

# Sower.

WINTER 2022  
BIBLE SOCIETY AUSTRALIA



**M**y heart is full as I sit writing to you, reflecting on your generosity, love for and commitment to Bible Society.

Our supporters are extraordinary. You know the importance of God's word; the difference it makes to people to hear and read the Scriptures in the language of their birth, and to own their own Bible. And you make it happen. Every day, people's lives are changed as they encounter the risen Lord Jesus through reading or hearing God's word. Praise the Lord!

You might have received an email from me announcing the new Oceania Alliance. You can imagine there has been much prayer and many meetings to bring about this exciting new partnership. In this Winter edition of Sower you will meet Geoffry Miller, General Secretary of Bible Society South Pacific and Joel Peter, General Secretary of Bible Society Papua New Guinea.

It is their passion for collaboration and mutual sharing of resources and knowledge that has led us to this place. We are confident that the Oceania Alliance will strengthen the three Bible Society teams to better fulfil our visions.

We are at the beginning of a big, exciting journey. And we can only go forward with the prayers of the faithful. My colleagues Joel and Geoffry love a big audacious dream.

As you read Sower, you will hear the hearts of these two men. Joel's biblical vision is 'to see a full resurrection, and the infiltration and penetration of the word of God' in his nation. Amen to that. Geoffry loves the thought of doing things together.

I invite you to join us on this exciting new journey, working together in our own region, with places we have all had long and special associations with. Your prayerful support of the work of Bible Society is important to us. May your heart also be full as you read this edition of Sower.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."  
Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV

GOD BLESS,

*Grant Thomson*

CEO, BIBLE SOCIETY AUSTRALIA



**We are at the beginning of a big, exciting journey. And we can only go forward with the prayers of the faithful.**





# Open The Bible with your neighbour

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.  
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV





# We are stronger together.



## OCEANIA ALLIANCE

**T**he South Pacific region spans vast stretches of ocean, beautiful island nations, and a diverse mix of people, cultures and languages. Along with spectacular beaches and active volcanos, the South Pacific is rich with opportunities to share God's love through his word, the Bible.

Bible Societies have been working for years to reach the many people groups across the South Pacific, yet there are still people left unreached, languages with no Scripture, and a yearning for God's word in many hearts.

Geoffrey Miller, General Secretary of Bible Society South Pacific, says, "The current biggest challenge for us is the size of the region we serve, 16 island nations within the South Pacific. Though they are not large in population size, they are so dispersed within the whole ocean body of the Pacific...it is very expensive to travel, and it also takes time to reach them, and to be able spend time in different places and different countries."

Bible Society Australia is excited to join with

Bible Society South Pacific and Bible Society Papua New Guinea, our neighbours in the Pacific, so that together we might Open The Bible with more people than ever before. The new Oceania Alliance will enable greater collaboration and sharing of resources, strengthening Bible Society teams to better fulfil their visions.

Geoffrey says, "We envision a South Pacific that works together, rather than working on our own and doing our own little things in our own backyard. Through this Alliance there are many changes we are implementing... so that it brings about a more collaborative Bible Society and it enables us to work more closely together."

"My vision for Bible Society Papua New Guinea is to see that the nation is filled with the knowledge of the word of God, as the waters cover the sea," says Joel Peter, General Secretary of Bible Society Papua New Guinea. "I want to set a Scriptural, a biblical vision...to see a full resurrection, and the infiltration and penetration of the word of God, the growth and development of the word of God, in the nation of Papua New Guinea. That this

vision would drive me and any staff that will come on, and every brother and sister Bible Society who are supporting us. This will be a driving motivational vision for us going forward from 2022."

Geoffrey adds, "Going forward in the future, serving our people better [will be accomplished by] doing it together. Working together, we will be stronger going forward into the future."

The Oceania Alliance is focused on recognising the people of the South Pacific as neighbours and seeking to love each other as Jesus instructed. The Alliance seeks to build up each Bible Society team, so they can better reach their communities with God's word.

**Jesus said, "Love your neighbour as yourself."**

Mark 12:31

"The fact that we are neighbours is very important," says Joel. "In terms of collaboration

and cooperation it is so important to work together. I want to see us work together in assisting and developing plans, through prayer and through giving support, through funding and through a change of people...to help build capacity. That will be a great encouragement, to see each national Bible Society in the Pacific helping each other in training and capacity building and in logistics."

Each Bible Society brings its unique opportunities, resources and capacity to the Alliance, as Geoffrey reflects, "One of the best ways for us to work together is sharing the resources that we individually have. Each Bible Society has its own strengths. For us I believe one of the biggest contributions into the Alliance is the vast mission field that we have and the people to reach. We also do have the big need within Bible translation itself. There is so much to do but with little people to do it." Geoffrey sees that one of Bible Society Australia's strengths is human resources and 'know-how'. "The partnership will enable us to translate Bibles that are still yet to be translated into the heart languages of our people."

We dream that we'll be able to reach more people with God's word and be able to translate more Bibles than us doing it all alone."

Joel says, "We know that Bible Society Australia will stand with us through the Oceania Alliance we have in place, and we will see that support continue with Bible Society Papua New Guinea to be able to fill this nation with a knowledge of the word of God, looking forward into the future."

## Meet Geoffry

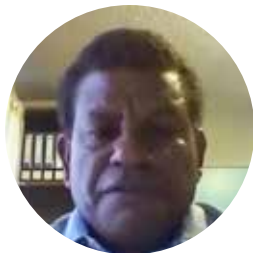


Geoffry is passionate about Bible Society work, especially the mission trips the team are able to take. "I am one who loves going out to the communities and visiting our local communities," he says. Geoffry was not originally looking to work for Bible Society. He studied both theology and urban and regional planning, and he was looking forward to working for the government in Fiji. Yet when he didn't hear back about his position with the government, "That's where my journey with Bible Society started." Geoffry was appointed to his position as General Secretary of Bible Society South Pacific in 2019, stepping into the shoes of a predecessor who had served for 31 years.

"I have always taken every opportunity with mission work," Geoffry says. "That means going out to islands and visiting villages, taking God's word in distribution, and conducting training where we are invited by the church in the communities. My journey, now going on four years, has been exciting and I have enjoyed every

bit of it, learning more and getting to work with people within Bible Society globally."

## Meet Joel



Joel Peter was recently appointed as the General Secretary of Bible Society Papua New Guinea, having previously held the role of Translations Manager. Joel says, "What's so important about Bible Society that drew me to work with them, is that Bible Society is an interconfessional body. It exists to send, to meet the needs of churches and individual people in Papua New Guinea across the breadth and width of this nation."

Bible Society Papua New Guinea has been through great upheaval in recent years, rising again in 2019 with a new General Secretary, ready to begin rebuilding. Sadly, the new General Secretary Verenagi Ravu, passed away from COVID-19 in March 2021. Joel held the fort of Bible Society Papua New Guinea, working closely with the United Bible Societies global mission team to implement the mission, focused on reinstating services to ensure Scriptures are available to people in Papua New Guinea.

Joel understands the importance of Bible translation, as it helps his people understand God's message of salvation: "They can respond with faith because it grabs the heart of the people. The Bible written in our words is the most precious treasure we have."





# From confusion to clarity:

ENABLING THE LOCAL CHURCH

VIETNAM LITERACY PROJECT +  
CAPACITY BUILDING IN SOUTH PACIFIC  
AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**T**his year, Bible Society Vietnam have reached a milestone to be celebrated. Their long-running literacy program is being handed over to the local churches to run into the future. In the seven years since Bible Society Vietnam began the literacy program, they have not only seen an increase in literacy among believers (and a corresponding increase in Bible engagement), they have also seen the church enabled to Open The Bible with their neighbours.

Before the program began, the need for literacy amongst Christians in Vietnam was felt deeply by leaders in the church, like Thanh\*. When Thanh became the pastor of Lung Cu church in 2008, he noticed that when church members were able to read the Vietnamese Bible, their understanding increased. He decided to try to teach them to read Vietnamese. Yet the language is difficult, and many people gave up.

At the same time, Bible Society Vietnam was becoming increasingly aware of the need for literacy among Christians, especially in ethnic minority churches, who did not have the Bible in their heart languages. "They were not only lacking Bibles, but all other Christian materials are in Vietnamese," says Lien from Bible Society Vietnam. "Believers also lacked confidence because they did not know Vietnamese."

So in 2015, Bible Society began their literacy project. Thanh heard about it and attended a training workshop. He began holding the literacy classes at his church, and the people were so excited to learn. "Before, I taught them myself. But now, with this audio classroom method they can learn even more effectively. My hope is that the literacy program will help the church members to read and meditate on the word every day, not only on Sunday."

Over time, churches gradually played a larger role in Bible Society's literacy program, as they promoted and implemented it. Pastors introduced

the program to large numbers of believers inside and outside the churches, even encouraging people to invite friends or non-believers to study together. Churches also sent people to participate in making supplementary reading portions and to editing literacy textbooks with Bible Society Vietnam.

In this way, Bible Society Vietnam began to equip the churches to teach literacy to people in their communities. After seven years - with more than 1,000 classes opened and more than 10,000 students participating - the Bible Society Vietnam found that the program had covered most of the provinces in the North of Vietnam and received great attention from the Evangelical Church Vietnam North as well as the ethnic Christian communities. Lien says, "We believe it is the right time to hand over the program to the community and let the church deploy it on a larger scale."

In 2022, Bible Society Vietnam is transferring the literacy program to the Evangelical Church Vietnam North - Christian Education Committee and to Evangelical Church Vietnam South, Tan Chau church. They are providing training for key people who in turn will train the class instructors and implement the classes where needed.

In the Pacific region, there is an equally urgent need among churches, for literacy, trauma healing, Bible translation and Bible distribution. Bible Society South Pacific and Bible Society Papua New Guinea are primed and ready to enable their local churches; yet the opportunities outweigh their resources.

The Oceania Alliance has been formed between Bible Society Australia, Bible Society South Pacific (BSSP) and Bible Society Papua New Guinea (BSPNG) for just such a time as this. Together, opportunities for Bible work as well as resources, skills and experience will be shared to increase the reach and impact of Bible work throughout the region.



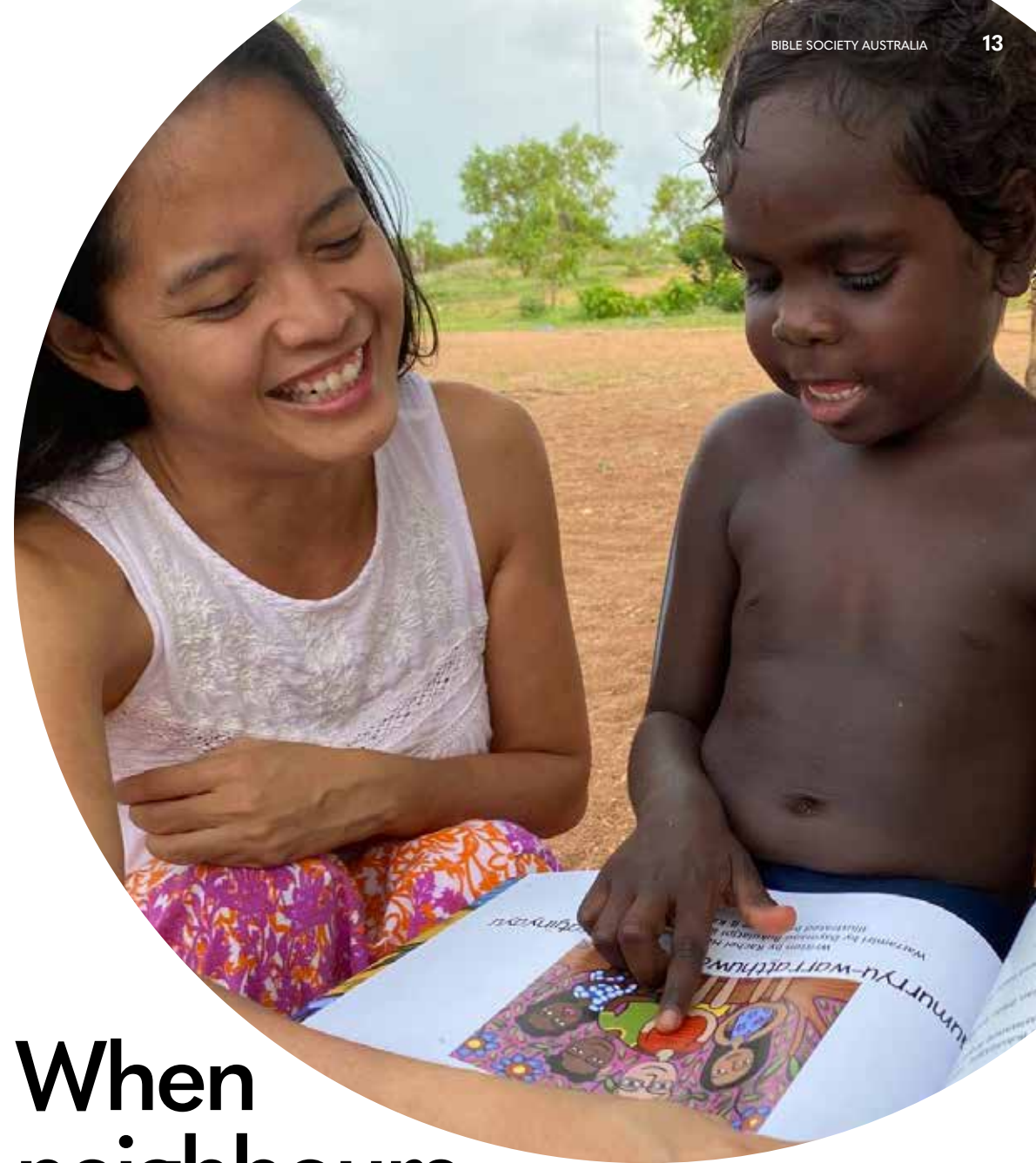
In the South Pacific – which incorporates 16 island nations – Bible Society is already at work enabling the church, though the challenges of distance, time and expense of travel are significant. BSSP is conducting mission trips, during which Bibles are distributed, and churches are enabled with trauma healing training to implement in their communities. Bible Society South Pacific is undertaking capacity building, working with Bible Society Australia to (among other things) increase their IT infrastructure and security, vital for efficient and effective Bible work into the future. BSSP is also restructuring and relocating their Bible translation headquarters. The move to a centralised location in Vanuatu will mean that Bible translation work is more streamlined and connected, and they will be able to accelerate the completion of current projects.

Much of the work of BSPNG over the last few years has been focused on restructuring their organisation, in order to have a stable presence and provide sustainable Bible ministry into the future. To this end, working with Bible Society Australia, they are building their capacity as an

organisation, focusing on building a strong staff team as well as establishing a renewable source of income by renovating their properties. Joel, BSPNG's General Secretary, says that the Oceania Alliance "Will be a great encouragement, to see each national Bible Society in the Pacific helping each other in training and capacity building and in logistics." Joel goes on to say with great excitement, "In the not-too-distant future, we should be able to see the full resurrection of Bible Society Papua New Guinea. We are looking to reactivate the Bible based literacy program, recording of audio Bibles, Scripture engagement, distribution."

In the years ahead, the Oceania Alliance expects to see programs in the South Pacific and Papua New Guinea yield the same encouraging results as the literacy program in Vietnam, as Bible Societies work together to encourage, enable and empower the local church to Open The Bible with their neighbours.

*\*names have been changed to protect privacy*



# When neighbours become family

ADOPTED IN LOVE



Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... John 1:12, NIV

And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Galatians 4:6, NLT

In 2017, schoolteacher Rachel Herweynen and her husband Cameron moved to the remote homeland of Gäwa, on Elcho Island. Upon their arrival, they were adopted into the local Yolŋu family. Halfway through their first year at Gäwa, while reading the Bible Rachel was struck by the parallels between our adoption into God's family through Jesus, and the way Yolŋu people adopt outsiders.

Rachel was working to fulfil a God-given dream of running a school when she applied to run Gäwa Christian School on Elcho Island in the remote east of the Northern Territory, among the Yolŋu people. During their first year at Gäwa, the Yolŋu couple Hannah and Alvin went out of their way to make the "balanda" (white) couple feel welcome, sharing their joys and struggles with each other. Rachel recalls, "Hannah just pulled me aside and said she was adopting me as her sister...and then Alvin pulled Cameron aside and called him 'brother.'"

When the parallel between our adoption into God's family and her adoption into the Yolŋu family struck her, Rachel immediately started

writing a story about the links between God's kinship system and that of the Yolŋu. "I showed it to our elders first and they were very happy with the story. And then our students had a go at translating this as part of our lessons and had a go at illustrating. But it was quite basic and not a proper translation," says Rachel.

Bible Society Australia, along with Uniting Church workers Margert Miller and Yurandyjil Dhurrkay from Elcho Island, were honoured to support the work with a translation workshop, providing translation consultancy through Dr Carl Gross. Yet it was local Warramiri Elder Daymangu Bukulatjpi, known as "Old Man", who pushed the translation of the book forward to completion. Rachel shared, "I think that's been a huge blessing and part of his pride in it is the fact it's the first book in his own language." Rachel says, "It has been utterly wonderful seeing God's grace and sovereignty over this process. It's so powerful to have the leader of this land submit humbly before the Loving Creator. This book allowed him to articulate his faith."







The few translated Bible verses in Warramiri at the end of *Adopted in Love* (John 1:12 and Galatians 4:6) are the first Scripture published in this language, though not the last – the local Bible translation team has now completed the first draft of Mark's Gospel in Warramiri. The book features illustrations by local artist Salome Moes and her daughter Katinka, which were painted by the students at Gäwa. "Sal and Katinka did the faces and then our kids helped paint and then Sal did the final zhush," Rachel explains.

The community reaction was rapturous when Bible Society's Remote and Indigenous Ministry Support team helped publish a bilingual softcover version of the book in early 2021. Rachel approached Bible Society and subsequently a hardcover edition has been published for schools around the country as a way of educating non-Indigenous children about Indigenous language and culture. Bible Society began work in January

on Teacher's Notes for the *Adopted in Love* book and are preparing a package of resources for schools including videos.

"From the beginning, my favourite part of being in Gäwa has always been becoming part of the Yolŋu family," says Rachel. "We are so grateful that it has been captured in this book, alongside the infinite goodness of being part of God's family through Jesus Christ."

"God's word brings life and brings his children together!"

### Will you help share God's word across the Pacific?

Every  
**\$34**

Could provide literacy skills to support someone to read God's word in their heart language.

Every  
**\$88**

Could see neighbours share God's word through print and audio Bibles.

Every  
**\$120**

Contributes towards helping a community receive the complete Bible translation.

### PLEASE GIVE NOW

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





## OPEN THE BIBLE WITH YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Through the Oceania Alliance, a partnership with the Bible Societies of the South Pacific and Papua New Guinea, we're coming alongside our closest global neighbours to share God's word.

Together, we can Open The Bible to even more people throughout our region. But we can't do it without you.

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





# Pray with us

**P**rayer is an important part of supporting our neighbours in gospel work. As we pray this month, we will be upholding Bible work among our neighbours, here in Australia, in the South Pacific, and in South East Asia. Joel from Bible Society Papua New Guinea says, “I’d like to take the opportunity to thank Bible Society Australia... you have been so supportive, so great in prayer and in giving...”. Joel adds, “I want us to see us work together in assisting and developing plans for each Bible Society ...through prayer and through giving support... these are really important areas in which should be able to work together and to support each other and grow as we work together in Oceania and the Pacific.”

DOWNLOAD OUR MONTHLY PRAYER GUIDE:  
[BIBLESOCIETY.ORG.AU/PRAY](http://BIBLESOCIETY.ORG.AU/PRAY)



## The Oceania Alliance

Thank God that Bible Society Australia has embarked on the Oceania Alliance with Bible Society South Pacific and Bible Society Papua New Guinea. Please pray for this partnership, for the mutual encouragement, sharing of resources, and collaboration in Bible work that it brings. Pray that many would come to know God through his word, as Bible Societies work together.

## South Pacific Bible Translation Headquarters

Please pray for the relocation of the Bible Society South Pacific translation team to new headquarters in Vanuatu. Pray that the new building will improve the coordination of Bible translation across the region, and strengthen relationships, alleviating issues with costs, distance and isolation.

## Australian Audio Bibles for Remote and Indigenous Ministry work

Please pray for more opportunities to record Scripture in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Thank God that through this work, many people who cannot read can still embrace the Gospel and know God’s love.

## Australia – Training for Indigenous Bible Translation

Thank God that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters want to be trained to serve as Bible Translators. Pray that God will bless the work of the Nungalinga College in Darwin, for principal Ben Van Gelderan and other staff who work there.

## Rebuilding Bible Society in PNG

Praise God for the way in which Bible Society is rebuilding in Papua New Guinea. Thank God for the appointment of Joel Peter as the new General Secretary this year, and pray for wisdom, energy and continuing enthusiasm for him as he builds the Bible Society team and revitalises Bible work.

## Australia – Bibles in Schools

Thank God for families who opt to participate in Special Religious Education and Christian Religious Instruction and pray that they would receive God’s word eagerly. Pray that children who are introduced to the Bible will continue to turn to God’s word throughout their lives.

## PNG’s Tok Pisin Bible Revision

Thank God that revision work on the Tok Pisin Bible is progressing well. Pray for much-needed equipment like computers, solar power and internet devices. Pray that the revised translation will equip the church in Papua New Guinea with a clear and readable version of God’s word.

## South Pacific Bible Engagement

Thank God that Bible Society South Pacific was able to run the *Jesus. All About Life* campaign, and for the many churches involved. Pray that the campaign materials will continue to inspire conversations about Jesus. Pray that partnerships between Bible Society South Pacific and local churches would be fruitful, as Bible Society seeks to serve the church and provide digital and Scriptural resources.



# Bibles in Schools

"It was just wonderful sharing the Bibles and telling students that this is where our lessons each week come from... This opportunity is terrific and the only time many students would open up and read a Bible."

- SRE teacher Annette



Bible Society Australia is providing a Scripture Grant for Bibles in Schools, equipping and supporting volunteer teachers participating in Special Religious Education (SRE) and Christian Religious Instruction (CRI).

This year, Bible Society is again supplying Class Sets of the CEV *Big Rescue Bible* (for Primary schools) and the CEV *Youth Bible* (for High Schools). This project is also supplying Borrow Bibles (*The Jesus Storybook Bible*) – which are lent out to different students each week to read at home. SRE teacher Emily shares, "It is such a blessing to be able to open God's word with children and to build their confidence so they can do that for themselves."

SRE teacher and coordinator Neil testifies to the impact this project is having, as he relates, "One of the highlights was when the local schools requested Bibles for their library due to popular demand because of SRE. We provided the schools with three *Big Rescue Bibles* and three *Jesus Storybook Bibles*. A few kids have also started going to the local churches because of SRE."

- 2,449 CEV *Big Rescue Bibles*\*
- 639 CEV *Youth Bibles*\*

**A total of 3,088 Bibles to form new Class Sets**

*Bibles supplied for SRE and CRI classes between July 2021 and March 2022*



# Emergency Response in Ukraine

Bible Society Ukraine continues to bring comfort and encouragement to their people as they face war and displacement.

READ MORE OR DONATE AT:  
[biblesociety.org.au/ukraine](https://biblesociety.org.au/ukraine)



War fatalities in Ukraine have reached more than 46,000 and at least 14 million people have been displaced. Bible Society Ukraine is reaching their people in two ways; firstly, by providing Scriptures to bring the comfort and encouragement of God's love amidst a time of war. Secondly, to get resources to those who need them.

Bible Societies around the world are supporting Bible Society Ukraine staff, as they work with all their might, despite the inevitable risk to their lives.

The General Secretary of Bible Society Ukraine, Oleksandr, conveys his deepest gratitude to their supporters. He says, "We see Lord's hand in very tangible ways every day, he gives strength and peace that surprise even ourselves, he gives opportunities to share our faith in ways that were unimaginable before."

- After being restored from damages Bible Society's Kyiv office has returned to more standard operations as the local seminary and will also serve as the hub for humanitarian aid efforts.
- Bible Society Ukraine is providing food and medicine to people in the neighbourhood of Bible House, as they appeal for help.
- The office in Lviv continues to serve as a central hub for the Scripture distribution - receiving shipments from abroad and sending them to other areas of the country and to those partners who work in the Western Ukraine.

CPX

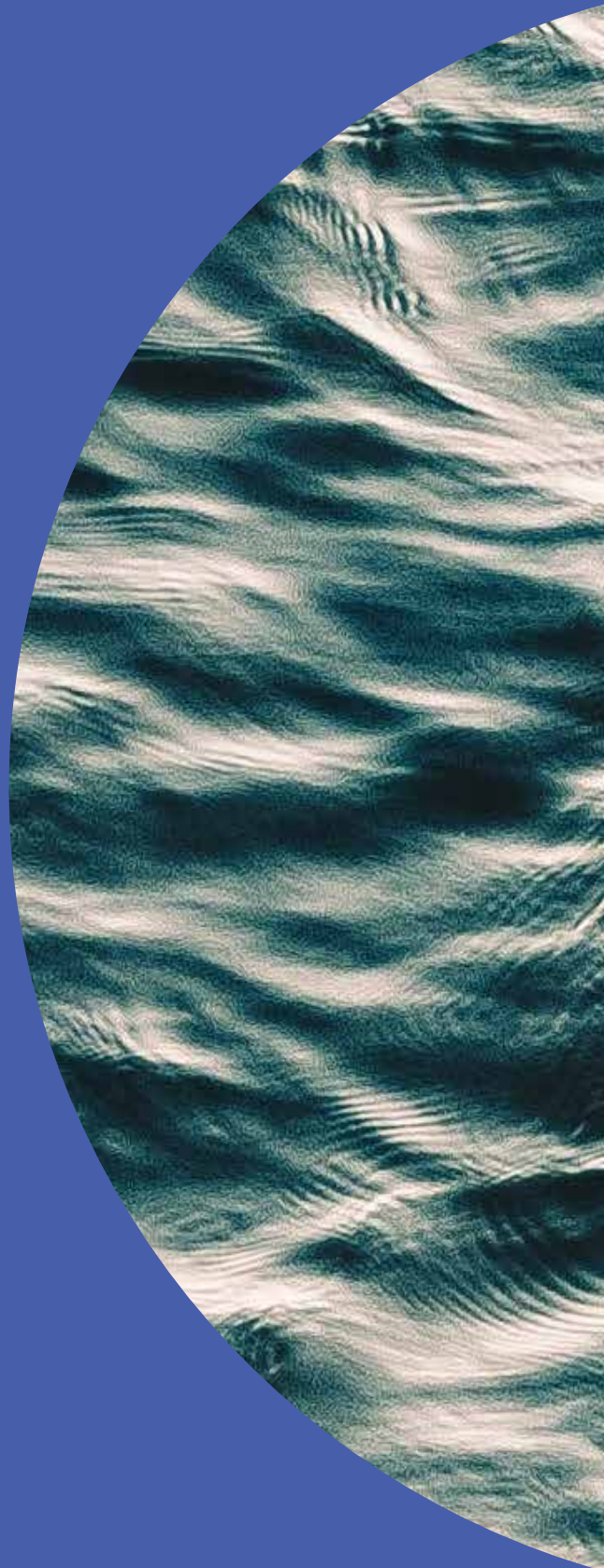
# THINKING OUT LOUD

## ... WITH CPX

Thinking Out Loud is a bite-sized opinion column that the Centre for Public Christianity (CPX) publishes regularly on social media. It offers refreshing Christian “takes” on what’s going on in our culture or in the news, inviting believers and sceptics alike into a conversation about faith and what it has to say to the ups and downs, the ins and outs, of our often turbulent moments.

Follow CPX on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to join the CPX team as they “think out loud” about the issues of the day engagingly, sometimes provocatively, and (above all) concisely!

Scan to read more  
Thinking Out Loud



## DEEP WATERS

Natasha Moore / 4 March 2022

The language of floods is visceral, and frightening – like the real thing. Floodwaters “rage”. An “angry” river rises. Bridges, homes, streets are “swallowed up”.

The term “rain bomb” (however meteorologically inaccurate) has gotten a lot of traction this week, as swathes of Queensland and NSW were deluged and more than a dozen people lost their lives. One of the things we say about floods this bad is that they are of “biblical proportions” – invoking the story of Noah’s Ark and a flood so devastating there was no ground high enough to escape it.

But the language of flooding appears again and again in the Bible.

When the psalmist reaches for a way to describe just how desperate his situation is: “Save me, O

God, for the waters have come up to my neck ... I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me” (Psalm 69).

When Jesus looks for a way to express the utter collapse of a life built on the wrong things: “The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash” (Matthew 7:27).

But psalmist and prophet also use flood language to declare their belief in a God who saves. “The Lord sits enthroned over the flood” (Psalm 29:10). “When you pass through the waters,” says this God to his people in Isaiah 43, “I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you” (v2).

Floods are so overwhelming that we humans use them to describe some of the very worst moments in life; and also our experience of relief from, or consolation in, the worst. In the face of literal floods, consolation is something plenty of Australians could use some of this week.

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



# Faith Stories

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



## WHY DID NOBODY COME AND VISIT HIM AND WEEP?

"I came to Central Asia in the winter of 2003. It was very cold. My plan was to study Russian and teach obstetrics to the post-graduate nurses. Within the first week of my arrival, though, I looked out of my apartment window and I saw three homeless people picking food out of the dustbins, with the dogs. I thought of the verse from Isaiah 58, 'Share your

food with the hungry' (verse 10). And so I did. I went downstairs and I said, 'Would you like something to eat?' The lady said, 'Yes, please!' So I went back upstairs and got the chicken casserole that I'd cooked earlier that day and I served it to them on the dinner plates that I'd brought from England. They ate it, squatting on the ground. Then I said to them, 'If you're here again next week, I'll give you another meal.'"

"That's how it started. I soon found out there were 3,000 homeless people living in my city, with no services, and a life expectancy of only three years after they were on the streets. It was so cold. Most of them lived in manholes. So I kept feeding them, and then I started doing their dressings. I noticed that many of them had wounds on their hands and their feet. Some of them had frostbite. Then, over time, I got the local church involved and we started a homeless centre. We've been running it now for 15 years and we serve food every Monday, Wednesdays and Friday.

"I love the fact that the people come. They can shower and have a haircut. We have a laundry and they get clean clothes. We have music and a devotional time. It's good, but early on, one of my frustrations was with other people's attitudes to the homeless. Other Christians, in this city and even back in the UK, didn't always see the homeless as their brothers and sisters. They either blamed them or they avoided them. They thought they were dangerous, so they kept their distance.

"Then one year, five homeless people died, all of whom were believers. I was so sad. I visited one of the men in the TB hospital. His name was Ural. He loved the Lord. He used to come to the local church, but he couldn't overcome his problem with alcohol and he developed multi-resistant tuberculosis. He died in the TB hospital. I sat with him at the end and as I was

leaving the hospital after his death, I wept. It all seemed too hard. Why didn't anyone else care? Why did nobody else come and visit him and weep? Why didn't they remember that Ural was their brother? I couldn't understand it.

## 'Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

"Then when I got home. I happened to be reading Matthew 25:40 again. I noticed for the first time that it says, 'Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Jesus actually said, 'these brothers of mine'. Jesus thought of Ural as his brother. Nobody else might remember that Ural was their brother, but Jesus did.

"It helped me. When it feels like nobody else is noticing, or caring, I have to remember that Jesus loves them. They're his brothers and sisters. He died for them. He rescues them time and again. Sometimes, I think he takes them home early. Maybe he knows that their lives are not going to get much better here. Maybe it's his mercy. His forgiveness is so great. He reaches down into their hearts – these people who have nothing to live for, and he draws a longing for himself. I've seen him do it again and again. "Some years back, a homeless man wrote to me, in Russian. He said, 'I want you to know that your love and acceptance of me, has shown me that God still loves and accepts me.' That made me cry. That's why I'm here."

READ MORE FAITH STORIES:  
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*Eternity*



# Daily

## Loving God and loving others

*Nic Mackay is the National Director of NAYBA Australia, which helps churches to love their neighbour.*

### Day 1 - Loving God and Loving Others

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39 NIV)*

Love God; love others. This is the core of our Christian faith.

But it can lose significance. Isn't the Great Commandment Christianity 101? Shouldn't we have moved on to more complex topics?

The Great Commandment is simple, but incredibly challenging. Love God with *all* our heart, *all* our soul and *all* our mind. If we get that right, everything else flows from it.

**Heavenly Father, help us never to get too comfortable nor too weary in loving you and others. Thank you that you are merciful to us when we fail. Amen.**

### Day 2 - Loving God by Loving Others

*“...For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” (Matthew 25:35-36 NIV)*

If we truly believe that all people are created in the image of God, then the way we treat others *is* the way we treat God. That's why Jesus says that when we feed, shelter and care for the downtrodden, we (metaphorically) feed, shelter, and care for him. When we turn our backs on those in need, we turn our backs on God.

Loving God and loving our neighbour are two expressions of the same commandment; two sides of the same coin.

**Lord Jesus, you call us into the pain of this world. As we look into the faces of those in need, may we see your face and love them. Amen.**

### Day 3 - Loving Our Neighbours

*"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:18 NIV)*

Loving others seems reasonable when the other is “one of us”, as it was for the people of Israel here.

But Jesus (in Luke 10:25-37), teaches us to expand our definition of neighbour to include even our enemies.

As followers of Christ, we are called to look beyond our family, friends, and members of our local church. We are invited to be part of

transforming not only individual lives but also our cities, our nation, and the world.

**God, please help us to receive this your wider vision for this world and engage with others who may not be ‘our people’. Remind us that we are all your people. Amen.**

### Day 4 - Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City

*Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. (Jeremiah 29:7 NIV)*

Jesus' expansive definition of “neighbour” calls us to serve the wider community. In Jeremiah we find the mandate for serving and impacting entire cities.

Do we really have something to offer our schools, universities, and workplaces? Is it possible to engage with media, government, and other sectors – especially where attitudes toward Christians are so hostile?

If the Israelites were instructed to seek the peace and prosperity of Babylon, where they were in exile, then we certainly have a role to play in our towns and cities. We should also recognise that our welfare is tied to that of the places in which we live; as they prosper, so will we.

**Lord God, give us a heart for our communities, cities, and country. I pray for the peace and prosperity of the place in which I live. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

### Day 5 - Stretch Out Your Tent

*Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. (Isaiah 54:2 NIV)*

What does it look like to love our neighbour and seek to transform our neighbourhoods? It starts by seeing ourselves and the Church as part of the broader city. That was the message Isaiah gave to Israel.

What if we stretch the concept of our Christian 'tent' and see our tent as covering our whole town or city?

If our tent covers the city, its issues become ours – homelessness, mental health, domestic violence, unemployment. We take less pride in our own success and recognise what is not as it should be. We learn to love our neighbour in deed and in truth.

**Father, make us a tent that has room for all to find shelter and find you. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

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