

# Living Words

## Taking the Long View – Scripture Engagement

P 3–5, 8–11

A glimpse into Scripture engagement  
in Papua New Guinea and Cambodia

P 6–7, 12–14

Dig deeper into well-known  
Bible stories



This is my first time writing an introduction to *Living Words*. Having stepped into the role of Executive Director in January, I am aware of the privilege of leading an organisation focused on bringing God's Word to every people group and my heart is full of thanks to everyone involved in this work. I'm also aware that our ultimate goal in bringing the Scriptures to others is to glorify God and to see the lives of individuals and whole communities transformed as people worship God and share the hope of salvation that only Jesus can bring.

Our next three issues of *Living Words* will be 'Taking the Long View'. Bible Translation is central to our mission, but what else do we do to help people understand and live the hope made available to them through the Scriptures, and what roles outside of translation are needed? The answer to this is extensive, but we're going to be focussing on three areas of our work, Scripture Engagement, the work of Consultants, and practical roles involved in the Bible Translation Movement.

You may have heard the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child'. The idea here is, of course, that it takes more than just a father and mother to raise a child and that the input of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, friends and others all shape the life of a child. The same is true for Bible Translation. It isn't a solo task for a limited few people directly involved in the translation project. It involves pastors, teachers, tradespeople, literacy specialists, software and IT specialists, Scripture engagement specialists, consultants in translation/literacy/anthropology/creation care/Scripture engagement and many many more.

In this edition of *Living Words*, our members Phil and Chris Carr share how media can be used powerfully for Kingdom purposes and Kevin Bird encourages us, through example, to help people get hold of and understand the Gospel. You'll also feel your brain stretched as Ross Millar provokes us to thought with a short Bible Story activity and Ian Vail shares questions and clues to help you dig deeper into the meaning of Bible passages.

I hope that this series in *Living Words* will bless you with a greater awareness of the 'village' of people involved in the Bible translation movement. Remembering, also, that as each of these people go about their work, they are representing Christ as living examples of the truth and hope found in the Word of God.

God bless,

**Bruce Eirena**

Executive Director

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# Turning Grain into Food

BY CHRIS CARR

Scripture tells us it is possible to eat raw grain, but we generally aim for a more palatable and easy-to-digest form of nutrition. Jesus is the bread of life after all.

Translating God's word into another language is like growing grain. At the end you have something technically edible, but generally it needs to be presented to people in a way they can 'digest' — written, visual, audio, with teaching, with repetition, with time to reflect and discuss, and so on.

There are many ways to bring the food of life to the table. Here are some that we in the Bamu translation team have used to bring the Word to the Bamu people once it has been translated.

We print booklets of individual Scripture books in the Bamu language as they are completed. The literate people read the books out loud so everyone can hear. In church, those who have the books follow along. Should the reader make a mistake, a susurrantion of murmured correction follows from many mouths among the congregation.

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*Translating God's word into another language is like growing grain... but generally it needs to be presented to people in a way they can 'digest'*



Bamu people tell their important stories in song, often accompanied by dance, especially during the annual Independence Day's celebrations when people from all over the Bamu gather for games, competitions and fun. The Bamu translation team sponsor a Scripture song competition where various groups present their original Bamu language songs telling Scripture truths. For years, people will hear these songs in the village boom boxes, on phones and on their radios.

Every day tugs pull barges loaded with freshly-felled logs down the Bamu river. On one tug, a crew member plays the Jesus film in the Bamu language on his phone. Everyone is enthralled, and many commit to follow Jesus.

A woman sits by her open fire, food cooking on the hot embers, children warming themselves. She is reading the Scripture for the day. The reading for each day is from the Bamu Scripture calendar.

In our early days walking around the village, the sound track would so often be a kung fu movie blaring from the popular TV-and-generator combo. These days, we are more likely to hear Bamu audio Scripture recordings sounding out.

The translation team learn the Scripture so well in the process of translating it. They travel around the different villages reading the Scripture and explaining it in Bamu. These communities that were once hostile to anyone who came near now warmly welcome God's Word. They invite the teams to come again and again and give generously back to them in gratitude.

For any community where the Scripture has been translated at some point, a door has been opened, or you could say the grain has been grown. But it is through Scripture engagement that people recognise the grain is food, and they walk through the door to life.



# Storytelling Widens Your Perspective

BY ROSS MILLAR



*What's a country run by God like?*

*One day, crowds came to Jesus, so he told them this little story.*

***God's heavenly country is like a person who took a seed...***

*[take a seed from your hand and eat it – it's hot and spicy!]*

***a mustard seed...***

*[take second seed and eat it too – lick your lips]*

***the tiniest seed in the garden...***

*[look at it closely]*

***and...***

*[take third seed and nearly put it in your mouth, but have an idea]*

***planted it in the garden.***

***The seed grew...***

*[seed pokes up]*

***and became a bush...***

*[seed grows into a bush]*

***a large bush...***

*[seed grows taller]*

***the largest bush in the garden...***

*[be amazed at its height]*

***and birds came and nested in its branches***

*[mime birds flying and tweeting].*

***That's what a country run by God is like.***



Image: Effective storytelling doesn't only use words. Here, Ross tells the Mustard Seed Story.

There's a lot packed into this 45-second story, starting from the opening line. How do you describe "kingdom of God" when we aren't really ruled by a king these days? There are actions too.

But then stories are a way to provoke thought. Jesus knew that. And questions can help too.

I've told this story dozens of times to audiences of only one or two, or sometimes thirty or more. I've told lots of other stories too: the Paralyzed Man lowered through the roof; the death of Ahab; and a battle that's avoided by Elisha. I've told stories to kids and adults. I've even told stories without words, like Psalm 150 in NZ Sign Language. I've worked my way through the whole of Exodus and the Sermon on the Mount at a church without a paid minister. (That was over a number of years.) It doesn't seem to matter what the story is: each time I tell a story, I get an answer that surprises me.

Here are three of the questions I use, but there is a trick... you need to get at least 10 answers for each question. Some might be silly, but others will show real insight. See what answers you get from the Mustard Seed Story. Can you get 10 answers for the first two questions?

1. What do you learn about God from this story?
2. What do you learn from the people in this story? (You might have to ask: Who are the characters in this story? If you can only find three, you are missing some...)
3. What is one thing you can put into practice from this story?

If seeing Scripture illuminated through storytelling has intrigued you, a practical response may be signing up to a Bible Storytelling Workshop. Whether in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea or the centre of Auckland city, a story well told captures attention and prompts deeper thought and discussion. Learning how to do this with Bible stories is a valuable skill for not only those in the Bible translation mission, but all followers of Christ.

Wycliffe New Zealand will be hosting a one-day workshop in Auckland in 2024, led by Ross Millar, where participants learn how to craft and present Bible stories for themselves.

● To learn more or express interest, please contact [info@wycliffenz.org](mailto:info@wycliffenz.org).



# Scripture Engagement is Personal

BY KEVIN BIRD

The Word of God is powerful and can speak for itself... if we let it. What holds the Word of God back? One answer lies in accessibility and engagement. If people don't, or can't, hear the Word, how will they be impacted by it? Wycliffe's mission is to ensure that all people groups get to hear the Word of God. This comes firstly by translation, and secondly via literacy, access, and engagement.

There are challenges for low-literacy people in **accessing** and **understanding** the Scriptures personally. Often their access to the Word is second-hand and filtered by those who are preaching and teaching.

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*Engagement with the Scriptures must be personal to be meaningful. So, the challenge to all of us who work in this space is to answer the question: How can I help people get personal access to God's Word?*



The provision of Bibles, resources, lighting and other forms of infrastructure help these church groups foster literacy and Bible access in their low-literacy communities.

As a result, often their understanding and spiritual maturity remains shallow until they gain personal access to the Scriptures. Engagement with the Scriptures must be personal to be meaningful. So, the challenge to all of us who work in this space is to answer the question: How can I help people get personal access to God's Word?

Personally, I came to faith through someone giving me a Gospel of John at a rock concert. The act of giving it to me did not bring me to faith. It was the meeting of Jesus through the Word of God which brought me to faith. I met Jesus personally via the Word. The Word of God is sharp and powerful (Hebrews 4:12), and does not belong in the scabbard, or on the shelf collecting dust. Everyone who hears it will remark and wonder at its power and authority, as we feel the Holy Spirit affirming it to us. It is truly a spiritual encounter. We are in the ministry of arranging spiritual encounters with God.

Our ministry in Cambodia involves sharing Bibles (access), sharing Christian resources (access, understanding), sharing God's Words (access via audio, video, multi-media), teaching in workshops (understanding), literacy (access), and socialising Biblical faith through contacts and fellowship with rural Christians (access, understanding). **None of this involves translation directly, but everything is focused on ensuring local Cambodian people get to engage personally with the Word of God: for them to meet Jesus personally.**

Poverty, and the lack of education, literacy, Biblical literacy, and technological literacy (together with some unhelpful theologies here and there), are all barriers to accessing the words and understanding of the Scriptures. We are working to break these down and minimise their impact on the Church. Bibles often have uncommon (high level) language as well as Bible-specific language (such as place names and people). So someone new to the Word needs all the help they can get to receive full understanding and benefit from it, and to grow their confidence.

One of the pastors we support has a growing and vibrant church, arguably because she is fully committed to the literacy programs in her church. She knows that people gain personal relationship with God via engagement with the Word of God. She is also a keen evangelist: every literacy teaching time includes the sharing of the Good News. Literacy opens the doorways to knowledge, but it also opens the doorways to the Word of God.

Functional literacy in Cambodia is still very low, and the religious language in the church (and the Bible) has a "less commonly used" flavour. So our challenge in such contexts is always to listen to the Spirit, and respond, just as Philip did:

*And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So, Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Acts 8:29–31 (ESV)*

# Becoming Addicted to the Bible

BY IAN VAIL



Image: Find Ian, the Bible contagion, amongst church leaders and Deeper Bible students in Indonesia.  
Credit: JPCC photos – Peter W.

During a deeper level session of *Deeper Bible* in Jakarta I was told, “Ian, you are a walking Bible virus.” I responded by saying, “Paulina, no one has ever paid me a nicer compliment.” I used that conversation in *Deeper Bible* before the Covid years by telling participants, “My one aim throughout *Deeper Bible* is to infect you with the Bible virus. I want you to become addicted to the Bible like me.”

I have encountered many people over the years who, like Elly Neliwati, told me: “I have been a Christian [x number years]. I have read the whole Bible through [y times]. I didn’t miss anything out. I have been blessed and encouraged reading the Bible. But then I arrived at the point where I began to be bored. Even when I switched translations, after reading the whole Bible through twice this way, my boredom returned. I needed help.”

Many people find themselves in Elly’s position. We read the Bible at surface level. We read the words on the page, but we don’t go deeper to capture the grandeur of the Word of God. And so we start to think, “*There is nothing more I can get from the Bible. I have reached the limit of what the Bible holds for me.*” Early in my Christian life I was trained to treat Scripture with the Navigator approach of Scripture memory, personal reflection and application. But it wasn’t until I went to Bible College of New Zealand (BCNZ) and encountered Dr Basil Brown that I realised I, too, was only scratching the surface.

Given the Greek and Hebrew courses were offered across more years than the two I was at Bible college for, I was given the unique opportunity to take multiple levels of Old Testament and New Testament study in the same year. Through following Bill Osborne and Dr Brown to all the classes they taught in my two years at BCNZ, I was given the overview, the in-depth awareness and the exegesis in the original languages all at the same time. The lights were going on every day. Dr Brown taught us that no word of Scripture is wasted; every word is there for a purpose. “When you think something doesn’t make sense,” he would say, “that is the time to dig deeper into the text. Dig for the gold, class.” This changed the way I approached Scripture. One of Dr Brown’s favourite sayings was “No one lives long enough to plumb the depths of the Bible.” That thought stuck with me and now I use it in *Deeper Bible*.

When I later sensed God leading me to create *Deeper Bible*, I got cold feet and asked God, “How on earth am I going to pull this together?” But I felt Him say to me, “Teach them the way I taught you.”

So I teach people how to recognise the depth in the Bible text and where to dig deeper. Word and phrase repetitions indicate there is depth there; so do subtle word changes or word switches. Word pictures demand us to search for hidden points of comparison. Allusions to other portions of Scripture force us to make the connection. I teach the Deeper Biblers to read across chapter boundaries, search for the sense units, find the clues or hints in the text that lead us to the depth. We use passages of Scripture as we practise in order to learn where to dig. When people reach the stage in their Bible reading where they are not getting anything new, I show them in *Deeper Bible* that they have only scratched the surface.

But one frustrating aspect of *Deeper Bible* is the fact that I won't tell people the answers. Rather I will lead them to find deep Bible treasures for themselves. The best teachers show you where to look instead of telling you what to see. It was through digging beneath the surface of Scripture for herself that Elly, who had initially described her Bible-reading as boring, began to gain a new perspective. After completing an exercise on Luke 15, Elly came back to me and said "Even though I felt like my brain might explode, I have found the right way to read the Bible and my excitement for the Word has returned."

Living Words Reader, I have given you the same exercise below, for you to try yourself. Use the questions and clues to dig deeper into the meaning of the passage. If you enjoy it and write back, I have plucked six other exercises from *Deeper Bible* for you to try your hand at as well.

Here is the first:

Look at the structure of Jesus' story in Luke 15 (note "story" or parable is singular, see 15:3). For example, the NIV reads as follows:

Verse 4: "Suppose one of you..."

Verse 8: "Or suppose a woman..."

Verse 11: "There was a man..."

Who is the certain man in Luke 15:11? Can you prove it? There are at least 27 similarities and four quotes to support it. See how many you can find. Now apply these clues to the whole of Luke 15. What new insights have you gained?

Send your answers to [info@wycliffenz.org](mailto:info@wycliffenz.org) and Ian will guide you into the depths of the Prodigal Son story simply by asking you leading questions.

Try it and you will be hooked. You could then try one of the other six exercises.

Warning: You are likely to become addicted.

*"Having completed several of the Deeper Bible levels over the last couple of years, I wished that the course had been available before I headed off to the mission field to spend half a lifetime assisting with Bible Translation.*

*It would have made such a difference to my ability to help others unpack the Scriptures for themselves, while being enriched and challenged myself by the intricate and intentional connections right across God's Word.*

*At least now, by participating and experiencing Deeper Bible for myself, I'm set up for the second half of my life, having learned to dig for nuggets, and discover things by myself without even having to visit a commentary. Yup – highly recommended. Anyone who's serious about their relationship with God should do it."*

– Mark Penny, Wycliffe NZ member

# Engage in Scripture Engagement in Bangladesh

**New Zealand applicants have the chance to join Wycliffe Australia's Kurukh Scripture Distribution (KSD) short-term ministry trip from 27 September — 17 October 2024.**

Participants will take part in a range of outreach opportunities with a large focus on Scripture engagement among the Kurukh-speaking Oraon people in the far north of Bangladesh. The trip will include the following distinctives:

- Hone your Bible storytelling skills at a workshop alongside Kurukh-speaking participants.
- Accompany Kurukh speakers in telling Bible stories in their communities.
- Promote the upcoming Matthew Drama\* performances which a few members of the team will be training local Kurukh speakers for.
- Support local Kurukh believers in distributing the newly-printed Kurukh New Testament.
- Join with national Christians to celebrate the completion of four New Testaments in ethnic minority languages.
- Observe day one of the Old Testament translation workshop for these four translation teams.

Each participant will need to provide or raise a total of NZD \$3,600 to cover all expenses on the trip.

\*Visit [wycliffe.org.au/eventtype/matthew-drama](http://wycliffe.org.au/eventtype/matthew-drama) for more information.

For more information, visit [wycliffenz.org/short-term-trips](http://wycliffenz.org/short-term-trips) or reach out to [info@wycliffenz.org](mailto:info@wycliffenz.org)

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