to keep a great attitude while you wait.

***Where are you struggling with lack of patience in your life at the moment?***

*Devotion first printed in the Army Devotional, a series of studies written specifically for the Australian Army and published by Bible Society*



# China trek fills hearts with emotion

By Alec Wallis



**T**he amazing country of China has shaped the lives of most who have travelled to it. I lived in Xi'an, Shaanxi province for a year and came back forever changed. Therefore, I was not surprised that the recent Bible Society and Inspired Adventures tour to Beijing and Nanjing had a profound effect on those who took part.

Christians from different denominations and various parts of Australia signed up to fundraise, walk the Great Wall and visit the work of the Bible Society in Nanjing.

Nanjing hosted us for three days as we visited Amity Printing Press, the largest Bible printer in

the world, and had the privilege of distributing Bibles in a local registered church.

Brian, one of our trekkers, spoke for the group when he said a feeling of great joy came upon us as we had the opportunity to hand out Bibles to those for whom we had been fundraising!

"The first man I went to, a tall man sitting up the back put his hands out very humbly, and with a great smile he accepted the Bible. I could really relate to him," Brian told me later.

It was without doubt the highlight of the trip. Our little group had been actively fundraising to pay for Bibles to

give to churches in China, and then we did just that. Each person stretched out both hands and took this precious book from us, smiling broadly, sometimes warmly clasping our hand. Some clutched the Bible to their hearts and others stroked the cover.

The China Trek team raised more than \$28,000 for Chinese Bibles and it was great for us at Amity to see the physical results in how much paper that bought for Bibles. The recent Winter Appeal for Bibles in China raised more than \$1 million across Australia. The need continues to be great, as one quarter of the world's unreached peoples live in China.



# When Shabetree learned to love her enemy



**W**ife and mother Bakul Halder of Narikelbari in Bangladesh, pictured above, was sceptical when a literacy facilitator from her village came to her home and invited her to join her literacy class.

**Bible-based literacy classes are run by 50 rural churches across Bangladesh, meeting for an hour a day, five days a week. Participants learn to read the Bengali Common Language Bible, along with newspapers and other materials.**

With about a quarter of the country's 165 million people illiterate, according to the UN, Bible Society in Bangladesh has an annual target of reaching more than 1000 participants, of whom about half are in a second stage of literacy learning.

Bakul initially refused to go, saying she was too busy at home to spare the time. But when the facilitator came back and tried to convince Bakul of the benefits of being able to read the word of God independently and count money to assist in day-to-day tasks, she agreed to give it a try.

"On the first day I got something new which I never had in my life," Bakul says.

"The class was so interesting. We learned through songs and drama, and we practised reading. We also talked, listened, shared personal feelings and prayed together in the class. It was quite amazing for me!

**"The stories I learned are not only stories, but I found the deeper meaning of the stories and related them to my personal life.**

I also learned writing," she reports with obvious joy.

"Now I'm feeling much more confident to take some decisions on my own! Nowadays, I talk to my Lord God quietly in my mind. I also learned to live in peace and harmony with my family, friends and neighbours.

"Finally, I decided to lead and encourage my younger son so that he may be able to tell the Bible stories to others. Please pray for him and for me so that my dream comes true."

Farmer's wife Shabetree Halder also discovered unexpected benefits after attending a literacy class in Narikelbari.

"I learned how to love my enemies, which I never heard before," she relates.

"After joining the literacy class,



I realised that the creator God loves me and he also gave the command to love one another. So, we need to love our neighbours.”

Thanks to her newly acquired ability to count money, Shabetree is delighted that she is able to relieve her son in his shop in the village and give him a well-earned break.

**As well as developing their literacy and numeracy skills, graduates of the literacy classes keenly value the opportunity to pray with other members of the class.**

Shobita Madhu, a member of the Catholic church at Bethkachia, Kotalipara, Gopalganj, was facing a lot of problems in her family when she joined a literacy class last year.

“My husband Melvin is a daily worker. He works for others and earns a little amount of money for the family. One day, while he climbed up a tree to chop the branches, he fell and injured his cheek, left jaw and upper teeth.

“I shared this matter with all the participants of the literacy class. The group spent time praying for my husband. Slowly he recovered and got the strength to work at full speed. I realised the abounding love and pity is endless for my family,” she says.

“The literacy class gave me hope in my life ... I thank God for speaking to me through this literacy class.”

For Liza Shaha, a member of Chapterpar Baptist Church, it was a dramatic change to be able to read the Bible from the pulpit in front of the congregation.

“Literacy class educated me to know the Bible stories. As I was unable to read, I never read the Bible. I was almost in the dark,” she says.

“The literacy class is a place where I find peace. I can share my joy and sorrows and the

participants all pray together for one another.”

Liza was sad because after seven years of marriage, she had no children.

“So, all the participants stood around me and prayed for me with tears. The pastor said after the prayer that God is able to do any miracle in my life. So, I needed to wait in faith. Within a couple of months I got pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. So, now I believe God can do anything to anybody. **I am grateful to my church pastor, the facilitator and the Bangladesh Bible Society for these opportunities which turned my life towards light from darkness.”**



**Women share their joys and sorrows at a literacy class**

**GIVE NOW**

Please call **1300 BIBLES** (1300 242 537), use the donation form on the back page or visit **biblesociety.org.au/sowlove**



# Thank you

Please enjoy these stories of how your generous

## Nicaragua

**E**ight-year-old Martha Pastran and her mother, Maritza, live in Puerto Cabeza on the northeast coast of Nicaragua.

Earlier this year, they made the long journey to La Mascota Hospital in Managua, where Martha was diagnosed with a rare kidney cancer, Wilms Tumour. While Martha had surgery and follow-up treatment

in the hospital, her mother was desperate and turned to Bible Society volunteers, asking them to pray for her daughter. Australian donors like you have supported this work through giving to the Hope and Smiles for Children with Cancer project.

After several visits by volunteers, Maritza felt the call to give her heart to Jesus. Afterwards, she felt at peace and able to leave her worries with God.

Maritza says: "My life has changed with the Bible, because the Bible is an instrument of God in my life; it helps me to have peace. I thank the Bible Society for praying for us and for supporting us since that gives us strength."



## South Africa

**D**emand for children's literacy books in South Africa is growing dramatically, as the material opens up new avenues for teachers and learners. Thanks to your generosity, there has been a huge growth in the number of literacy books distributed this year. The latest distribution figures for the literacy materials show a jump from 38,897 in 2018 to 78,988 in 2019 for Book 1, and a doubling from 37,392 to 77,783 for Book 2 in the same period. We believe this trend will continue.





donations have helped bring people closer to Jesus through the word of God.

# China

Before Li Yanjing knew Jesus, he had only one objective in life – the pursuit of wealth. But after he received his first Bible from his father-in-law – who had prayed for his conversion for years – he began to see the emptiness in his past pursuits. Gradually, as the word of God took root in his life, he was transformed into a more patient person, learning to put a check on his hot temper and readily making peace with his “enemies.”

“The Bible has become my precious companion and I treasure it dearly,” says Li, who has now been in active Christian service at a church in Handan city in the province of Hebei for the past ten years.

Li, 66, works as a taxi driver and often puts copies of the Bible in his cab. When passengers show interest in reading the Bible, Li gives them a free copy on the condition that they promise to drop off the copy at any nearby church if they change their mind about reading it. Li was greatly encouraged when a passenger



became a Christian after reading the Bible he gave her in his taxi. We at Bible Society Australia are greatly encouraged by your support of our Bibles for China projects, for God’s word truly convicts and transforms

## Bibles in schools grant

Gail Morgan (above right) is the wife of a drought-stricken farmer in the Mount Seaview/ Yarras area which is near Long Flat, a rural village about 50km west of Port Macquarie on the NSW mid-north coast. But her life was brightened by receiving a Bibles in Schools grant to help her in her work as a volunteer teacher of SRE (Special Religious Education) at the local primary school. “I cannot begin to express the excitement and happiness I felt when I arrived at school last week and all the Bibles I had requested from you were sitting there in boxes,” she wrote.

After using the Bibles in Grades 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, Gail says



the children “are getting pretty proficient at looking up the verse or chapter I ask them to, and that really thrills my heart as that is a life-long ability – something they will *not* forget. Each child has a bookmark with their name on it and a sticky note with their name on it on the front cover of the Bible, which they will be able to use for the time they are at the Long Flat School. It will then pass on to a new student.

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart for these Bibles and for the work you do in getting God’s word out into our world,” says Gail.

Thanks to your support, Bible Society was able to distribute 9172 Bibles in Australian schools in the last financial year.





**BIBLE  
SOCIETY**

# CHAMPIONING THE BIBLE 2018-2019

BSA'S YEAR  
IN REVIEW:  
**translating,  
distributing,  
engaging and  
advocating  
for the word  
of God.**

**With your help,  
here's what  
we've achieved!**

## TRANSLATION

**Australia**

Kunwinku Shorter Bible



Pitjantjatjara Audio NT



**International**

**INDOCHINA (VIETNAM)**

Bible for 2 minority  
ethnic groups



2 other groups  
**significant progress**

**SOUTH PACIFIC**

Maumi NT completed  
after 11 years



## DISTRIBUTION

**IRAQ**

**2,800**   
**families**

received Scripture  
and a care package

**CHINA**

Paper provided for  
**1.4 million**   
**Bibles**

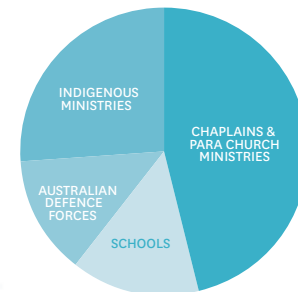
**NICARAGUA**

in the children's cancer hospital

**38,000 people**   
received a free Bible  
or Scripture portion

**Australia**

**90,000**  
**scripture grants**



Koorong Bookstores:

 **4.5 million units**  
including 420,000 Bibles  
and Scripture portions





Bible Society's vision is to see all people engaged with the Bible in a language they can understand, in a format they can use, and at a price they can afford.



## ENGAGEMENT

Australia

EVENTS

**3,200 people reached**

at Youth Masterclasses and other events

PUBLISHING

**35+ books published**

for readers in Australia and overseas

**10,000+ special edition Bibles**

published in partnership with schools and churches

International

SOUTH AFRICA

**105,000 students in 235 schools**

learnt to read using Bible resources

PAKISTAN

**5,200 women** were presented with a free Bible after graduating from Bible literacy classes

LEBANON

**1,000 refugee children**

gifted a Scripture and audio CD following literacy class graduation

## ADVOCACY

Eternity

**600,000 reached**

per month in print and digital

Videos

**Over 330,000 mins watched**

The Centre for Public Christianity

**55 articles**

& appearances in mainstream media

**100,000 downloads**

of Life+Faith podcasts

**360,000 people watched**

For the Love of God documentary on ABC TV

## FINANCIALS

**\$12.1m**

total donations & bequests

**4%↑**

over the last 3 years

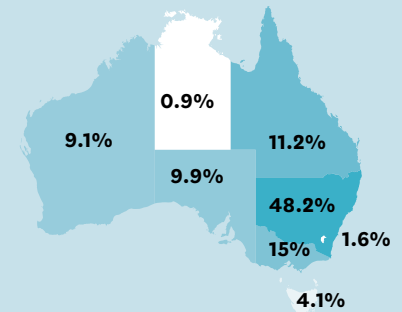


OF EACH DOLLAR raised goes toward our mission

**\$9.2m**

mission expenditure

## DONATIONS BY STATE



## MISSION EXPENDITURE %

**35.6** International

**4.6** Scripture Grants

**5.9** Remote & Indigenous

**23.4** Campaigns & Advocacy

**1.4** Youth & Schools

**18.1** Publishing & Eternity

**11.0** Church & Community Relations






# SUPPORTER SURVEY 2018-2019

**Thanks to those who participated in our recent supporter survey!** The results were encouraging and insightful. In short, a big thumbs-up for our focus on translating and distributing the Bible and helping people to engage with confidence. And another thumbs-up for how we serve you. As you requested, we will better consider your generational needs when communicating too.

## FOCUS

**Top four programs supporters believe are important for Bible Society:**

-  International literacy programs using the Bible
-  Global Bible distribution programs
-  Global Bible translation
-  Youth and school Bible programs in Australia



**2 in 3 supporters (64%) place equal priority on overseas work and work within Australia**

**Supporters value a local and global focus**

The top two areas you think Bible Society should currently focus on for Bible translation and distribution programs are:



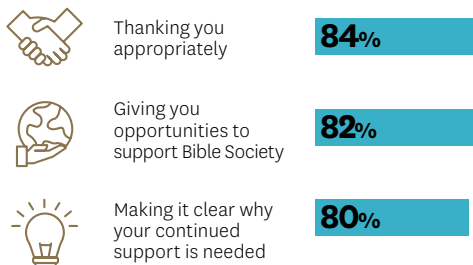
Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander  
communities



China

## SATISFACTION

**Supporters feel extremely/very satisfied with Bible Society:**



**Supporter satisfaction**

**86%** 

**86% of you are extremely/very satisfied with your experience, supporting Bible Society**

**Reasons to support Bible Society**

Supporters strongly/somewhat agree:





# Anna McGahan: I follow my body's journey



**A**nna McGahan is an Australian actress, best known for her work in *Underbelly*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *100 Bloody Acres*. Read about her journey to faith in her new book, *Metanoia*.

*Why is the book entitled Metanoia?*

“Metanoia” is Greek for a transformational change of heart or a repentance. I thought it was an incredibly powerful, dynamic word to describe what I experienced when I had what was essentially a conversion experience and was reconciled to my body at the same time I was reconciled to God.

*Tell us about the journey you document regarding your body?*

I follow my body's journey from the idea of [being] a marketplace

– that is bought and sold as merchandise – to transforming into a sanctuary or temple. From having no worth, to being of extraordinary, priceless value.

*What did you need to be healed from?*

I had an eating disorder for ten years that was healed. I was able to see clearly what drug use did to my body and what an act of worship it could be to share a meal with somebody else.

*When you met Jesus, he was not at all like you expected.*

I expected to meet a Jesus that was on the side of Christians and of the people that I, at that time, didn't identify with. I was so rejected and broken and this person [of Jesus] just disarmed me, because it was so personal. As soon as I started to read it, I

was like, “Well, this is the story I know I believe.” This person sort of came out of the page and was on my side and was my friend. I felt this deep alliance from him and acceptance. I felt like I had an ally in Jesus when I didn't have anybody on my side.

*What do you want people to take away from the book?*

My giving of it is not to state some sort of absolute exclusive truth but to share something I hope can resonate, particularly with people that have questions or similar experiences.



***Metanoia***  
**by Anna McGahan.**  
**\$24.99 RRP.**  
**Published by Acorn Press.**  
**Available at Koorong and**  
**all leading booksellers.**



# When Bill met Melissa

**A**s a 21-year-old midshipman in the Royal Australian Navy, Melissa Lipsett looked good on the outside, but inside she felt broken. The tall, slim Navy communications officer who had run away to the Navy at age 17 didn't have a very high opinion of herself and she carried a lot of shame and guilt about her life.

"I came from a difficult family environment where there were significant challenges, and quite honestly, some of the choices I'd made since I was 13 years old were very poor," says Melissa, who today is Bible Society Australia's Chief Operating Officer.

**Having little knowledge of the Scriptures, Melissa was amazed when a Navy chaplain, Bill Rosier, sat her down and opened up the Bible with her.** As he shared God's word over several months, Melissa gradually saw that she was not the person she thought she was but that she was the person God said she was.

"I was the Creator God's child and he had a plan and purpose for my life. Knowing that changed my life.

"When I truly understood the

grace and mercy of Christ, the shame and guilt was completely lifted off. Not needing to carry that incredible burden completely transformed who I was and the accusing voice in the middle of the night was gone," she says.

After 15 years of Naval and Naval Reserve service, Melissa went on to have a fulfilling career in Christian ministry – 20 years in the Uniting Church, in which she was ordained, and for the past three years as COO of Bible Society.

In this role she launched a new Bible Society New Testament for the Navy on HMAS Canberra III, in Sydney in October, in a moment that took her back to her beginnings.

"It is an incredible joy for me to see my life come full circle," she said then.

"Those of us who are of faith believe that the Bible is the book for life and for living. It changes the way we live, serve and lead. All of us will be better for what we find in its pages."

Melissa recently took a trip to visit Bill to thank him for leading her to Christ so many years ago. She recalled how during

a Christian leadership camp he decided to sing *Amazing Grace* until Melissa came forward and gave her life to Christ.

"He looked straight at me and I think we sang it three or four times. Then I remember praying the sinner's prayer with Bill – he led me through that – but really it was the conviction that I wasn't who I thought I was, but I was who God said I was that reshaped everything for me."

Reminiscing about his time as Chief Protestant Chaplain in the Navy in the 1980s, Bill remembered that when at sea he never went to the movies that were screened nightly in the wardroom because he would hold a fellowship group every night.

"I did it every night because the senior sailors and officers were on watch, so I had to do it every night just to see them growing. This was my ministry and I really loved it. It was really very special," he said.

"I remember coming down from Hong Kong to Singapore and we had been on HMAS Stuart frigate where we had a mini-revival – we had lots of sailors committing their lives to Christ. We had a young lieutenant who was very





**Right: Melissa with Bill at his home**

**Inset: At the launch of the Navy NT, with BSA CEO, Chief of Navy, Melissa and Head of Chaplaincy**



difficult and very stropky – he also ended up making a commitment of his life and he confessed to me later that he wanted to kill me. But I was under God’s protection, and it didn’t ever worry me.”

**Because she became a Christian as a result of a Navy chaplain who had a Bible available, Melissa is passionate about Bible Society continuing to provide Bibles to the Defence Forces.**

Navy chaplain Monsignor Peter O’Keefe says it’s amazing how many people carry the “camo” Bible with them, particularly on deployment.

“This New Testament Bible that’s been created for them – they identify clearly with it. It’s theirs and it’s much more

personal. Even if they don’t read it that much in everyday life, they carry it and feel it protects them. It’s important to them. When they’re on deployment, they’re away at sea for a long time. They can sail at reasonably short notice if there’s a conflict. They are separated from family and loved ones. They have each other but

just need support.

“The provision you make of offering the word of God to them is very much appreciated. **These camo editions – we leave them in chapels, and they just go. It’s amazing just how many people ask for them and read them in their cabins when they are alone.**”

Will you support the provision of Bibles for Australia’s Defence Forces?



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# Prayer points

## December – March

### December 15-21

**Australia:** Please pray for our new CEO, Grant Thomson, as he settles into the role. Pray that he would lead and grow Bible work in our country and beyond.

**Haiti:** There is a desperate need for prayer for an end to escalating violence, rioting and crime. Pray that every Haitian will have access to basic necessities.

### December 22-28

**Australia:** Please pray for Bible Society's outreach campaign for Christmas this year, as we give away copies of *The Who, What, Why and How of Christmas*. Pray that many will be reached with the good news of Jesus.

**Chile:** Please pray for a peaceful and just solution as the country suffers with vandalism amid angry protests against living costs and inequality.

### December 29-January 4

**Australia:** Thank God for the printing of the new revised edition Pitjantjatjara Shorter Bible "Tjukurpa Palya" which includes Daniel and 1 Samuel for the first time.

**Algeria:** Please pray for reopening of churches that have been closed by the authorities and for the release of a container of 5000 Bibles.

### January 5-11

**Australia:** As a new year begins, pray for chaplains and para-church organisations who work with students. Pray their students will keep seeking the God of the Bible

**Cambodia:** Please pray for safety and protection for the distribution team who travel extensively. Pray that God's word will bring salvation to those experiencing poverty, bringing transformation to their lives.

### January 12-18

**Jordan:** Pray for wisdom and protection for Bible Society staff who are working in public book fairs. Pray that refugees in Jordan will know God's loving presence.

**Australia:** Please pray as we prepare to print the revised edition Gumatj New Testament, in response to demand. Gumatj is spoken in Arnhem Land.

### January 19-25

**Australia:** Praise God for the opportunity to supply Indigenous language Bibles through our grants program. Praise God for a mother in Queensland who was able to connect her eight long-term foster children to their faith in a culturally appropriate way.

**Arab-Israeli Bible Society:** Please pray that Bible Society will be a voice of hope and peace during times of conflict, that more people will find comfort and refuge in the Lord and his word.

### January 26-February 1

**Cameroon:** Please continue to pray for Project Esther, which supports teenage mothers and girls who have been victims of sexual exploitation. Pray that these women may be healed from trauma.

**South Pacific:** Please pray for the Bible Society's efforts to encourage the spiritual life of people in the South Pacific by providing Scripture for eight island nations. Pray also for harmony among the churches.

### February 2-8

**Australia:** Pray that patients and families who have fleeting encounters with hospital chaplains will remember the conversations and be drawn to Scripture material while in hospital and when they go home.

**Mozambique:** Please pray for partners in Beira, who were running a literacy project until the cyclone devastated the city in March. Thank God for emergency funding from Australian donors to rebuild



the lost churches and replace all the literacy materials, books and Bibles for every student.

## February 9-15

**Australia:** Praise God for the work of chaplains in correctional centres. One chaplain says, “The men have a real hunger for the Scriptures. We now about 10 per cent of our whole prison population doing Bible study.”

**Philippines:** Please pray for Bible Society staff as they help Filipino women who have suffered trauma through violence by leading them in healing sessions and introducing them to the Scriptures.

## February 16-22

**Australia:** Please uphold those working with children through Special Religious Education in schools. Pray that as children’s hearts will hear the message of love and new life found through Jesus in the Bible.

**Slovenia:** Please pray for a Bible Society healing project that is helping women who have faced various traumas, such as violence and abuse, to experience the freedom of the love and truth of God.

## February 23-29

**Suriname:** Please pray for a Bible Society project that is seeking to reach children with the message of God’s love through events at schools and orphanages.

**Bangladesh:** Pray for women who have completed the two-year literacy course that they may help other believers who still cannot read or write.

## March 1-7

**Australia:** Pray that the Centre for Public Christianity will inspire Christians to show that they have beautiful and credible answers to life’s biggest questions.

**China:** Please pray for newly graduated seminary students and newly appointed preachers as they adjust and develop skills in their roles.

## March 8-14

**Iranian Bible Society:** Please pray that the Iranian Bible Society in Diaspora will meet the Scripture needs of the various dispersed Iranian communities. Praise God for the significant growth of Persian Christians around the world.

**Southern African Bible Societies (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia):** Please pray that as these Bible Societies work together there will be many opportunities to distribute Scripture in their countries.

## March 15-21

**Vietnam:** Give thanks for the recent joyful celebration of one million Bibles published and distributed in Vietnam since 1994, when the Bible Society reopened after being suspended for two decades.

**Malawi:** Give thanks for the launch of literacy classes with local churches to ensure the new translation of the Yao Bible can be well utilised.

## March 22-28

**Nepal:** Please pray for the successful translation, production and distribution of the Nepali Bible and related materials for Nepali speakers.

**Australia – Publishing:** Please pray for Amanda McKenna as she looks after custom Bibles and seeks to encourage schools, churches and other organisations to get their communities to read it.

## March 29-April 5

**Australia:** Pray that the recent launch of an easy to use AUSLAN Bible website will encourage Deaf Christians in their faith and reach other members of their community.

**World:** Give thanks that 305 million Bibles were distributed worldwide in the past decade by the United Bible Societies.



# African children compete to learn Bible verses

**L**ife in Westbury, a suburb of Johannesburg, can be tough, with prominent gangs controlling everyday life. A recent newspaper report said Westbury residents bury a victim of gang wars every weekend.

But in one of the primary schools in Westbury, children are learning up to 35 Bibles verses in a year, spurred on by the prospect of winning a certificate and a Bible in an awards ceremony at the end of November.

"We saw Muslim children in their Muslim attire stand and recite 20 to 30 verses," says Pastor Willy Dengler of World Hope Ministries, who has been running the Bible Memory Verse Calendar Program for ten years in ten schools in South Africa.

"We saw the joy on their faces when they received their very own Bible. It opens up an opportunity for us to teach the Bible. We value these opportunities because politically we are not supposed to share the gospel of Jesus in our schools, but at World Hope

Ministries we like to say, 'we fly under the radar.'"

**With 10,000 children's calendars handed out each year, the program provides a precious opportunity to bring God's word not only into schools but also into families as children take their calendars home.**

"The Bible Memory Verse Calendar Program is widely and enthusiastically received in our schools, especially in the schools situated in Soweto," says Pastor Willy.

"Soweto has about ten million people; there's a number of African schools where the children memorise the verses as part of their curriculum. One of the results that we look at is that the calendars are hung in their homes and visible to the parents, even to those who are Muslims or from other religious groups. There's a witness to the word of God right there!"

Thanks to your support, the calendars used are those published by Bible Society

Australia, which have a different theme each year to encourage and motivate learners. This year's theme was My Friend Jesus.

"Most of our kids come from broken homes and do not have friends, let alone true friends that they can talk to and confide in," comments Pastor Willy.

**"Kids can lose focus and the devil can use those opportunities to get a foothold in these precious lives. Through the calendar, they have the opportunity to learn about Jesus and get to know that he wants to become our friend and a true friend that we can trust and confide in 100 per cent."**

Pastor Willy says in some of the schools they have visited this year, Satanism has gained a foothold.

"The school heads are petrified and have pleaded with us to place Bibles in each and every class at their schools," he says.

"By distributing Bible memory verse calendars and Bibles, we are combating Satanism ... The gates of hell shall not prevail against the word of God."





The program's success is demonstrated by the fact that 600 Bibles are given out each year to children who learn 35 Bible verses. Those who learn fewer than 35 verses receive just a certificate.

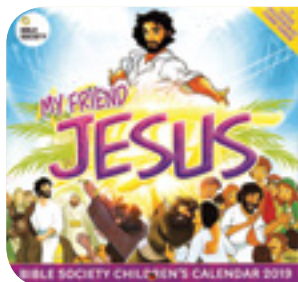
"There's a great interest among the Catholic schools. Many Christian teachers are encouraged as well and have the opportunity to express their faith and confidently teach the learners about the word of God, says Pastor Willy.

However, there is also an opportunity to be a witness to all the teachers and staff of these schools. "After one of our

graduations, a Muslim teacher came up and asked if she could have a Bible. She also asked if she could use a Bible story for her class. We were blown away but praise God for these opportunities we get as a result of the Bible Memory Verse Calendar Program.

"We've never been turned away but always received with open arms. What an opportunity!"

**Will you help increase the impact and scope of this valuable program?** Pastor Willy would love to give away 1000 Bibles and 15,000 calendars each year.



## GIVE NOW

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## The Birth of Jesus

By Laurel Moffatt

*Writer & researcher*



## New Beginnings

By Adam Ch'ng

*Pastor & church planter  
Cross & Crown, Melbourne*



## The Power of Words

By Ryan Kerrison

*Online & Academic  
Officer, C3 College*



## Overcome

By Tess Delbridge

*Writer &  
Moore College graduate*

### Week One

**DEC 16 – DEC 22**

**MON 16** Luke 1:1-4  
**TUE 17** Luke 1: 11-15  
**WED 18** Luke 1: 16-17  
**THUR 19** Luke 1:18-22  
**FRI 20** Luke 1:23-25  
**SAT 21** Luke 1:26-28  
**SUN 22** Luke 1:29-33

### Week Two

**DEC 23 – DEC 29**

**MON 23** Luke 1:34-38  
**TUE 24** Luke 1:39-45  
**WED 25** Luke 1:46-56  
**THUR 26** Matt 1:18-25  
**FRI 27** Luke 2:1-7  
**SAT 28** Luke 2:8-18  
**SUN 29** Luke 2:25-35

Part of the wonderful strangeness of the arrival of God's Messiah on earth is the fact that he was born, just like us. How marvellous that our deliverer was first delivered! In the promise of his coming, and the news of his birth, we will consider the purpose of his coming, different responses to this news, as well as our response to him today.

### Week Three

**DEC 30 – JAN 5**

**MON 30** Gen 1:1  
**TUE 31** Gen 12:2-3  
**WED 1** Exod 6:7  
**THUR 2** Deut 30:19-20  
**FRI 3** 2 Sam 7:12  
**SAT 4** Dan 1:1-2  
**SUN 5** Jer 29:10

### Week Four

**JAN 6 – JAN 12**

**MON 6** Ezra 3:12  
**TUE 7** Mark 1:14-15  
**WED 8** John 4:21  
**THUR 9** Acts 1:8  
**FRI 10** Rom 6:4  
**SAT 11** Eph 2:19-20  
**SUN 12** Rev 21:1-2

We all live with regret and we all long for a second chance. On every page of the Bible, God offers us a fresh start. And he invites us to join him in extending that offer to the world. Why not give others the new beginning Jesus has given you? Start a workplace prayer group, pioneer evangelism to new migrants or even plant a church.

### Week Five

**JAN 13 – JAN 19**

**MON 13** Matt 3:2  
**TUE 14** 2 Cor 3:18  
**WED 15** Rom 12:2  
**THUR 16** Col 1:9-11  
**FRI 17** Eph 2:12-13  
**SAT 18** Rom 8:9  
**SUN 19** Gal 2:20

### Week Six

**JAN 20 – JAN 26**

**MON 20** Eph 4:22-24  
**TUE 21** 2 Pet 1:3-11  
**WED 22** Acts 4:12  
**THUR 23** Ps 51:10  
**FRI 24** Ezek 36:26  
**SAT 25** Titus 3:5  
**SUN 26** Mark 1:14-15

Words can shift from culture to culture over time. The words “repent” and “transform” are two words with an array of meanings. These are key biblical ideas, and so how do we treat them when we encounter them in Scripture? The way we handle these words in our culture has tremendous impact on how we engage with God's word and let it transform our lives.

### Week Seven

**JAN 27 – FEB 2**

**MON 27** Ps 13:1-2  
**TUE 28** Ps 88:3-8  
**WED 29** Ps 22:1-2  
**THUR 30** Ps 6:6-7  
**FRI 31** Ps 3:5-6  
**SAT 1** Ps 31:9-10  
**SUN 2** Ps 10:14

### Week Eight

**FEB 3 – FEB 9**

**MON 3** Ps 25:16-18  
**TUE 4** Ps 34:17-18  
**WED 5** Ps 42:9-11  
**THUR 6** Ps 16:9-10  
**FRI 7** Ps 88:13-14  
**SAT 8** Ps 13:5-6  
**SUN 9** Ps 27:13-14

Sometimes life just seems too much. Pressures push in from every side. And then there's that unexpected news that tips us over into full-blown panic or depression or anguish. Though it's hard to see, our God is with us even then. In the moments when we need to sit in a dark room, curl into a ball and weep, he is there with us, and has some surprisingly comforting things to speak into our hearts.





## Caring for the Last, Least and Lost

By Matt Prater

*Senior pastor & radio host*



## I Believe

By Ben Myers

*Director of Millis Institute*



## Living Above the Mess

By Katie Haldane

*"Trash Your Bible" creator*



## God's Big Story

By Melinda Cousins

*Educator & pastor*

### Week Nine

**FEB 10 – FEB 16**

**MON 10** 1 John 3:17  
**TUE 11** Luke 14:14  
**WED 12** Zech 7:8-10  
**THUR 13** Isa 58:6-8  
**FRI 14** Isa 58:9-11  
**SAT 15** Prov 31:8-9  
**SUN 16** Prov 22:22-23

### Week Ten

**FEB 17 – FEB 23**

**MON 17** Prov 3:27-28  
**TUE 18** Prov 11:25  
**WED 19** Deut 15:4-5  
**THUR 20** Deut 15:7-8  
**FRI 21** Deut 15:10-11  
**SAT 22** Matt 25:35-36  
**SUN 23** Matt 25:37-40

All through God's word we are reminded of God's heart for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the ones who are downtrodden. In this devotional series, Pastor Matt Prater will be sharing some key verses in Scripture about caring for the last, the least and the lost.

### Week Eleven

**FEB 24 – MAR 1**

**MON 24** Ps 34:8  
**TUE 25** Rom 8:15-16  
**WED 26** John 1:1-3  
**THUR 27** Phil 2:9-11  
**FRI 28** Luke 1:46-49  
**SAT 29** Gal 2:19-20  
**SUN 1** 1 Cor 15:55

### Week Twelve

**MAR 2 – MAR 8**

**MON 2** Ps 110:1  
**TUE 3** Matt 13:29-30  
**WED 4** Acts 2:8  
**THUR 5** Gal 3:27-28  
**FRI 6** Rom 3:27  
**SAT 7** 1 Cor 15:51-52  
**SUN 8** 2 Cor 1:20

The Apostles' Creed is the baptismal confession of the ancient church. When we recite the creed, we are joining our voices to a great communal voice that calls out across the centuries from every tribe and tongue. We are joiners, not initiators, of the Christian movement. The creed reminds us that God doesn't just speak to us individually; he speaks to the whole church.

### Week Thirteen

**MAR 9 – MAR 15**

**MON 9** Ps 40:2  
**TUE 10** Eph 3:20  
**WED 11** Isa 60:1-2  
**THUR 12** Jer 33:3  
**FRI 13** Ps 123:1  
**SAT 14** Rev 19:16  
**SUN 15** Ps 8:1-4

### Week Fourteen

**MAR 16 – MAR 22**

**MON 16** Eph 1:18-19  
**TUE 17** Isa 63:4-5  
**WED 18** Psa 1:1-3  
**THUR 19** Rev 4:1  
**FRI 20** Rev 4:2  
**SAT 21** Hab 3:19  
**SUN 22** Isa 40:30-31

At times you can feel like you are only able to get your head above the mess of life every now and then for a quick breath. Come with us as we journey through the Bible to help lift up your eyes to heaven and live above the mess. See afresh the God who is above our thoughts, above our understanding, exalted above every problem we face. And feel the empowerment of heaven as you exalt him daily!

### Week Fifteen

**MAR 23 – MAR 29**

**MON 23** Isa 46:9-10  
**TUE 24** Gen 1:1-3  
**WED 25** Gen 3:6-8  
**THUR 26** Gen 12:1-3  
**FRI 27** Exod 3:7-10  
**SAT 28** Exod 19:3-6  
**SUN 29** Judges 2:10-13

### Week Sixteen

**MAR 30 – APR 5**

**MON 30** Jer 25:4-6  
**TUE 31** Ps 33:20-22  
**WED 1** Mark 1:14-18  
**THUR 2** Luke 24:5-8  
**FRI 3** Acts 2:42-47  
**SAT 4** Rom 12:1-2  
**SUN 5** Rev 21:1-4

The story of God is a good story – one of hope and promise, welcome and restoration. It's also a story of broken humanity, with dark and complicated twists. It's a story we are invited to enter into and live out. It's one we need to keep retelling and reimagining, so that we find our place within it, and that it might be received by new generations.



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# Bible Societies around the world



**Ellomwe in Malawi**

“I thank God that finally my constituents have their own Bible, because they have been reading Bibles in other languages. I am grateful to God that I can witness this in my lifetime,” said Senior Chief Nazombe, as she joyfully held up the Ellomwe Bible at its launch in Malawi on August 10. This is just one of the stories of transformation that Bible translation is bringing to people across the world thanks to the vision of United Bible Societies.



**Surinamese Javanese**

At age 77 Rosemay Pawironadi glowed as she held a Bible in her own language for the first time. “It is a good feeling! I have waited for this day to purchase my own Bible in my own language. I am looking forward to reading this Bible. I have a lot of families and friends who are also Javanese, but they have not yet converted to Christianity. Now, having this Bible available, it will be easier for me and for my family and friends as well to share the gospel.”



**Hadiyya from Ethiopia**

When Pastor Tesfaye Abebe was working on the Hadiyya Bible translation, he went back to his village of Odakicho in southern Ethiopia. When Tesfaye read Psalm 28, his mother, Bincho Bufebo, exclaimed: “Today there has been a wonder here with us. God has spoken to us in our own language!” Aleminesh Tagese, pictured with her daughter Tesfaya, aged 8, said: “When we deeply know a language, we also understand the text deeper.”



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Bible Society Australia is a not-for-profit interdenominational organisation. It's a member of the United Bible Societies, a fellowship of 154 organisations working in more than 200 countries and territories. Our mission is to achieve the widest possible effective and meaningful distribution of the Bible; also to help people interact with it and to have their hearts lightened by the Bible's message of unconditional love in Jesus Christ.



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