

A Bangladeshi man holds up his Bible.

BRINGING BIBLES TO VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN ANGOLA, GUATEMALA, AND BANGLADESH

“The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

— Matthew 11:5 (NIV)

They are among some of the most vulnerable. They are marginalised, isolated, and often suffer rejection by their families and communities. They may be forced to live on the fringes of society without any means of earning a living except for begging.

For the visually disabled the loss of sight is a life changing event which sees them becoming increasingly isolated and often stigmatised. **Such is the case for many of the world’s 2.2 billion¹ blind or visually disabled people, especially those in developing countries.**

Likewise, people who are illiterate are also vulnerable. Lacking an education, they are unable to navigate the many challenges of life and are open to exploitation by others.

¹ WHO 2019

They are unable to find employment or to become fully functioning members of society losing their sense of self-worth and dignity. **Currently, there are 773 million² illiterate adults worldwide, two thirds of whom are women.**

BANGLADESH

In Bangladesh alone there are 42 million illiterate people accounting for about 26% of the population. For those who are Christians, it is very difficult for them to access the Word.

It is an issue that the Bible Society of Bangladesh is working to address through its *Audio Bibles for Underprivileged Believers* project.

Partnering with 1,000 churches, Bible Society is providing audio Bibles in the languages of Bengali, Bangladesh's

official language, Garos, Bawm and Santali for rural listening groups, which are mainly comprised of illiterate women. Through the listening groups it is hoped that the listeners will come to understand the Bible stories and experience the transforming power of the Word.

The project aligns with this year's International Literacy Day theme - celebrated on 8th September 2021 - which is: "The right to literacy in times of COVID-19: The contribution of digital literacy and distance learning programmes." It has become even more relevant during the pandemic, which has impacted Bangladesh badly with 16,189³ deaths to date.



PRAY THAT GOD WILL KEEP THE LISTENING GROUPS, CHURCHES, AND THEIR MEMBERS SAFE DURING THE PANDEMIC.



A group listening to an audio Bible during the pandemic.

² UNESCO

³ Accurate at time of going to print.



GUATEMALA

Meanwhile, in Guatemala, Bible Society is reaching out to another group of vulnerable people, blind adults and children, through its *Light of Hope* project. For several years Bible Society has been running a Braille Book Reading Club where visually disabled people meet to study the Bible. During the pandemic, the format of this has been changed to 30-minute conference calls. Together, the members have been studying the books of Job and Psalms.

One who has benefitted from the club is 70-year-old Oscar.

"I have been blind from birth. I have lived alone for years. I have been attending the Braille Bible Reading Club for four years.

"My dream is to have a complete Bible in Braille.

This time has been very difficult for me because I do not have a family and going to the Reading Club brought joy to my soul. Now they phone me to study the book of Job.

I really appreciate the effort they are making and for not leaving us all alone these months. They also brought me an audio Bible.

I listen to it at night. It comforts me. Thank you that I have access to the Word of hope during the loneliness of the pandemic," said Oscar.



Top: A blind Guatemalan man reading Braille Scriptures.

Left: This man also attends the Braille Bible Reading Club.



Vilma gives her testimony to a group.

Another who has benefitted from the club is Vilma, a Christian lady who began losing her sight at the age of 38. Even as her sight was declining, Vilma did her best to continue reading and listening to the Bible. During the pandemic she has joined in with the conference calls.

“The club is very influential for us visually impaired people since braille is read and practiced. **Although it is challenging, learning braille makes us independent. It also raises self-esteem, but above all it brings us closer to God.**

For us the verse, “For our life is a matter of faith, not of sight”, (2 Corinthians 5:7) is a reality.

Although we cannot see, we know that the Lord cares for and protects us,” said Vilma.

For visually impaired children, Bible Society is providing audio recordings on topics such as love, forgiveness, generosity, identity, and integrity. Designed to be used on the messaging app WhatsApp, the recordings are distributed to parents via schools.



PRAY FOR THE ADULTS IN THE CONFERENCE CALLS THAT THEY WILL BE ENCOURAGED IN THEIR FAITH, PRAY FOR BLIND CHILDREN THAT THEY WILL READ THE SCRIPTURES IN THEIR HOMES, AND FOR THE VOLUNTEERS THAT GOD WILL STRENGTHEN THEM.

ANGOLA

In Angola, blind and visually disabled people are also suffering through the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of them are keen to connect with the Word and they contact the National Association of People with Visual Disabilities (ANCAA) requesting Scriptures.

Bible Society is providing them with both braille Bibles and audio Scriptures. "I would very much like to receive a Bible in braille, so I can read it for myself," said one visually disabled woman.

Bible Society is also working with Christian training centres to teach braille, something which strengthens self-confidence and self-esteem. "When I went blind everything changed. Now I am learning braille so that I can read the Bible for myself," said a visually disabled man.

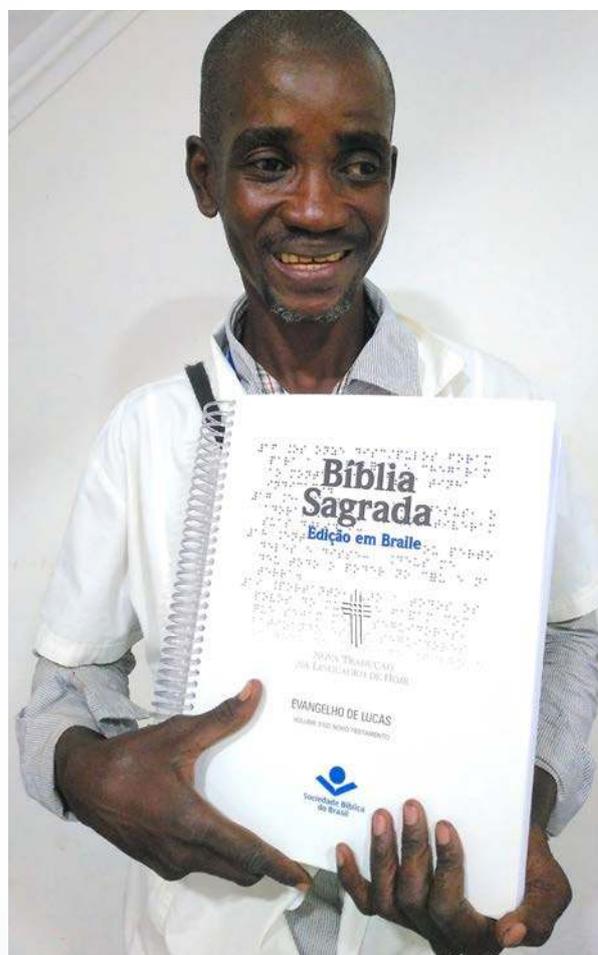
One person who has benefitted from having braille Scriptures is 43-year-old Antonio.

"I went blind at the age of 29. It was not easy as a young person to be blind. I have experienced many internal conflicts. I started drinking a lot. I am a student of God's Word but I have never had a Bible before because it is difficult to obtain Scriptures in Braille. Thank you to the Bible Society of Angola for the Gospel of Luke and the four portions in braille. I am satisfied from the bottom of my heart. The biblical passage that comforts me the most is Matthew 5:5, 'Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth' (NIV)."

Right: Antonio holding Braille Scriptures.

DID YOU KNOW?

The cost to produce a Braille Bible is \$1,000 which is more than 60 times the cost of a standard Bible.



With the COVID pandemic still causing angst and challenges everywhere, vulnerable people such as the visually disabled and the illiterate can be easily overlooked or forgotten. We know that God is our only hope and we see many during these times seeking Him. I invite you to prayerfully consider taking the opportunity to invest into the lives of blind and illiterate people in Guatemala, Angola, and Bangladesh through making a gift.

In Bangladesh, your gift will help to provide audio Bibles for listening groups. In Guatemala, it will help to run the Braille Book Reading Club and provide audio teachings for children. In Angola, it will help to provide braille and audio Scriptures and to support braille reading centres.

Your gift could help to bring the comfort and hope of the Bible into the life of an illiterate or visually disabled person. Thank you and God bless you!

Yours sincerely,



Neels Janse van Rensburg
CEO

THE DIFFERENCE YOU'VE MADE!

As a Bible Society supporter, you are part of a mission that is bringing Bibles to many.

We want to share with you a special story we have received about a Chinese Christian who received a large-print Bible through the United Bible Societies and through the generosity of supporters like you.

To find out how the Bible has changed the life of a Chinese



Christian go to:
www.biblesociety.org.nz/china-bibles



In Bangladesh, not only do farmers in rural areas have to deal with low literacy rates, their rivers often flood, ruining their crops and livelihood. Flooding will only increase with global warming.



FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Bible House • 144 Tory Street • Private Bag 27 901, Marion Square, Wellington 6141
Freephone: 0800 424 253 • Tel: 64 4 384 4119 • CC22121 • www.biblesociety.org.nz



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