

## Q&A on the Bible Society

**Most of us, if not all of us, have heard of the Bible Society. I'm sure we all know the story of its founding in the Welsh valleys all those years ago, but what do you actually do?**

"For me personally, my role has changed a bit since the last time I came to visit you back in 2017. I've always been a big supporter of 'Open the Book' and would get churches enthusiastic about it and start working with them but would then have to pass it on to somebody else. So now I do training and development for 'Open the Book' as well as work with churches so it all works together, which is really exciting.

As to the Bible Society itself, it is all about translating the Bible, distributing the Bible, helping people to relate to and make sense of the Bible, carrying on the founding things that William Wilberforce started all those years ago."

**How do you work with other organisations that are also involved in translation, like Wycliffe Bible Translators, for example?**

"A lot of people think we're 'competitors' but we really aren't. We work hand-in-hand with the other translators as they might have expertise in one area, and we might have expertise in another. It's all about using people in the countries and on the ground wherever they are. We all have the same ultimate goal and want to see the Bible translated into the local languages so that more people have access to the Bible."

**Is there still a place for the printed word? Isn't the world all digital these days?**

"Oh no, there's definitely still a place for the written word, even with teenagers - we recently produced the youth edition Good News Bible. People still like to hold the Bible in their hands and read through it. Also, it's a wonderful literacy tool throughout the world and people are learning how to read by reading through the Bible. For some families, the Bible is the only book they have in their household. And it is absolutely amazingly precious gift."

**Surely though, the digital world is important to you? There are people who do want to consume it digitally. How do you handle that stuff?**

"Obviously, we can't ignore that and sit back and say the Bible has to be a printed book. We've got to adapt. One of the things that really excited me was that in an area of Africa where everyone had a phone and wanted to read the Bible on their phone, instead of spending our time and money putting in the infrastructure to get those people printed bibles, we built solar power charging stations so that they could charge their phones. And so it's about realizing what the need is and adapting to it. At home we've got Apps that people can have on their phone. We've recently updated our Website so that while you're looking through the Website, you can just click the 'Read Bible' tab and read it straight away. It really is taking the listening approach, finding out what people want and adapting to those needs. We've got to be there digitally. We're currently working on a digital Bible course that people can do. There's a constant adaptation taking place."

**Yes, and I follow the Bible Society on Twitter and their daily pointers - little Scriptures for the day which are actually quite useful to trigger that moment of thought in a busy day - I think it's very beneficial. What do you do for new and for mature Christians over and above just printing the Bible? What you do to help people engage with the Bible rather than just reading it?**

"This is such an important aspect within this country. It is not a problem for us to get a Bible. The problem is getting people to engage with the Bible so that they then take that knowledge and share it with others. Our "The Bible Course" has been extremely popular as it gives people the big picture of the Bible so that they feel they can dive into it further. From that success., we are developing a new, seven part Bible series "Experience a Better Story" for the whole church, children, youth and adults, to journey through the Bible together, as a sermon series and weekly homegroup resource. We also have our Bible Book Club where you can go to our website, select the Bible that you want to read and download the materials that go with it to give you a better understanding the Bible. It is all about increasing confidence in mature Christians as well as someone who's just getting to know the Bible. I often find

that re-reading a book of the Bible at different stage of my life really makes a big difference in to how I'm reading it, interpret it and use it - we can't just say "Oh, I've read the Bible, I'm mature Christian", we have to keep digging that bit deeper and take those next steps to sharing it with others.. So we're constantly developing things to help people to understand the Bible better."

**What is the big challenge for the 21st century for the Bible and for the Christian story? Is the Bible Society trying to look further forward than just what it's doing today?**

"We can never just sit back. Although the Bible is still the world's biggest seller, we've got to get people engaging with it and make it relevant to people's lives. Last year we had planned to have a garden at Chelsea Flower Show in 2020, based around Psalm 23 to get the Bible out there in our everyday culture and hopefully help people to have a different view of it and see the relevance of it. It has had to be postponed to next year, so hopefully that still will be able to take place. We need to bring the Bible into our daily society and be very proactive about that. As Spurgeon quoted "we've got to let the lion loose". We can't just protect the Bible and make excuses for it - the Bible can do its own work but we've got to get it out there. We've got to be proud about sharing the Bible. I think in many ways we've been a bit quiet about standing up for the Bible and we've got to be really proud of it and want to share it with others. And that is why "Open the Book" is so important in sharing the Bible with young people, passing it on to the next generation so that they've heard the Bible stories and they will be able to tell others. We've got to continually think about how we're going to share the Bible."

**The pandemic must have affected your work. What has been the impact on the Bible Society? Is it purely financial or has it affected you in other ways?**

"It really has had an effect. We've been very blessed at the Bible Society here in England and Wales as our individual supporters have been amazing and are continuing to support our work. But I have seen a big difference with our church support as finances are not coming into churches and church support has dipped down. But I've been really encouraged by the response that we have had to some of our Appeals, so we are currently OK financially here. But internationally there are around 88 Bible Societies who are really struggling and some of them may have to close because they simply don't have the infrastructure in place. There are no furlough schemes for their employees, and they do not have reserves to fall back on. We are work as a "united Bible Society" and have raised almost one million pounds to help support the other Bible societies because we don't want them to close. If they do then translation projects end, women's literacy projects end and a whole host of things will have to stop. So while we're looking at what we do here at home, we're also opening up to make sure we support our friends and colleagues internationally. We also have to adapt just as you have adapted to Zoom services. We have to create online resources for churches to use and look at new ways of meeting and engaging with people. It has been a very adaptive process and just as you've adapted as a church, we're constantly having to look at ways to adapt as well."

**So that leads very nicely into what was my final question which is 'how can we as a church and as individuals support you?'**

"The first way is prayer. We need prayer for our colleagues internationally and we need prayer for the work that we're doing at home. So prayerful support is much appreciated. Folks that are able to support us financially can go on our website and use either the "Donate now" or the "Get involved" tab at the top. Currently we have a supporter who is matching funds are given to our work in China 'pound for pound'. People in China are so hungry to have the Bible and we're hoping to print a million bibles this year and our supporter will double our gift to China, which will make a real difference. If you don't use the website, then there's a telephone number you can use to call and donate. But most of all, please do continue to pray for us."

**Thank you very much indeed, Kristin**

## Joshua 1:1-9

Thank you for allowing me to join you today. I appreciate you allowing me to come in to your home to share with you. For those that I haven't met, my name is Kristin and I am the Bible Society Engagement manager for the South and East. I also want to thank you for your continued support of Bible Society. We've been praying for our supporters during this time as you take care of those in your communities and reach out to them in very different ways than before. We are also encouraged by the different ways that people are discovering and engaging with the Bible.

When I sat down to think of the reading and what I would focus on to share with you today my mind was full of many thoughts. I had a message from a friend of mine the evening before and she was going through some struggles and was desperate to hear from God on what her next steps should be. I also had another friend whose mother had died and she was on my mind as it was her mother's funeral. Through these thoughts I was led to Joshua 1:1-9. When I was a teenager Joshua 1:9 was one verse that made a big difference to me and it caused a real change in my thinking. I recall a weekend retreat that caused me to change my outlook on things and this verse was part of the theme. My daughter still wears the t-shirt as I kept it all these years as it meant something special to me.

I have some empathy for Joshua as well. He has been mentored by Moses and now that Moses is dead he must step in to play his part. How many of us have found ourselves in a situation of having to fill some big shoes and not feeling quite adequate to get the job done. I think today it is sometimes referred to as impostor syndrome and I can admit to feeling this at several points in my career. And of course Joshua's first task is not a simple one. You and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River

Have you had times when God has placed you on the edge of a river bank with rushing waters with a challenge you felt too difficult to even imagine a way through? Maybe the last few months have felt like that at times. We have all felt a sense of unexpected of unknown and yes of fear. For me I think I adjusted well to the first part of lockdown but I have found these daily changes lately a bit more unsettling.

But what God says to Joshua is the same message he has to all of us; Be strong and courageous.

These words were given by God Himself to Joshua- He received them from someone who had the authority and who could give him the strength to overcome.

Joshua was instructed to do something bigger than he was but not bigger than his God. How much faith do you have in your God to see you through your struggles? Enough to step out of your situation and take a step toward solution?

God didn't give Joshua instructions on how he was going to cross the raging river, or how not to be afraid but what he does say is to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

Meditate on the word day and night. When faced with a struggle is the Bible our roadmap and what we turn to and keep on our lips?

Andrew Ollerton has said, If Jesus needed the Bible as the son of God then we really need it as the people of God. How very true. When we need hope and encouragement the Bible is where we need to turn. Our colleagues at the BS in Zimbabwe shared with us recently about a project they are doing.

Mainah Moyo, 71, has much to worry about as the sole caregiver to two grandchildren – Penny, 14, who has Downs Syndrome, and her younger sister. Their mother died when Penny was just a baby, and their father, who is ill, lives in the rural areas.

Drought and the dire economic crisis in the country had already made it increasingly difficult for Mainah to provide for her grandchildren but the Covid-19 restrictions have made her situation much worse. She is now no longer permitted to sell things on the street to make a bit of money.

But, throughout her life, Mainah has always found her strength in the Bible. The well-worn cover and pages of her Ndebele Bible show just how much she has turned to it over the years. One of her favourite verses, she says, is Psalm 1:1-3, which vividly describes how following God's Word brings joy and life.

"It gives me strength and courage to take care of my grandchildren," she told staff of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe when they visited her in her small home in Bulawayo – the country's second city.

The Bible Society was visiting Mainah to bring her practical and spiritual help as part of its project to support people – usually grandmothers or mothers – who are caring for disabled children. Families with disabled children struggle financially and are ignored or even rejected by society, even in many churches. The project aims to advocate for them, provide them with Scriptures and set up support groups to offer practical, spiritual and emotional help.

Knowing that the families will need extra support due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Bible Society set up an extra project to provide food and hygiene hampers, face masks and Scriptures to get them through the crisis. Mainah was relieved to get the hamper and delighted to receive a new Ndebele Bible to replace hers, which is falling apart. I have often heard that a person with a Bible falling apart on the outside is a person who isn't falling apart on the inside. Such a blessing for her and her family that she gets her strength from the Bible.

Our colleagues in China have told us of a whole village that when lockdown began they started from the Book of Genesis, these believers, young and old, read at least 10 chapters a day. Some can read 50-80 chapters a day," One of the villagers said;

"During this time of isolation, I read the Bible without stopping for 10 days and I could not stop reading about God's forgiveness and love for me. Now I want to spend the rest of my life reading the Bible!"

What is that we are being challenged to do? What is going to take some courage? When he says cross- don't look at the raging river in front of you, stand on the promise God has given you. Getting messy and wet is usually how a blessing starts- you have to step in faith to watch God do the amazing-

So do you step out into the raging water or whatever that obstacle you are facing or do you stand back and just say that you cannot cross because the obstacle won't let you pass by. It takes trust but if we don't put our trust in Him where are we putting our trust. And if others are not seeing us step out in faith how can we ask them to also put their faith in Him. We have to be the ones leading the way across the river and showing what faith and hope look like when all around us we see fear!

You cannot stay on the shore if you want to get to the other side.

Think about where you have been- is fear keeping you from moving forward? If it is make sure what you want to do lines up with God's word and if it does step out in faith. See what the Lord will do. Trust in Him to lead you and guide you. If God is in it, He will give you what you need to accomplish the task.

We hold in our hand the most precious gift. Let us open the Bible and find our strength and courage for what lies ahead, for our ragging river in His word.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Thank you for your partnership in the Gospel. God bless.

*Kristin Stevenson*