

India Missions Journal

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Editorial

This issue of the journal focuses on “Scripture Engagement”. From the time of his birth in Bethlehem to his death on the cross in Jerusalem, our Lord Jesus Christ immersed himself in the Scriptures. Of course in those days only the Old Testament was available as the New Testament was not written. However, we can get insights into the life of Jesus when we read the four Gospels.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the heavenly angels sang a beautiful song to the shepherds soaked in Scripture. The Chief Priests and the scribes had to tell Herod the King after searching the scriptures, where Jesus was to be born. Then he grew up in the household of Joseph and Mary, a lower-middle-class family. At the age of twelve, his parents found him debating about Scripture with the priests in the temple in Jerusalem. After that, as a boy, Jesus “*increased in wisdom and in stature*” (Luke 2:52 ESV). As a young adult, Jesus faced his adversary, Satan, and defeated him with words from Scripture. For the next three and a half years, he preached and taught God’s Word in public and private, healed the sick, performed many signs and wonders to prove that he was the Messiah. When he laid down his life for us on the cross, he died uttering Scripture. Finally, before he ascended to heaven after his resurrection, he sent us his Holy Spirit to remain with us and to witness of him.

If Scripture was so important to Jesus, it should be equally important to us. Do we read the Bible daily? Do we meditate on the words or verses? In these days of numerous gadgets, it may not be necessary to read them, but can watch it on the screen or listen to them. Do we teach our young people to value God’s word in our lives? In this edition of the journal, we have brought together a variety of articles ranging from Biblical basis to children, youth, women and Bibleless people.

Should we not have a concern for people without a Bible in their mother tongues? Do we pray for our Bible translators as they labour in remote and difficult conditions? What about our literacy workers who are striving to educate the vast majority of our country’s people?

R. Theodore Srinivasagam

Executive Editor, IMA

Scripture Engagement: Biblical basis

Ravi David*

Introduction

The Bible is God's Word. In the New Testament, Jesus is the eternal Word, and in the Old Testament, the Word carries the idea of active, creative power. God spoke, and the entire universe with all of its inhabitants was created (Gen 1:1¹ "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind*") (John 1:1-4).

God engaged with his creation as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day looking for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:8, 9). Even today, He continues to speak and engage with humankind in various ways. He knocks on the door of our hearts, waiting for us to open the door and invite him into our lives (Rev 3:20). God's Word urges its readers and hearers to respond to the invitations made therein. "*Follow me*" (Matt 4:19); "*Come, Take, Learn*" (Matt 11: 28-30) are a few of the many invitations in scripture that the Lord lovingly offers all of humanity to engage with and respond to.

Self-Authenticated Word

The Bible authenticates itself and affirms itself. People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument (Heb 6:16). When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself (Heb 6:13), because he wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear of what he promised, and he confirmed it with an oath (Heb 6:17).

The Bible describes its own words as pure words and as silver tried in the furnace of the earth, purified seven times (Ps12: 6). *Your word is very pure, therefore your servant loves it* (Ps119: 140). Every Word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him (Pro 30:5). The Word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does (Ps 33:4).

¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version.

Divinely Inspired Word

The Holy Spirit is the author of the scriptures who brings it to life as we read it. The Bible is a living book - it speaks, teaches, encourages, corrects, rebukes, instructs and gives its readers hope and meaning to life. The challenge to Jesus was to turn stones into bread. He responded by saying that *“It is written that man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matt 4:4).

God’s Word is divinely inspired and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21).

Trustworthy and Reliable Word

God keeps his promises, and he set a rainbow in the sky to remind us of this (Gen 9:13-16). God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through? (Num 23:19, NLT). Abraham did not waver in his faith but fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised (Rom 4:20-21). Joshua, while reflecting on all that the Lord had done, said, *“Not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed”* (Josh 23:14). Jesus said that *“Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished”*(Matt 5:18). Jesus also said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”* (Matt 24:35).

Reflecting on the words of the Lord, the Psalmist expressed his thoughts as follows: *“The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord radiant, giving light to the eyes”* (Ps 19:7-8) and in keeping them *“There is great reward”* (Ps 19:11).

Transforming and Prophetic Word

God's Word is truth (John 17:17), and we are made clean through the Word (John 15:7). Jesus said, "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:31-32). Holding on to the teaching of God's Word is the mark of a disciple. It is a great thing to hold the scriptures in high regard, reverence and respect, but **that does not necessarily translate into obedience.**

We need to engage with the Bible. It records the history of the past, resonates with the present and prophetically reveals the future of the world. The entire book of Revelation is prophetic, and all of history will eventually align itself with what God has spoken through his prophets. God is on the throne, and he is in control. His divine plan is at work, and we have the privilege of being co-workers with him, joining Jesus in fulfilling the mission of God (Missio Dei).

Paul describes the characteristics of the world in the last days and predicts stressful times and urges us to note: "*There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash and conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power*" (2 Tim 3:1-5). Though this writing was over two thousand years ago, it aptly describes our contemporary world. Many of the prophecies written in the scriptures were fulfilled. Some are fulfilled at present, and some are yet to be fulfilled.

The prophet Isaiah compares God's Word with rain and snow that waters the earth and makes it flourish. Similarly, God's Word will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent (Isa 55:11). The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic (Ps 29:3-4). God is inviting us to engage with it and respond.

What is Scripture engagement?

Scripture Engagement involves accessing, understanding and interacting meaningfully with the life - changing message of the Scripture.² According to Dr Fergus Macdonald “Scripture engagement is interaction with the biblical text in a way that provides sufficient opportunity for the text to speak for itself by the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling readers and listeners to hear the voice of God and discover for themselves the unique claim Jesus Christ is making upon them”.³

Bible publishing agencies worldwide recognise that it is not enough to translate the Bible; it is not enough to distribute the Bible – but they desire to see real Scripture Engagement: people encountering God’s Word in a life - changing way⁴

The Wise and the Foolish

Jesus concluded his sermon on the mountain with the story of two people building houses (Matt 7:24-27). They had many things in common, but there also was a very significant difference between them. Both of them were building houses on which the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against them. The difference, however, was that one of the houses crashed while the other stood firm in the storm. Both the wise man and the foolish man heard the Word of God. Jesus said that the person who hears God’s Word and puts it into practice (Scripture Engagement) is like the wise person who built the house on a rock foundation of obedience. The foolish person also heard God’s Word but did not put it into practice and therefore was like a house built on a foundation of sand which crashed when the storms hit it. That is a simple but powerful illustration that distinguishes between people who hear the Word of God and act upon it and people who do not.

The Hearer and the Doer

The Word of God requires a response from its hearer. Hearing God’s Word and doing nothing about it is self-deception. Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (Jam 1:22).

²<https://www.sil.org/translation/scripture-engagement>

³<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/sidebar/defining-scripture-engagement>

⁴<http://www.scripture-engagement.org>

Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at their face in a mirror, After looking at themselves, goes away and immediately forgets what she/he looks. However, whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it-not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do (Jam. 1: 23- 25).

The Divine Plumb Line

In an age of increasing relativism and the tendency to reject absolutes, the Word of God is our reference point to which we align our thinking, behaviour and actions. A plumb line is a string with a weight at the bottom, used by builders to ensure that walls are straight. God's Word is like a divine plumb line which shows areas of life whose alignment is not correct with scripture. The Lord was standing by a wall that was built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. The Lord said, *"Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer"* (Amos 7:7-8). Submitting to the authority of scripture is the first step in scripture engagement.

Obedience is better than Sacrifice.

King Saul disobeyed God's instructions and tried to justify it by saying that he did so in order to bring an excellent offering to God. Samuel, the prophet rebuked him and said, *"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams"* (1 Sam 15:22).

Deuteronomy chapter 28 outlines a long list of blessings that come on the person who fully obeys the Lord God and carefully follows all His commands. Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commands"* (John 14:15). He also said, *"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me"* (John 14 : 21a). We show our love for God by obeying his commands. Not obeying His commands reflects a lack of love for God (John 14 : 23-24).

A woman told Jesus that his mother is a blessed person. Jesus responded, saying, *"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it"* (Luke 11: 27-28). The Psalmist said that blessed are all who fear the Lord and walk in obedience to him (Ps.128:1).

Moses instructed Joshua to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night so that he would be careful to do everything written in it (Jos. 1:8).

Metaphors used for God's Word

The Bible uses several metaphors to describe the characteristics of God's Word. Each of them demonstrates different dimensions of the scriptures and how we can engage with them.

- ***Light***

Psalms 119:105 says that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. God's Word shines the light on the ways of God and provides direction, wisdom, insight and guidance along the journey. The unfolding of God's Word gives light and understanding to the simple (Ps 119:130).

- ***Mirror***

The Word of God is like a mirror that reflects our appearance. We think we read the Bible, but the Bible reads us. We look at the Bible, but the Bible looks at us and reflects us our appearance in the light of the Word. When we see our reflection in the mirror, it shows us things that are untidy, out of place or messed up and thereby allows us to set things right. By urging to look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continue in it – not forgetting what we have heard, but doing it – and in doing so we will be blessed in what we do (Jam 1:25).

- ***Milk***

The Word of God is like milk which nurtures us and causes us to grow. The invitation is to crave the pure spiritual milk like newborn babies so that by it, we may grow up in our salvation, after having tasted that the Lord is good (1 Pet 2:2). **Salvation can be like a one-time event - when we repent of our sins, ask God for forgiveness and invite Jesus into our lives.** However, the Word of God invites us to an **on-going journey of engagement to grow in him**, follow him as a disciple and get sanctified for his purposes.

- ***Fire and Hammer***

God's Word is like fire which burns up all the dross in our lives. We are instructed in the scriptures to be thankful and worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28, 29). *“Is not my word like fire” declares the Lord, “and*

like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jer 23:29). God’s Word can shatter hardened hearts and bring healing and new life to broken people.

- ***Sword***

We are encouraged to put on the full armour of God to be able to take our stand against the devil’s schemes (Eph. 6:11). There are several pieces of the armour which is defensive, but the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, is an offensive weapon (Eph. 6:17). The Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword; it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges thoughts and intents of the heart and penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow (Heb. 4:12).

Conclusion

The Lord wants us to allow His Word to dwell in us richly (Col 3:16) and to hide his Word in our hearts so that we can live pure and sinless lives (Ps 119:9-11). As we remain in him and his words remain in us, God will answer our prayers (John 15:7). Moses instructed Joshua to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night, obey it and not turn from it to the right or the left if he wanted to be successful, prosperous and courageous (Josh 1:7-8).

Proximity to God’s Word without actual obedience to it is like train tracks that run parallel to each other: nearby but never intersecting. That will be the case if there is Bible reading but no life-transforming engagement with scripture. Beyond the ritual of a quick daily Bible reading, the Lord wants us to seek him in the reading and studying of his Word. The hymn writer Mary A. Lathbury (1877) expressed this well in her hymn as follows:

“Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,
As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;
***Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word!***”

As we delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night, we will be *“Like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither and whatever we do will prosper”* (Ps 1: 3). Jesus said that the proclamation of the Word

of God is like seed sown in different places: the wayside, rocky ground, among thorns and on good soil. May our hearts be like good soil wherein we receive the seed of the Word of God in a way that produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times (Matt 13: 18-23).

Growing up as a child, I was woken up every morning by my father with these words from: “*Get up my son; it is time to seek the Lord*” (Hosea 10:12). It is now thirty years since he went to be with the Lord, and I remember with gratitude to God the godly heritage of my parents. Every morning as he went about his daily morning routines, he would passionately and prayerfully sing the words of this hymn written by Horatius Bonar (1846): ***I heard the voice of Jesus say***

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, O weary one, lay down
Your head upon my breast.”
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place,
And he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“I am this dark world’s light;
Look unto me; your morn shall rise,
And all your days be bright.”
I looked to Jesus and I found
In him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life, I’ll walk,
‘til trav’ling days are done.

Scripture engagement is paying attention to the invitations that the living Lord lovingly offers us every day – and responding to it.

May we seek to engage with scripture with ***the attitude of Samuel***: “*Speak Lord, for your servant is listening*” (1 Sam 3:10), ***with the posture of Saul*** (before he became Paul): “*Who are you, Lord? What do you want me to do?*” (Acts: 9:5) and ***with the faith of Abraham***, who was “*Fully persuaded that God is able to do what He has promised*” (Rom 4:21).

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Bible Engagement: From Access to Absorption

Aldrin Bogi*

“The Bible, when presented in the heart language of people, is the greatest missionary.” Wycliffe founder Cameron Townsend once said. “It never needs a furlough, is never considered a foreigner.”

For years now and rightfully so, Bible agencies have emphasized on Bible translation to provide people with access to God’s Word. This emphasis needs to continue, as there are millions of people without the Bible. However, recent studies reveal that more and more people are reading less and less of the Bible. In North America, a survey says that about 1700 people are giving up reading the Bible every day. Another study suggests that 85 % of Millennials (18-30 year-olds) in South Asia read fragmented scriptures in times of crisis only. That is a silent crisis the Church is facing worldwide.

While it is true that Bible access is essential, it is equally important that we do everything we can to make the process of Bible absorption possible for deeper engagement with the scriptures. However, there are real challenges about issues of Bible access and Bible absorption. Bible engagement best happens when we handle well the challenges around access and absorption.

Challenges in the area of Bible Access

Bible access happens when excellent translations of full Bibles are available for every tribe in every nation presented in print, audio and digital formats. That is no easy job. There are several challenges for us to overcome in providing Bible access.

Here are a few:

- More than one and half billion people in the world today do not have the Bible in their language.
- Bibles are available in print form, but people either prefer oral communication or do not have the opportunity to learn to read
- People want Bibles but are not able to get them.
- Displaced populations do not have Bibles available in their language.

- People are uninformed about the available Bibles. Many minority-language speakers are not even aware that a translation of the Bible exists in their heart language.
- Over 5400 languages still need the Old Testament (OT) translated. There is a huge need in this area. Researchers are realizing that among many unreached people groups the OT is critical to a full understanding of the gospel and God’s plan of redemption. There are actual reports of various people groups drawing to the Lord as a result of OT stories. I read of a true story of what happened in a Colombian people group. The people were listening to the story of Jonah and heard how the people of Nineveh had responded to Jonah’s warnings. Some of them interrupted. The missionary said, “We too have done bad things among us, having customs of burying unwanted babies alive – and we too must change and stop offending the God of the Bible!” Apparently, in the following days, dozens of people gave themselves to the Lord. If getting the OT in the hands of these millions of people becomes our goal, we will need many more OT translation experts. We do not have many trained Old Testament translations consultants. It is difficult to make disciples without having the Old Testament Scriptures.

These are just a few challenges for us to wrestle. However, our efforts do not just stop with Bible access. As we continue to strive towards ensuring that every tribe in every nation gets the Bible in their heart language, we also need to make sure we tackle issues of Bible absorption.

As N.T. Wright says, “For too long, we have read Scripture with 19th-century eyes and 16th-century questions. It’s time we get back to reading with 1st-century eyes and 21st-century questions.” What is the use if people can access God’s word but do not absorb it?

Challenges about Bible Absorption

According to Taylor University Center for Scripture engagement, ‘Bible Engagement is a way of hearing and reading the Bible with an awareness that it is in the Scriptures that we primarily meet God. It is a marinating, mulling over, reflecting, dwelling on, pondering of the Scriptures, resulting in a “transformative engagement” with God.’

Bible engagement happens when a community has excellent access to a well-translated text. Individuals and communities should be able to enjoy scriptures by regularly feasting on whole literary units, understanding the overall story of the Bible as centred in Jesus. This practice enables modern-day readers to accept the invitation to take up his or her role in God’s ongoing drama of restoration through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Absorption happens when we can strategically leverage our published translations (whether in print, audio or digital formats) via programs, resources and education that help people read and live the Bible well. Real transformation happens when we can bring both Bible access and Bible absorption in a meaningful rhythm.

To do so, one needs to consider various aspects:

- Some people might prefer to listen to the Bible rather than read or vice versa.
- It could also mean to help people who think the Bible is not relevant to their lives.
- In some cases, it is developing a strategy to help people who risk persecution if they associate with the Bible.
- In most cases, it is as simple as helping people read and study the Bible better. Many do not know the necessary information behind each book written in the Bible and often misinterpret scriptures and worse still - misapply the Bible.

Many people in the Church today have picked up bad reading habits when it comes to the Bible. As Philip Yancey rightly says, “We’ve essentially reduced our engagement with the scripture to eating Bible McNuggets.” Bible absorption is more than just snacking on God’s Word, but rather it is helping people get on to a more wholesome diet.

Bible agencies need to work hard to make sure both Bible access (translation and publishing) and Bible absorption (Bible engagement and distribution) go hand in hand. Habakkuk 2:14 says, “*For the Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*” (NIV)

Biblica's Community Bible experience is a classic example of how Bible access and Bible absorption go hand in hand. It is a programme geared to help people read the Bible well and live well. Our translations team worked to get us a Bible translation that is accurate, readable and reliable. The engagement team took it one step forward by working on the de-cluttering the Bible from many well-intended accessories (chapters, verses, cross-references, red-letters etc.) and they rearranged the flow of the text in a better historical flow. All this is to help the readers engage with scriptures at a deeper level.

The 'Books of the Bible' Model

At Biblica, we call this "The Books of the Bible" - a Bible so innovative it was there from the start! This model encourages people to read the Bible well by challenging them to:

Read Big: Most people have picked up bad Bible reading habits such as reading small portions or just being too dependent on daily devotionals. They lack the habit of reading big. If we can read other narratives big, why shouldn't we read the Bible big? We must help people to read big. One significant benefit is that it will help people not read the Bible out of context. That is a crucial first step to absorbing the Bible well.

Read Real: Ranging from preaching trends to "verse of the day" emails, the Bible can start to feel more like a reference book and less like a story. With columns and verses – it can feel even less conducive to comfortable reading and absorption. We have designed a Bible that restores the text to a more authentic presentation (we removed chapters, verses, columns, etc.), helping you see Scripture in its original context and uncover its original beauty.

Read Together: The Bible narratives gave birth out of a storytelling community. For various reasons, the early Church experienced Scripture as a community. If the Bible means a lot to you – what better way to experience it than with the ones who mean the most to you! The community Bible experience welcomes everyone into an honest, open conversation about the Bible.

We need to ask God to help us come up with various ways to help people re-discover the grand story of God so that they can discover

and live out their role in God's story. Imagine the impact of what will happen if everyone in the body of Christ reads the Bible like this?

It will eradicate Bible poverty!

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Children and Scripture Engagement

M. Mani Chacko*

The Bible Society of India (BSI) has been focusing our attention on children enabling them to engage with Scripture – the Bible. Our colleagues have been widely travelling visiting different Churches and holding workshops for children through the co-operation of our local Auxiliaries. The response has been overwhelming.

The theme “Children and Scripture engagement” has a direct bearing on (Mark 9:33-37). The disciples were on their way to Capernaum. They were discussing with one another as to who was the greatest. When Jesus inquired about their conversation on the road, they were silent. However, Jesus sensing the issue that has been bothering the disciples sat down and called the twelve disciples and said to them, “*If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all*” (Mark 9:35 ESV). Then Jesus took a child and put him in the midst of them. Taking him in His arms, He said to them, “*Who ever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but Him who sent me*” (Mark 9:37 ESV). For Jesus, a child was special and unique.

Understanding Marginalised Children

Children will have to be a significant concern for any sensitive human being. Many children die before the age of five out of poverty and sickness, such as diarrhoea, measles, tetanus, and whooping cough. Many die from respiratory infections, mainly pneumonia. Simple therapies could save most of these. However, this is a distant dream for many of them as they are among the desperately poor.

Children, besides being victims of malnutrition, disease and starvation are also victims of violence. One moving incident as narrated by the President of World Vision International comes to my mind. 16 Israeli soldiers caught a 14-year-old Palestinian boy living on the West Bank as he was writing graffiti on a wall. The soldiers placed him against the wall, and one shot him four times in the eye. As he lay on the ground, still alive, they savagely beat him for almost an hour. During that time, they forced him to stick his finger into his wound and wipe out the

graffiti with his blood. He was then bound and dragged through the village streets and finally thrown into the back of the jeep and rudely dumped at a local hospital. Miraculously, he survived. This incident is typical of the cruelty. Many such incidents happen every day the world over.

There are nearly a million street children in the major cities in India and lead a nightmarish existence. They are half-fed, ill-clad and do not have the benefits of medicare and education. Many street children do not know or have limited knowledge about hygiene or sexually transmitted diseases. As a result, they encounter sexual and reproductive health problems such as STDs, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, premature births and abortions. The street children are frequently taken advantage of by the underworld gangsters or by older street boys who bully them and use them to achieve their ends. If the children do not oblige, they are threatened, beaten and at times, even killed. The general misconception is that street children are drug addicts, uncontrollable and violent, and so people treat them with hatred and contempt. There are many factors that drive children onto the streets. A few of them are, due to poverty at home, conflicts in the family and lack of love and attention in the family. There are also social factors such as pressure from peers to move away from home, attracted by life in the city. There are also psychological factors like the need to assert one's independence and the need for more attention. Street children live in an environment devoid of affection and comfort of a family life. Many of them rummage through the garbage to find food and others go hungry for days together. The tragic plight of these street children is a powerful image of the deprivation, hunger, abuse and poverty.

Children during Jesus' time

The society during the time of Jesus was male-dominated. People regarded women and children as chattels. They were expected to stay in the background and not to appear in public. It was common among the Romans who needed an heir, to adopt an adult rather than their child. In the Roman Empire, one of the cruelest practices was to abandon the newly born. When a new baby was born it would be laid at its father's feet; if the father picked up the baby it would live, but if he ignored the baby it would be taken away to die. Judaism did not permit to kill the newly born. But the Jewish father could sell or pawn

his children. Children also had to work to help their parents provide for the family from a very early age. In short, the society in which Jesus lived was very male-dominated. Children and women were considered “non-persons” with few rights or no rights. Jesus overturned the social norms of the time by accepting women and welcoming children.

The extraordinary act of Jesus welcoming the ordinary children and women is a reaffirmation of the theology of creation wherein God created the entire humankind in His own image. The image of God is the doctrine of *Sitzim Leben* of human uniqueness. Despite the relatively meagre collection of biblical passages that explicitly mention the image of God, the doctrine itself has had a substantial role in influencing Christian anthropology and even the rest of the doctrine of creation. Indeed, the Genesis text decisively indicates that the image of God is what separates human beings from the rest of creation and defines a human being, including children as a unique creature in the order of creation.

Scripture Engagement Programme for Children by the Bible Society of India.

The department of Media and Special Audience of BSI has been meticulously conducting different innovative programmes for children.

● Bible Fun Shop

The Bible Fun Shop is a unique programme designed by the Media and Special Audience Department for the digital Scripture Engagement of Kids. The Bible Funshops aim to introduce kids to Digital Bible resources and also help them to engage with Bible stories/passages creatively. It has a plenary session and small group sessions. The design of the day-long program is to help kids creatively express their learning in the digital space through short videos, Blogs, Facebook posts and Instagram posts.

BSI Allahabad Auxiliary conducted Bible Funshop for Kids. About 40 children from 5 churches attended the Bible Funshop organised by the BSI Allahabad Auxiliary in November 2018. We had a great time together, reading and learning from the Bible. The theme of the Bible Funshop was **the big picnic** (based on the story of Jesus feeding the 5000). The kids engaged in deep conversations about what we can give to Jesus and how we see what we have multiplied and become a

blessing to many if only we can trust Jesus! Kids imaginatively retold the story of the boy who gave his lunch – five loaves and two fish to Jesus. “The Big Picnic” as one teacher who accompanied the children said, “It was a spiritual journey with fun, laughter and learning”. They introduced the kids to popular Digital Bible tools such as Youversion Kids App, Bible Lens, Guardians of Ancora. We hope and pray that the Digital natives would engage with God’s word in the Digital format!

We have conducted 20 such Fun shops in 8 cities. At the Bible Funshop, Children collaboratively read a Bible passage and learn from each other. It was fun reading the Bible with kids and understanding the passage from their perspective. The Funshop also included a video-making workshop. They taught the children to make video presentations of the Bible story. In all the 20 workshops, children made amazing videos and Bible posts for Facebook and Instagram. We thank God for the creativity that He has endowed our children. It was an overwhelming experience to hear the kids sing “I like the Bible” - which was our theme song. Besides, the children were challenged with the life story of Mary Jones, whose thirst for owning the Bible was instrumental in starting Bible Societies around the world.

● **‘SPROUTS’ Children’s Get Together**

The Bible Society of India, North-West India Auxiliary conducts ‘SPROUTS’ Children’s get together of various Churches in and around Delhi. That is an annual event of Scripture engagement. The SPROUTS get together was held at Butler Memorial Girl’s Senior Secondary School, Delhi on the 11th August 2018. The theme of Sprouts was “Conquerors”. Children from about 20 churches participated in the day long event. Besides Scripture quiz, there were other activities such as games, cooking-without-fire, and singing competition at the 2017 Sprouts, the distinctive feature was Biblical story telling through puppetry (traditional arts). It was truly amazing. The kids were spellbound, and much loved it. It goes to show how we can command a listening when we engage with the Biblical story and when we present it creatively.

● **Bible Quiz**

The Bible quiz engages people with the Bible and gets them to look for details that we miss out in our devotional reading. Similarly, the North West Auxiliary (NWIA) of BSI organized a Bible Quiz on 12th August

2018. Rev. Shirley Lal, Secretary NWIA says, “What an overwhelming joy to see people of God as many as 1500, young and old, from cities and villages, men and women engrossed in writing Bible Quiz on the Gospel according to Luke in Suranasi, Ludhiana, Pathankot (Punjab), Sirsa, Hissar, Kalka, Rohtak, Fatehabad (Haryana), Meerut, Ghaziabad, Noida (U. P. and Udaipur, Ajmer, Naseerabad, Khrewara, Chhitorgarh and Jaipur (Rajasthan)”. The Bible Society of India promotes Bible engagement. We do whatever it takes to take the Bible closer to people and people closer to the Bible. We hope and pray that the Bible quiz events help children to read the Bible more.

● **Children’s Bible Learning (CBL) Workshops**

We also initiated CBL workshops which were and conducted across the nation in local Churches of various Church denominations. We used participatory methods relevant to the age group characteristics of the urban children, and rural children to make the process of learning from Children’s Bible stories, meaningful and enjoyable! In each workshop, we narrated the fantastic story of Mary Jones who became the reason for the Bible Society movement and inspired children to understand how God can help children and teenagers to be of blessing to people! In the 182 such workshops, which we conducted, we distributed children’s Bibles to around 25000 needy children.

Conclusion

Children are the ones who are very vital for deciding how the world is going to be after some years. If one can do some good in the life of a child, then there can be a change in the world to come. The entire humankind, including children, are created in God’s image, and therefore, all so we need to treat all with love and respect. God’s love is available to everyone, irrespective of their place in society and that we are called to accept every human being as unique and equally worthy to God. We must treat children, young and old, rich and poor, male and female, just and unjust, the vulnerable and the powerful equally whomever they are. To make this happen, Scripture engagement, especially among children, becomes a vital tool.

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Scripture Engagement and Vacation Bible School (VBS) Ministries in India

J.Herbert Samuel*

There were days when Christian families took discipleship seriously. Churches rang the church bells every night to remind families of their times at the family altar. The church services mostly were solemn and severe. Though people looked upon children as the future of the church and society, they were not in focus in many churches in their order of worship. For many children, Sundays were hard days. They had to memorize scripture portions, sometimes even prayers in the prayer book, no-meal punishments if they failed to do so, no games on Sundays as they were considered holy. They also had to undergo compulsory daily Bible reading with or without understanding, compulsory Sunday school and church attendance. Though the intentions were laudable, their execution was unpleasant for children and often not in line with their age. So commonly God, church and religion were compulsory, unpleasant entities to reckon with for the younger generation. So Scripture engagement was instead an undesirable drudgery.

Beginnings of the Vacation Bible School (VBS) Ministries

There were Bible colleges of different sorts, mostly developing pastors, church planters or theologians. It was South India Biblical Seminary in Bangarapet in Karnataka State that focused on Christian education and developed a cutting edge in this regard. With the sacrificial commitment of a few of the faculty members there, they taught the vision and skills regarding Christian education and nurture. God used them to bring a great revival in the shape of Vacation Bible School (VBS) ministries. It was a new concept until it started in 1952 in Kovilpatty in Tamilnadu in South India. The students had summer assignments to fulfil and report back to their tutors when they returned to the college in June of every year. It was the summer of 1952, a faculty member, Ms. Morgan and two students who happened to be brother and sister, Mr. P. Samuel and Ms. Packiathai teamed up to run a VBS in Kovilpatty. Little did people realise at that time that it would become a great national movement, instrumental in bringing revival in the churches across the country.

VBS a Recognized Movement

Vacation Bible School in India became a recognised movement since its small beginnings in 1952 in rural South India. Ever since, VBS has had a significant impact among Christians, producing Christian leaders of even some leading indigenous missionary movements such as Friends Missionary Prayer Band and Indian Evangelical Mission. It spread into different languages across the country and also inspired the birth of different options of curricula and materials produced by various agencies and churches. It still does remain a vital point of spiritual connect in many lives.

Scripture Engagement

While we notice that ‘Scripture Engagement’ has been the cutting edge of impact in VBS, it came with certain advantages in context and time. That facilitated the results. While the churches have been having their Sunday Schools throughout the year and other outreach activities, VBS has been unique in the way it has been impacting lives. The prophetic claim in the scriptures was, “*The word proclaimed will not return in vain*” (Isaiah 55:11). However, the question was, how we were proclaiming it.

What caused the impact of VBS?

Certain factors facilitated the impact of the Vacation Bible School (VBS) Ministries. They are as follows.

1. The Concept of ‘Abundant Life.’

The portrayal of ‘abundant life’ in the Scriptures needs to be reconsidered. It needs a positive presentation. It needs a paradigm shift in the perspective of presentation and understanding of the Scriptures. For the bored, captive audience in Church programmes, the concept that God wants people to be happy and enjoy a clean life is radically new. In an attempt to protect the children from spiritual harm and danger, Christian parents often banned many things from children such as sports activities, movies and secular music. All these need to change to appropriate activities.

2. New Ideas brought in New Perspectives

Kids love new stuff. Scripture remains the same and unchanged yesterday, today and forever. However, Scripture presentation must

be appropriate and in line with contemporary styles and needs. A half-a-day engagement for ten days with some special days in between and a final day to finish the programme shows the children something quite different from their Sunday Schools. It is vacation time. Therefore it has to be a relaxing half a day schedule and flexible and creative in style to attract them. Mr. P. Samuel was a great visionary and had the charisma that produced a lot of “thinking out of the box”. In his days, he would suddenly announce a gathering of all students in a familiar place, and he would either tell them an absorbing story or screen a movie. Once, I remember watching the movie about the missionary David Livingstone. The new ideas, they saw and heard challenged the children to consider the Scriptures differently from the then traditional ways against which they showed prejudice.

3. Communication that is Entertaining and Efficient

Entertaining and efficient communication should be the hallmark of excellent Christian communication. The Christian message should be presented through entertaining stories and songs, beautifully balancing scriptural depth and clean fun. Once to tell the story of “triumphant entry” of Jesus into Jerusalem, leaders brought a live horse onto the stage. On another occasion, to tell the story of “serpent raised in the wilderness” – a colourful, harmless and slow-moving snake was borrowed from the nearby snake park to be used as a visual aid. The interactive communication, filled with fun and laughter, really brought the children to open their hearts. It was not just reading Scriptures, but performing them in front of the kids that excited them. That revolution in communication resulted in reliving the Biblical stories. It resulted in helping the children to have a fresh look at stories, even the ones they had heard before.

4. Taking Relationship-based Ministry to a Higher Level.

The charisma of the leaders had attracted many children towards them. They made use of both the formal times on the stage and also the free times off the stage. Many activities happened during break times. The directors of VBS played with the kids, laughing with them and interacting with them. The children began to open up their lives to talk, discuss and ask questions without any threats. Special days such as ‘Love Feast’ gave more opportunities for children to come closer in their relationship with the teachers. The directors

strategically turned this in connecting the children and the Scriptures. Even though the whole program had its primary focus on children, it impacted even the volunteers who came to teach. It was follow-up fellowship meetings of these teachers after the VBS was over, that eventually gave birth to some missionary movements.

5. The Carefully developed Curriculum was a useful tool.

The lessons and curriculum faithfully, prayerfully and efficiently developed by the then SIBS faculty the Hamiltons, Ms. Esther Faulkner (later Mrs. Theodore Williams), had the depth of theology and application. The VBS developed a three-year rotatory curriculum which catered age-wise for five different departments. Each day two lessons were taught with some workbook activities and memory verses. The daily schedule included a typical plenary worship time and then two class times with a break time in between. They were carefully planned and showed the children something different from their regular school schedule, yet enjoyable. Every day finished with a solemn devotional hour. That often brought many into serious decisions in response to the Scriptural presentations. The three-year cycle, followed even at present, is based on the assumption that a child will not be in the same department for more than three years.

6. The New Initiatives.

The VBS motivated new initiatives because of the impact of that program. It gave birth to several new initiatives by churches, organisations and individuals. The VBS as a concept and a programme began to spread like wildfire. It became more visible than even the South India Bible college, of which it is still a part. Many across the country and languages know about VBS. The impact motivated many to run the programmes. It continues to evolve into new styles even at present. Several others started to try new curricula either on their own or from elsewhere. Several dioceses of the Church of South India have come up with their curriculum and their style of running the VBS. However, Scripture engagement is still the main focus of Vacation Bible Schools.

Changing Times.

Times have changed. The millennials and the Alpha generation form a significant portion of children attending VBS's today. They are more doers than listeners. They do not want to work a lot with books and writing, but they are hungry for knowledge and experience, and they get it through digital media much faster than the traditional methods of books. For them, the experience is more important than a mere memory of Bible verses. They want to try whether it works and experiment with it. Scripture says, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life"* (1 John 1:1). Therefore, we need to make Scripture engagement a viable experience for present day's children.

These children are post-modern in world views and behaviour. Scriptures are for all times. We believe the Bible does have answers to the post-modern and the google kids for their questions. Now we have the difficult task of bringing changes and adaptations in the curriculum that will engage the present-day children. The world of children is changing much faster than churches and Christian organizations. Their ways of communications are also different. Therefore we need to speedily, prayerfully and strategically engage them with the Scriptures. If we do so, as promised, the 'Word' will not return in vain.

As described in the Old Testament, we should teach Scripture to them diligently engaging them when they sit, stand, walk or lie down, letting them see it, letting them hear it and also motivating them to ask more questions. The defining moments in our Scripture engagement are the times they begin to ask questions like it says, *"When the son asks you"* (Deuteronomy 6:20). VBS today should give opportunities for children to ask questions.

We need Scripture-based curricula, but experience centred and learner-centred. The application of these Scriptures to their world of today only will keep them engaged. However, the church does face stricter challenges as the questions before the next generation is without easy answers. We need to reckon with and take it head-on the post-modern challenge of 'no absolutes' and where truth is only relative. As traditional and Scriptural values are under attack, we should

not shy away from genuinely taking pains to struggle and apply the Scriptures. Giving pat answers without many explanations, or being judgmental about condemning individual styles and behaviour without Scriptural support is not going to help today's children. Taking a cue from the legacy of VBS history let us engage these children through clean fun, in a relaxed atmosphere, build relationships and more importantly showcase Christian living. Then not only VBSs, even all our attempts to engage them with Scriptures will be fruitful.

Conclusion

The transition from the analogue to the digital is not easy. It should begin with our mindset first. For long, we have seen 'Scriptures' as a book. In the generations past, it was seen as a sign of spirituality to carry the book, the Bible. Yes, God in His time, with the coming of the printing press had given us the Scriptures as a book – the Bible. It was quite useful. However, with the changing times, we need to appropriate God's revelation into portals of knowledge God has now opened to us, which is the digital world. Our VBS's and Sunday Schools need to realise this and transform themselves to be more 'flesh and blood' in front of today's children. There were some exemplary worthy launches by the Bible Society, You version and One Hope. It should continue more and more, particularly in VBS, which still attracts a large number of children. May the Scriptures engage the google generation for the glory of God.

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Sources

1. The English Bible
2. The website of Vacation Bible School Ministries, Bangalore seen from August 2019 till 11/10/2019.
3. Writer's personal experiences as a VBS student, VBS teacher, VBS director and also as Associate Director of VBS ministries and also staff and ministry director for 34 years in Scripture Union India.

Scripture Engagement and Women in India: Some Perspectives

Leela Manasseh*

I am grateful to IMA leadership for dedicating a journal for understanding Scripture engagement in India. I am particularly thankful to the Editorial team for considering the subject “Scripture Engagement and Women in India”. I am thankful to all women colleagues in the ministry of the Lord over the years, for pioneering and empowering women in India through Scripture Engagement both in the Church and society. A host of women leaders¹ had gone before us and paved the way for us to continue empowering women based on God’s Word, for which we give glory and honour to God. We also affirm their courage to stand firm for the Word of God, in enhancing men and women to work side by side. Also, we affirm and appreciate current women leaders² In the IMA constituency and major national bodies – namely, Evangelical Fellowship of India, National Council of Churches in India, Catholics Bishops Conference in India and other organisations. Furthermore, we salute all men in leadership who integrated women leaders into the mainstream of decision making bodies over the years. They could hear the voice of God through the voice of women leaders at various stages over the past many decades.

Introduction

I was involved in empowering children, young people and adults through Scripture Engagement for about three decades in the context of the Evangelical Fellowship of India and about twelve years in the context of the Bible Society of India. It has been my observation that Scripture engagement or Bible engagement is defined differently and also uniquely in various contexts. To write this article, I undertook a

¹*Pandita Ramabai (late), Dr. Sheila Massey (late), Dr. Sheela Gupta (late), Mrs. Esther Williams (late), Mrs. Rivulet Lyngdoh (late), Rev. Mrs. Nirmala Vasantha Kumar (late)*

²*Dr. Juliet Thomas, Dr. Grace Sathiaraj, Mrs. Ruth Tozer (nee Warner), Dr. Kamala Cheeranjivi, Mrs. Pramila Rajendran, Mrs. Neena Williams, Ms. Christina Eapen, Dr. Sakhi Athyal, Dr. Aruna Gnanadasan, Dr. Beulah Herbert, Dr. Rini Ralte, Dr. Evangeline Mary Kamalini, Mrs. Starla Mercy Luke, Mrs. Lillian Jayaprakash, Dr. Naomani Elia Peter, Mrs. Sunitha Howell, Miss. Atola Subbong, Dr. Leela Bose, Rev. Soma Bhatkar, Rev. Shirley Lall, Mrs. Selina Mohan Das, Mrs. Kokila Desai, Miss. Smeeta Pramanik, Mrs. Aashima-Bernard-Samuel and others.*

micro-research analysis of women's articulations, testimonies, experiences, informal discussions, random interviews and Focus Group Discussion. I have integrated the insights into the discussion.

Definition: Scripture Engagement

At the National Women Leaders Conference³ the Facilitator asked the participants⁴, in a session, "Please write whatever comes to your mind when you hear the term "Scripture engagement or Bible engagement". They got divided into three groups, namely, Senior adults, Middle adults and Young adults. Each group enjoyed talking about Scripture Engagement and shared their findings with the participants. The Senior adults said, "It is reading the Bible daily; reflecting on the message; obeying God. It believes that the Bible has the power to change people if we engage with it; it will also help us to understand how to get involved in God's mission. We should engage with the Bible in our language or whichever language we know better or comfortable with". The Middle adults said, "It is reading the Bible as God's Word; reflecting; understanding what we read; responding to whatever message God gives us to each one of us. It is reading the Scripture references and the message given in the devotional books, namely 'Our Daily Bread; Streams in the Dessert, Springs in the Valley, and other books and praying through those references for becoming mature people". The Young adults said, "Bible is God's Word. Scripture Engagement is to know all about the Bible; memorising Scripture texts; understanding the stories and parables; reflecting, discussing all these and applying insights drawn from these activities to daily life to lead a meaningful and peaceful life."

The above responses form various aspects of Scripture engagement. All three groups emphasised that the Bible is the Word of God, and we need to reflect on it. Thus, we can define Scripture engagement as, "People engaging with the Bible daily, in their heart language or any language that they are comfortable with, as individuals, as families, as communities, as peer groups, as need-based groups, as professional groups, as gender groups, like interest groups, or any other groups."

³ National Women Leaders Conference held by the Bible Society of India during October 2012 at Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission, Kedgaon, Maharashtra

⁴ About one hundred and twenty participants from all over India

“They believe that the Bible is God’s Word, trusting that God will directly speak to them through it, and help them to understand and change for the better in order to lead a purposeful life in all its fullness.”

The Bible, as the Word of God, is accurate and authoritative in all that it teaches and proclaims. The Apostle Paul said, “*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work*”(2 Timothy 3:16, 17)⁵. Paul reminds Timothy of the positive influence and impact of Scripture. The inspiration and usefulness of Scripture represent a potent antidote to meaninglessness in order to make life meaningful and purposeful for children, young people and adults.

The subject is vast. However, this article will look at how Scripture Engagement has been enabling women who follow the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to live life in all its fullness, as per God’s will and purpose, amid many creative challenges in the Indian context.

The Bible is the Word of God

Although there are various views and perspectives on the nature of the Bible, in various Church denominations in India and around the world, generally women believe that “The Bible is the Word of God” and “The Bible is God’s Word”. For example, Dr. Rini Ralte⁶ articulates, “Bible as God’s Word is my source of inspiration. In it, I find strength and meaning of life through the experiences of others. When I lost my husband, my mind was empty; my heart was broken, my life-saving activity was gone. I felt I was alone, helpless and useless, and very lonely. I sat, and I cried. The Bible helped me to come back to life again. I am deeply hurt when someone uses the very same Bible I use, to put people down and make their life difficult. The Bible is life for all people. It is not a dead book. The Bible gives life to all people, including widows, who are looked down upon in our Indian context. I strongly believe that the Bible is the source of inspiration, a life-giving reality which should never be misused or misinterpreted by anyone.”

⁵*New Living Translation. Women’s Study Bible*, ⁶*Vice Principal and Professor, United Theological College, Bangalore, actively involved in Scripture engagement*

Although most of the feminist theologians generally agree that the biblical traditions and Christian theology were written, shaped and formulated mostly by men in a male-dominated context. However, it is equally important to recognise the fundamental biblical understanding that every human being is of value before God. Rev⁷ (2007, p.73) rightly argues about the equal value and affirmation of all human beings in the biblical narrative. He wrote, “Misuse of the Bible as a tool of oppression by some as well as accusations by others that the Bible is itself irredeemably patriarchal, both fail to see that whatever the Bible may say about roles and functions of individual human beings, the equal value of every human being is affirmed throughout the biblical narrative. The case for such equality can be made based on creation, the fall, the law, the incarnation, salvation, the giving of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the Church, and the Christian understanding of mission.”

Empowering Women through Scripture Engagement

The biblical texts – Genesis 1 and 2 provide doctrinal teaching concerning the nature of humanity as male and female. That provides an important starting point for the study of the biblical teaching on gender equality as rightly articulated by David Ball. While empowering women through Scripture engagement, often, gender equality issues rise in different ways. Some of the questions that women are asking include, “What is God’s image? What is God saying about men and women? In what way are men and women equal? In what way are men and women not equal? Why are women in some contexts abused? What is the remedy?”

Talking about the image of God, Dr. Juliet Thomas asserts in her article⁸, “Jesus came not only to give us life but abundant life in all its overflowing fullness. How can we, as a Christian community, have this life in its fullness? Moreover, how can this fullness we experience and enjoy, overflow among those we live bringing in the expression of equality and development of both the male and the female? How can we bring God’s ‘shalom’ to one’s whole being?”

Scripture engagement paves the way for women to ask questions and look for answers in God’s Word for making life a meaningful thing not only to themselves but to other women around them. When women

⁷ Dr David Ball’s article in “Side by Side” edited by Dr Beulah Wood and published by SAIACS, p. ⁸ Dr Juliet Thomas’s article in “Called To Serve” edited by Dr E. L. Manasseh and published by TAFTEE

engage with God's Word in small groups, women look to the Bible to see what it teaches about itself, as it is God's Word. For example, Smeeta Pramanik⁹, illustrates the impact of God's Word in Kandhamal district of Odisha. She said, "What I have been observing is that women find answers to all their questions in God's Word, in straight forward ways. Engaging with God's Word directly in their languages helps them to understand the message of God daily for their ordinary life. Christian women gather together regularly to read, reflect and respond to God's Word in ordinary ways. They learn from Abraham's prayer to pray for those who persecuted them in Kandhamal. They help each other by sharing their resources. Violence against women is there. They become strong and overcome violence in godly ways, as they apply what they learn from God's Word to their everyday life. They forgive their husbands and others who abuse them in the name of Lord Jesus Christ. I see a transformation taking place in the people whom they forgive and relate to them lovingly. That does not mean that women should be silent about abuse. What I see is that God is helping the entire community to become a better community through these women who are showing Christ's love. That is the power of God's Word."

While affirming the power of God's Word and believing that no one is not beyond the grace of God, many Christian women believe that God can transform the abusers. However, we need to teach women to take care of themselves and seek help for their spouses. They can be part of Biblical Trauma Counselling and Healing group that cares for them.

The message of the Bible can be grasped by anyone who seeks to understand it diligently and humbly. Christian women who face domestic violence believe that God's Word is essential for them to overcome domestic violence. Because God inspires it, it is useful for those who are seeking to live the Christian life in the Indian context, like in many countries. On the one hand, society holds women responsible for many vital actions, namely, family health, nutrition, education, food production and family income. On the other hand, women do not get the information, resources and freedom of action that they need in order to carry out their responsibilities.

⁹who served as EFI Secretary for Eastern Zone for several years

A woman's life is not easy. She has to struggle to exist in the Indian context as also in various other countries. She is overworked, unwanted, disadvantaged and threatened by violence. However, she continues to be a provider for her family and producer for the nation. Discipled women reach out to such women through Scripture engagement as God's Word alone helps us to discover the goodnews of Christ's redeeming love and work. God's Word alone can provide a remedy for sin.

Women long for engaging with God's Word because they realise that God's Word alone contains all that people need to know to be faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Vimala Daniel¹⁰, shares her testimony. "I am thankful to my Catholic Church for encouraging the congregation to study God's Word seriously daily and practice it. I believe that the Bible is the Word of God. I believe in the traditional role of the Church in interpreting the Bible to us, ordinary people, who sit in the pews. I just retired as the Branch Manager of State Bank of India. Engaging with God's Word daily, as taught by my Church and praying were the key factors for my exemplary life in my family and vocation."

"We enjoy the *Lectio Divina* method of Scripture engagement and the *Ignatian* method. One Scripture engagement technique that has a long and rich history, and that has been experiencing a resurgence in recent years, is *Lectio Divina*, Latin for "sacred reading" or "holy reading." This is a method of celebrating and immersing yourself in a set of words or verses in the Bible. It recognises the Bible as the Living Word of God and involves highly intentional reading and contemplation. The *Ignatian* method of Scripture engagement gives us the opportunity to engage our imaginations by placing ourselves in the stories of Scripture in an attempt to better empathise with the people of the Bible and understand the stories in a more experiential way."

"There were ups and downs in life. But through all the changing scenes of my life and our family life, God's Word kept us moving. I send God's Word daily through WhatsApp to friends and relatives. I have

¹⁰ Mrs.Vimala Daniel recently retired as the Branch Manager, State Bank of India, Bangalore

been able to empower women in need through God's Word. I cannot narrate all the incidents. But I must tell that whenever and wherever I came across wealthy women, needy women and rejected women. God helped me to share stories of hope in the midst of despair from God's Word. In my own sphere of little influence, women in despair found hope through their engagement with the Bible – the Word of God. All the stories and teachings in the entire Bible come alive when we make time to sit alone with God's Word and also sit as a family. Life becomes very meaningful even in the midst of many difficulties and uncertainties. I pray and read the Bible, reflect and meditate on the text, respond and pray through the Scripture for applying it to my life. It is very simple, but it strengthens me. I am able to help my children and others to engage with God's Word to lead a meaningful life.”

Rev. Dr. Fr. Anthony John Baptist¹¹ says, “We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, but it needs to be interpreted by the Church as it is the only reliable interpreter. Modern critical scholarship has influenced the Catholic Church, but the traditional view continues to play a very significant role in the Catholic Church doctrine. We have introduced a systematic study of God's Word for children, young people and adults.” To the query, how women look at the Bible, Father Baptist's response was, “Recently we introduced **Reading of God's Word**. They have taken up studying the Bible seriously and systematically, and they are the forerunners in applying the teachings of God's Word in daily life, wherein the transformation of life for the better is taking place slowly. Families are being touched slowly and steadily. Those who are addicted to substance abuse and other abuses are redeemed through Scripture engagement, although it is a very slow process. Women continue to play a significant role, being in difficult circumstances, enhancing the transformation of people, through Scripture engagement.”

Way Forward

The above discussions make sense to Christian ministry due to the doctrine of the authority and truthfulness of the Bible as God's Word. Engaging women with the Scripture creatively in their heart language is the best way forward to enhance women to experience life in all its fullness.

¹¹*Executive Secretary, Commission for Bible, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI)*

There are several local, national and international Governmental and non-Governmental organisations working for the rights of women and the upliftment of women. However, we need to continue to focus on the spiritual empowerment, which is the basis for all-round empowerment of women.

What do we do next?

Let us identify all the women in missions who are engaging people with Scripture. That may be through various forms of Bible study, Bible dramatisation, public Bible reading, Scripture memorisation, Scripture singing, and other forms of involvement. Let us work together in enabling women to find their identity in the Lord Jesus Christ and improve their status. Engaging women with the Word of God is the best way forward. Perhaps, we need to form a national forum for empowering women through Scripture engagement, which in turn may form regional forums for enhancing more women to join us. The time has come for Christian women of all Church denominations and women in Christian missions to work together for engaging women with the Scripture in more creative ways. Let us do together that which we cannot do separately in fulfilling God's mission.

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Scripture Engagement in the Bhatra tribe

Kirivasan*

Introduction

“You know to read and write. Why don’t you write that black book in our language and go?” That was the cry to the missionaries by the Bhatra seekers during the time of persecution in the year 1998. Now the New Testament in Bhatri language has been translated and printed. We released it on the 18th of October, 2019.”It’s not enough to translate the Bible; it’s not enough to distribute the Bible. We desire to see real Scripture Engagement: people encountering God’s Word in life-changing ways.”¹

What is Scripture Engagement? Why is Scripture Engagement vital in the tribal context? What are the appropriate ways to engage Scripture among them? How are Scripture engagement activities being practiced among the Bhatra tribe? What are the challenges to practice and promote Scripture engagement among them? In this article, I will discuss these questions and conclude with relevant answers which are appropriate in the central Indian tribal context.

Background

The Bhatra tribe is one of the major tribes in the state of Chhattisgarh. They inhabit the Bastar district and also live in the Navrangpur and Koraput districts of Odisha. R. V. Russell describes them as “A primitive tribe of the Bastar State and the general south of Raipur District, akin to the Gonds. They numbered 33,000 persons in 1891, and in subsequent enumerations of them have been amalgamated with the Gonds. Nothing is known of their origin except a legend that they came with the Rajas of Bastar from Warangal twenty-three generations ago. The word Bhatra is said to mean a ‘servant’, and the tribe is employed as village watchmen and household and domestic servants.”² In Odisha, we call the Bhatras as Bhattadas. According to the 1981 census, there are 2,47,000 in Odisha.³ Within Bhatras, there are three divisions, which are Pit, Amnait and San Bhatras. Pit Bhatras

¹“Scripture Engagement | Encountering God’s Word in Life-Changing Ways,” accessed 18th of December, 2019, <http://www.scripture-engagement.org/>. ²R. V. Russell, “The Tribes and Castes of The Central Provinces of India -Bhatra - Indpaedia,” 1916, 271, <http://www.indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Bhatra>. ³Jacob, “Strategies for Discipling the Bhatra Tribe of Bastar District,” Madhya Pradesh, 1992, 19.

is the highest, and the San are the lowest. The Bhatras speak the Bhatri language. Traditionally they are hunters, food-gatherers in the forest, and cultivators. They also make baskets. Apart from Bhatras, other people groups also speak Bhatri as their mother tongue.

The Bhatras' belief about gods, deities and other religious practices are the same as the other people who live in Bastar district. They believe that there is a supreme God whom they call '*Maparbu*'. They do not have any idol or form which represents '*Maparbu*'. They think that he is the creator and possesses the power. However, '*Maparbu*' is a god who is distant. They also believe in different deities, such as village deities and family deities.

“According to the 1981 census, the Christian population of Bastar district is 11,071, which is 0.60% of the total population of the district”.⁴ The Indian Evangelical Mission (IEM) started to work exclusively among the Bhatras from 1993. We did not see Christianity among Bhatras outwardly expressed until 1997. Now in 2019, there are about 200 Bhatra baptised believers worshipping in 9 different villages.

The writer of this paper has been living in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh since 1994. He and his family are ministering among the Bhatra tribe, which was non-receptive to the gospel until 1997. When a group of Bhatras responded to the gospel in April 1997, persecution broke out. The reason was that the local deities were losing their powers. Different kinds of efforts were taken by the locals to send the missionaries out of the village. At that juncture, the new believers asked the missionaries to translate the '*Black book*', the Bible, in their language.

What is Scripture Engagement?

*According to the Summer Institute of Linguistics, “Scripture Engagement involves accessing, understanding and interacting meaningfully with the life-changing message of the Scriptures.”*⁵

Scripture engagement, according to Fergus Mac Donald, former General Secretary of the United Bible Societies, refers to the ways Christian leaders and communities “help people interact with the Bible as the Word of God.” His view of Scripture engagement does include

⁴Jacob, “Strategies for Discipling the Bhatra Tribe of Bastar District,” Madhya Pradesh.

⁵“Scripture Engagement,” SIL International, August 2, 2012, <https://www.sil.org/translation/scripture-engagement>.

phenomena such as “faith” and “communities of interpretation and practice.”⁶

Joseph V. Crockett, of the American Bible Society, says, “I use the term Scripture engagement to refer to the acquisition, development, or performance of abilities that facilitate or help other people interact with the Bible as the Word of God – that is, a text to which individuals afford deliberative thought and allegiance.”⁷ He further says, “Scripture engagement also involves persons in their roles as a reader, speaker, hearer, receiver, interpreter, or bystander. Each of these ways of engaging Scripture supports the understanding that engagement with the Bible is never an individual activity, even when used alone.”⁸

The above definitions stress both understanding of the Scripture and the interaction with it for life-changing results. In other words, scripture engagement means the different activities carried out to give access to the Scripture, which will enable people to understand and obey it to bring transformation in their lives.

Why is Scripture Engagement vital in the tribal context?

The New Testament in Bhatra is available now and is in the hands of the people, making Scripture Engagement among the Bhatras crucial for the following reasons.

Firstly, the present missionary team is committed to establishing Scripture-based healthy churches among them.

Secondly, a Bibleless church will end up in syncretism. It will leave the churches very shallow in their faith, and the church will become ineffective to attract other people towards the gospel.

Thirdly, Scripture engagement is one of the components that most of the mission agencies and the churches tend to take for granted.

Fourthly, the Scripture engagement aims to see a life-changing experience not just in the people’s outward behaviour, but in their world view. That is possible when Scripture becomes an authoritative text.

⁶Joseph V Crockett, “Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations: An Interactive Perspective that Examines Psychological and Social Processes of Individuals as they Engage Scripture Texts,” *Black Theology* 3, no. 1 (January 2005): 98.

⁷Crockett, 99. ⁸Crockett, 99.

People use Scripture in their day-to-day living. “In order to help people engage Scripture as an authoritative text, one must understand how individuals perceive Scripture and the conditions under which they use and engage it. Such an understanding can lead individuals and groups to hold Scripture as an authoritative text that informs and guides their daily actions.”⁹ The authoritative text for a disciple of Christ is not the missionaries’ weekly sermon or any other supernatural spiritual experiences, but the Word of God.

What are the appropriate ways to engage the Scripture among the *Adivasis*?

Traditional ways of Scripture engagement may be alien to the *Adivasis*. When people approach Scripture for the first time, many elements may be confusing. Wayne Dye, in his article “The Eight Conditions for Scripture Engagement”, writes “People need sufficient background knowledge to make sense of scripture.”¹⁰ Therefore, Scripture in appropriate forms help to give a sound Biblical background.

Firstly, tribal people found in central India, especially the Bhatras, have less competency and understanding in the second language. Though most of the tribes are competent in their mother tongue, few manage to handle other communication to the same extent. They may use one language for the market, another for home life, and another for the church. They associate each language with different functions and different social groupings. Vernacular languages and languages of full communication (LWC) are suited to various tasks in any given community. For instance, some of the Bhatras use Hindi as a language of speech and as a language for the market: “Using a market language to buy carrots doesn’t mean that that same language is the preferred one to learn about God.”¹¹ So firstly, using a Scripture text which is most close to people’s heart is the appropriate way to begin Scripture engagement, preferably using their mother tongue.

Secondly, when working with local communities, missionaries who are working in scripture engagement ought to use local genre terms,

⁹Crockett, 98.¹⁰“89-98_Eight Conditions.Pdf,” accessed December 17, 2019, https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/26_2_PDFs/89-98_Eight%20Conditions.pdf.

¹¹“Arts Development for Scripture Engagement,” Scripture Engagement, 2, accessed the 17th of December, 2019, <http://www.scripture-engagement.org/content/arts-development-scripture-engagement>.

following the semantic domains of the target language. Local art is a genre that society considers as characteristic of their people, belonging to them, and performing an essential function in their community. Every culture has unique styles, including elements of a song, dance, drama, poetry, storytelling, and visual arts.¹² For example, the Bhatras love to engage themselves in *naat* (drama). Even though the Bhatras do not believe and worship Hindu gods and goddesses, they get very influenced by the *naat* which narrates the stories of Ramayana. It is equivalent to the other Indian genre *Bharatanatyam*, which has elements of music, dance, drama, and visual arts. Bhatra tribe mainly follows the oral culture. “Oral cultures use arts to pass on crucial knowledge from one generation to another. When they communicate Scripture in their own genres, they fully take ownership of their faith. People learn more easily and rapidly in languages and genres that they understand well.”¹³

Thirdly, Biblical storytelling can be an appropriate means of Scripture engagement, to begin with, and to give Biblical background to the people. Dennis Dewey, a professional Biblical storyteller, likes to point out that public Scripture reading often sounds like ‘spoken print.’ The people who first received God’s Word, however, lived in an oral culture, not a literate one. He further says, “Stories can be memorised in a few hours, but it takes weeks to learn the story ‘by heart.’ I suggest that people begin learning the story at least six weeks before they will be telling it.”¹⁴ However, we should give careful attention to the words of Dr. Omana Soundararaj, who said, “In many rural areas storying the contents of the Scripture is thought enough! With this method care should always be taken to direct people to the written Word lest they are deprived of the original contents of the Scriptures, the figures of speech, and the Word pictures that God Himself uses to express Himself. And also it is possible to miss out on the whole counsel of God.”¹⁵

¹²Michelle Petersen, “[Article] Arts Development for Scripture Engagement” 5, no. 1 (n.d.): 2.¹³Petersen, 2.¹⁴“Biblical Storytelling: Learning Scripture by Heart,” accessed the 20th of December, 2019, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/biblical-storytelling-learning-scripture-by-heart/>.¹⁵“Indian Evangelical Mission,” accessed the 20th of December, 2019, <http://www.iemoutreach.org/redirect.php?display=publications. 'Outreach', August 2017 Page.10>

Challenges to Practice and Promote Scripture Engagement among the *Adivasis*

There is no Christian life without challenges. When it comes to Scripture, it is much more challenging with the *Adivasis* and their tribal languages.

The first and foremost challenge is the availability of Scripture in the tribal language. We hamper Scripture engagement when Scripture is not available. Even though we may use other languages, it is not giving very satisfactory results.

Secondly, it is about the usage of the second language. “Even when people understand the Bible in a second language, the truth often loses its impact because hearers perceive God as distant and Christian faith as of little relevance to their daily lives. Unfortunately, many people learn their Christian faith through a language of wider communication, while traditional folk religion is in their local language.”¹⁶ The church need not be the place to teach the state language. It is a place to make people understand God’s Word.

Thirdly, the colonial attitude of the missionaries and the pastors hinders the faith of believers. In most of the churches, even when the congregation does not understand the second or state language, they continue to use that language. Most of the Pastors want to maintain their status and also show their fluency in the second language.

Fourthly, the illiteracy among the tribal people. The other forms of Scripture engagement cannot replace the reading, re-reading, and meditation on the written Word. This list can go on.

Fifthly, I would like to mention a significant challenge. There is an unhealthy interpersonal relationship problem among missionaries within the same agency, which hinders Scripture engagement activities in most of the mission fields. The missionaries in the team may use the people’s local language to evangelise. However, some team members do not use or encourage the use of the translated Scripture owing to interpersonal relationship issues with the Bible translator.

¹⁶Crockett 89-98_Eight Conditions.Pdf.”

How are Scripture Engagement activities being practised among the Bhatras?

“People need to be able to read, hear, and see Scripture. The more forms scripture is in, the wider the audience who can use it, because people do not have to learn how to read before they can access Scripture.”¹⁷ Scripture Engagement involves reading, hearing and seeing the Scripture. The missionary team among the Bhatra tribe prepared the believers in the following areas even before the Scripture was available.



Intentional Bible reading is an important issue: We were intentional that people should read the Scripture. Illiteracy is a common excuse. If the missionaries are determined to make the believers read God’s Word, they can do it. On the other hand, we cannot separate literacy from Bible translation. We prepared literacy books in the Bhatra language, and we taught the believers to read and write. It was an ongoing ministry along with evangelism. Since 1994, I never heard someone preaching on the Bible who asked the believers, “Have you read the Bible?” in the tribal region of Bastar. Even before the Bhatra New Testament was released, our team members printed a sticker asking “Have you read the Bible today?” and distributed it among the believers. It was a new experience for believers to come across such questions.

Printed materials: We got different printed materials available for the engagement of Scripture. We made bookmarks, hanging wall posters, stickers, key chains, pens, carry bags, steel plates and yearly calendars with Bible verses. These materials were distributed to believers and to non-believers that helped in the reading of God’s word.

¹⁷Crockett 89-98_Eight Conditions.Pdf,” 93.

Verses on a Calendar: We also printed calendars with scripture verses. The daily verses in the calendar helped our new literate believers to read at least one verse daily.

Audio Scripture: Our team prepared some Scripture materials for people to hear, for example, gospel videos and gospel messages in audio format, which we distributed to believers and non-believers. Audio Bible recording of the whole Bhatri New Testament is in progress.

Song writing was another avenue to interest People: Along with the Bible Translation, we have also encouraged the believers to write songs in Bhatri. We believe that the local songs will make a significant positive impact on the churches. For example, Martin Luther wrote many songs along with Bible Translation. When Eugen Eckert writes on the reformation, he mentions, “The Reformation was ultimately spread through song, not through preaching or writing.”¹⁸ So efforts on recording Bhatri songs are also underway.

Drama (naat): In addition to these visual arts, we also organised scripture-based scenes for people to learn background knowledge of the Scripture. For example, cultural *naat* ‘drama’ was one of the practical tools in our area. We used this useful tool to proclaim the Gospel message through drama. We wore traditional dresses of the local culture so that people could watch and quickly receive the message.

Plans for the future: The following are some of the upcoming projects of the team for Scripture engagement. Fluent reading competition, memory verse competition, Sunday school materials, Scripture reading in the churches, short term Bible classes, church-based literacy, one year New Testament reading plan, Scripture reading clubs, discussions on scriptural passages, and monthly Bible studies. We also plan to produce messages in audio form.

Conclusion

When people receive the Word of God in their language with different forms of Scripture engagement activities that are meaningful to them, they will understand the content. Then they will interact with it, resonate with it, and integrate the message with their lives. Engaging with God through reading, seeing and hearing help people love him with all their

¹⁸Michelle Petersen, “[Article]Arts Development for Scripture Engagement”5,no1(n.d.): 2.

hearts, souls, minds, and strength. That is the primary purpose of engaging with Scripture. We want to see that encounter with God's Word which brings transformation in the lives of people.

Revelation reminds us, *"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it because the time is near."*(Revelation 1:3). Paul exhorts us, *"Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord."*(Ephesians 5:19) Paul also says, *"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching."*(1 Timothy 4:13). Both the readers and the hearers are blessed if they obey these instructions.

Effective Scripture engagement will guard believers against false doctrine and deceitful spirits in the end times. It will help them to stay firm in their faith.

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Scripture Engagement in the Dhurwa Tribal Group

Selvi Michael*

Scripture Engagement is to do with all activities designed and carried out with the specific objective of achieving acceptance and use of vernacular literature (Dye, 1986:3). In this article I want to focus on the Scripture Engagement (SE) activities that were done and accomplished among the Dhurwa tribal group who live in and around AB village and the activities that could be done in future.

The Dhurwa tribal group is one of the tribal groups that are in the Bastar district, located in the southernmost part of the Chhattisgarh state. Majority of the Dhurwa people live in the south-east of Jagdalpur, the district headquarters, beyond the Kolab-Sabari River in Sukma Zamindari Estate and around Mount Tulsidongri in Sukma and Jagadalpur tehsil bordering Jeypore-Koraput of Odisha.

According to the Linguistic Survey of India, this now called Dhurwa language was called Parji. The Parji language got the name Dhurwa probably 50 to 70 years ago. The people group known as the Takara Parja has changed their name to Dhurwa and their language is Dhurwa. It belongs to the family of the central Dravidian language group. About 80,000 people speak the Dhurwa language.

Dhurwa people are fundamentally animists, and they worship the spirits. They do not worship idols. They have some stone pillars and wooden poles to represent the different spirits, which they worship. Their religious ceremonies or worship is meant for their well-being and done in fear of those spirits. So it is a fertility cult.

The Dhurwa people were not exposed to the gospel until IEM started its work among them in the 1980s. However, the schedule caste people living around them became Christians by the work of Methodist missionaries in the last two centuries. Those schedule caste Christians living around did not have a good testimony. They also did not know the gospel. Because of that, the Dhurwas denoted the word “Christians” for the scheduled caste people.

In and around 2000, the Dhurwa people, family by family began to follow Christ. The Dhurwa converts attended the Methodist church, the New Apostolic church, the Bible Mission church and the Indian Missionary Society (T) church. They began to show a real interest to have scripture in their mother tongue as they could not read and understand the national language, Hindi Scriptures. Their interest was such that the children of the converts became part of the Dhurwa Bible Translation project, which was started and supported by Indian Evangelical Mission in 1985.

The goal of this project was to produce Scriptures in the Dhurwa language so that the Dhurwa people can read and understand for themselves the Scripture in their mother tongue. Those Scriptures only change the lives of the people who read or hear them and respond to what they read and use the translated Scriptures for spiritual growth. Having that in mind, Scripture Engagement (SE) analyses and activities were started from the beginning of the project and done throughout the life of the project. According to Bendor-Samuel, *“A proper attention to the informal promotion of Scripture used from the earliest stages of the translation program should free us from any feeling of responsibility to stay on to promote its use when the translation has been completed”*(Bendor-Samuel 1981:4).

Oral Storying *“Giving oral people Scripture in oral form puts the Bible within their reach”*(Hill & Hill 2007:107). The oral storying method, which is one of the traditional forms of communication, to start with, was used. This method was particularly helpful in reaching the un-evangelized Dhurwa people. We used stories because these are easy for people to remember. We started telling stories of the creation, fall of man, sin, the great flood which led to God’s plan of salvation through the stories of the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. After one such storying session, using the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, we started dialoguing with the hearers as usual. Mr. Pardesi came up with the question, *“Then do you mean to say, only your God is the all-powerful and true God?”* That was a heart-warming question which opened doors for a personal testimony. Having a direct personal ministry based upon getting people to interact with, and grow in the knowledge of the Word was energizing. Through

this, we were able to touch lives, even though an entire assignment was not carried out.

Later, in the project, in 2012, the native believers crafted a set of stories (40 of them), which helped the new believers to have a clearer understanding of God's plan of salvation. They recorded the stories and played it in hand-sets or MP3 players. This set of stories aimed to disciple new Christians and to help them face persecution from their community. According to the socio-linguistic survey done in 1986, the surveyors found that there were around four to five mutually intelligible dialects in the Dhurwa language. About one-third of the Dhurwa population live in the neighbouring state of Odisha. Therefore, giving oral Scripture helped a lot in crossing dialect boundaries and even in crossing state boundaries.

Ethnomusicology

Instruction and encouragement in ethnomusicology can help people to move the domain of worshipping God to local thought-forms. Therefore, it is a valuable SE tool. Dhurwa people is a singing and dancing community. They sing stories and their histories on several occasions like weeding and harvesting the field, name giving and wedding ceremonies. The tune used for this purpose is called "*TollereChadu*" in Dhurwa, which means "Kith and Kin". Mr Samu was a very well-known singer. So we told him the story of the creation and the lost sheep and made him sing it in "*Tollere Chadu*" tune. After recording it, I replayed the tune inside my home and listened to it. Once, when the tune was being played, I came out of the house and was surprised to see an older woman, who used to be very unfriendly, standing near the fence of the house, beaming with joy and enjoying the song. That is the power of the native tune. As Mr Raidhar, one of my mother tongue translators, told me, "*If we sing the message of God in "Tollere Chadu" tune, it is melodious, and it touches our hearts.*" He felt that for the Dhurwa people, music is a reliable and useful vehicle of spiritual truth than even the written word. That is because music is already a part of their culture.

Music plays a significant role in Christian life. It gives us a way to express our emotions and our thoughts in praise and worship. (Hill & Hill 2007:135). In the young Dhurwa church, people usually sing Hindi

(state language), Halbi (lingua franca) or translated Dhurwa songs. Sometimes they did not understand what they are singing. The result was that the congregation was not fascinated by the singing and the services were not lively. Now the young believers are composing songs using a music style that they used traditionally, and everyone sings them with great attention. A couple of Psalms were set to local music style and are sung joyfully by the congregation. To get oral learners to memorise Scripture is not that easy. Since we started using Scripture songs, people remember a lot more Scripture verses. It is a fantastic way of getting spiritual truths across to them that otherwise would take a long time for them to learn. Until we get enough Scripture for them to be able to read, this is an excellent method for them to understand scripture. According to Arne Garborg, *"To love a person is to learn the song that is in their heart and sing it to them when they have forgotten."*

Drama

Drama is a form of audio-visual communication that requires no equipment at all. However, it can change the hearts of the audience and the actors. There are many different forms of drama, each suitable for a different occasion. It is another tool which helps the people understand and engage with scripture. Every year on Christmas day, the youth and the Sunday school children of the church perform a drama of the Christmas story. Christians and non-Christians gather with all excitement in the church ground to watch it. The drama interspersed with songs and dances lasts for two to three hours. That is the only time when non-Christians come to the church premises and hear God's message of salvation.

Every year we write a new script for the drama, and we add new stories of the Bible to the birth story of Jesus. For example, once we added the story of Ruth, and we passed on the message of how a Moabite non-Jewish woman was one of the ancestors of Jesus. At another time, we added the story of Esther to show how God preserved his chosen race and kept his promise in bringing Jesus, the Messiah into this world. We added these stories to encourage women who also came forward to enact the play. The children and the youth spend two to three months practising the drama and enact it on Christmas day.

Another form of drama, which is very famous in Bastar, is called “*Nat*”. The “*Nat*” specialists go around and recite the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata along with songs. They do this in Odiya language since the “*Nat Gurus*” (drama teachers) are usually from the state of Odisha, and the art has been passed on from generation to generation in Odiya language. IEM missionaries working among the Bhatra tribal group of Bastar adapted this method and enacted Bible stories in the Bhatri language. That became a tremendous success among the Bhatra group. The Bhatra believers are now willing to teach this to the Dhurwa youth who are keen to learn this art.

Scripture Memorization, Quiz, Games, Gifts

Children or youth meetings used to have Scripture memorisation, games related to scriptures, quiz, competitions and other activities. When children and youth actively take part in these activities, their faith and spiritual hunger often grow. Use of posters, banners, calendars, wall hangers, stickers, paintings, key chains and pens with Scripture verses are some visual ways of helping people engage with Scripture.

Small booklets

Over the years, the wise use of resources such as the use of small booklets like New Readers Series on Old and New Testaments, stories on “Jesus has power to save”, “Creation”, “The flood”, provided occasional stimulus to learn. In 1990 we brought out the first book in Dhurwa, “Creation Story”, with the help of the Bible Society of India. We were able to print the “Gospel of Mark” in 2007. Then we were able to bring out a booklet on “Christian Family” with selected proverbs from the book of Proverbs at the beginning of 2019.

Jesus Film

We were able to translate and dub The “Jesus Film” produced by Campus Crusade into Dhurwa in 1999. It was and still is one of the great evangelistic tools. Many people were moved in their hearts after viewing the film and accepted Christ after seeing it. Those who were already Christians also got significantly benefitted. They got a much better idea of life in Israel. It also helped them to know that Israel is a real country on this earth. That also helped some of the believers to memorise certain important Scriptural truths much more quickly than by any other mode of communication. One lady, Gangey, could not

read and write. However, she memorised most of the dialogues of this film and quoted them when she interacted with others when they come up with any spiritual or health issues.

Short Term Bible Course

In 2010, a group of young men from different villages gathered together to study the Bible for ten days. They were taught fundamental Biblical doctrines based on “One hundred Bible lessons” and were discipled. That brought a more in-depth knowledge of the Word. We then encouraged them to begin a similar ministry in their areas. Many of them are now either pastors or leaders in their local congregations.

Reading Club

One of the lay leaders is Mr. Sukral. In his house, more than ten elders gather around the fireplace daily. It is customary for the Dhurwa people to gather like that, to talk about day to day affairs and either relax or make bamboo artifacts, while the womenfolk prepare their supper. Raidhar adopted this situation to check the translated portions of the scripture with this group. This community testing of the translated portions achieved that objective of acceptance of the use of the vernacular literature. Eventually, that became a Reading Club. These people were regularly found to minister, teach and apply the Word. For many of them, the Scriptures were not relevant to ordinary everyday life. However, that platform provided a way of helping them to use the scripture naturally in daily situations. It showed how a church leader, or any Christian, can use them to solve problems.

Teaching and Medication

Jairam, one of the youth leaders decided to join this elders group when one day he peeped into the house to see what was happening. He expressed his desire to Raidhar and said, “I would like to come every day to this place and listen to God’s stories. I find this more useful than wasting my time with other youth simply talking of other stories”. From then on, he was regular to this group. After checking three of the gospels, Mr. Sukral told Raidhar, “You know people call me for treating them with herbal medicines. Now I know many of the Gospel stories by heart. I will tell those stories to people, pray with them and dispense the medicines, when called”. Many of the elders in the church can now

understand enough Christian teaching to make sense of the Scriptures, and they know how to learn new things from Scripture.

Listening Club

Similarly, a self-help group of women gather in Letchun's house every day around 10 in the morning. Their usual task is to make leaf cups and cook snacks for sale. Usually, Dhurwa women make leaf cups of four different types every day. One is for drinking Ragi(millet) gruel; one is for eating rice, another one for the curry, and one more for a side-dish. It is customary for them to use leaf cups than eating in plates, though the modern trend is slowly turning towards the use of plates. That eventually became a Listening Club, where the translated portions, were recorded in audio form and played to them. Further, that allowed ladies to come together, listen to a passage from the Bible and talk about it together.

They also had adequate opportunity to clarify their doubts. One of their doubts was what does the Bible say about women teaching the word of God. That came to the surface when one of their leaders reading 1 Corinthians 14:34, began to withdraw from leading the mothers' meeting. They got their answers by listening and discussing the word of God. The women leaders became equipped to teach their children and other ladies by this activity. They were helped to become spiritually free to follow Christ wholeheartedly, including turning from ancestor worship, traditional magic, fetish worship and other practices, when those conflict with the teaching of the Bible.

Literacy

Literacy is a vital, essential precursor to Scripture Engagement. There are significant numbers of adult non-literates among the Dhurwa people, who never had a chance to learn to read and write. There are also a vast majority of school dropouts, who struggle to read fluently. We developed many alphabet charts, pre-primers, primers and fluency readers in 1989 and revised in 2011. These were to promote reading fluency through adult literacy classes, reading clubs, fluency courses and reading practice in other courses. There are two main types of literacy programmes. (1) community-based literacy programme and (2) the church-based literacy programme. We tried with the church-based literacy programme. A few women in the church started coming

to the adult literacy classes, but they got bored after a while. Now, we have some concerns such as, who will organise, and who will teach in the Literacy class? We should have thriving literacy programmes in the churches to enable more people to read the Bible.

Bible Study

During the consultant checking of the first and second epistles of Peter, Jeysing, the Methodist Youth Fellowship leader got a shock. He said, “Till now all the messages that we have heard are just from Mathew, Mark and Luke. We never knew such wonderful deep truths are there for us in the Bible.” According to Hill, “it is true that there is a tendency for the leaders to use the parts that were already familiar to them—mainly the gospels—and not use very much of the Epistles” (Hill 1986:26). Therefore, we need to help the leaders to broaden their horizons so that they would use the whole New Testament in their teaching and preaching.

So Jeysing took a particular interest, one summer, to collect the youth for a Bible study, based on the epistles of Peter. Later they studied the epistles that were written by Paul as well. In this way, the youth leaders were equipped to teach others how to study the Bible and apply it to their daily lives. After these studies, he and another girl named Karuna started teaching what they learnt to the Sunday school children and in cottage prayer meetings. They felt much appreciated by the children and the adults for their enthusiastic teaching. In one such cottage meeting, when they read the translated portion to the people for the first time, the response from the people was overwhelming. One of them said, “there is no need for a separate message now. What we have heard in Dhurwa is self-explanatory. We understood perfectly well. The meeting is over. Let us disperse now.”

Participatory Method Workshops

We also conducted participatory method workshops on topics like” Use of mother tongue in the worship service”, “Key Biblical terms”, “Bible background information.” They were highly beneficial. In some congregations, the pastors are not from the Dhurwa language group, and they also did not learn the local Dhurwa language. They have the whole Bible in Hindi, the state language, and they received all their

theological education in Hindi. They had no idea how to express Biblical concepts in the local language. So they could not encourage their congregations to use the mother tongue in liturgy or reading of Scriptures. That was a definite barrier to the use of the mother-tongue in worship. Therefore, we got the liturgy used in the Methodist congregations translated into Dhurwa. Further, we also compiled a Dhurwa songbook in the year 2012. The workshop on the use of mother tongue in the worship service helped the elders to appreciate their language and use it in praying and singing. *“Churches have become used to Scripture in the trade language and, until the New Testament appears in the local language in printed form, it has no rival. This makes church leaders’ seminars and the like all the more important. ...at every possible opportunity. In fact - we need to be discussing and demonstrating how the translated Scriptures can be used, and giving opportunity for those who have ideas to share them.”* (Perrin1982:30).

Key Biblical Terms Workshop

The workshop on Key Biblical terms was an eye-opener to many of the pastors and elders. We gave them adequate information to make informed decisions on the rendering of terms like sin, grace, salvation, prophet, holy, Holy Spirit, redemption, circumcision and many other terms. It was an excellent environment for them to discuss and decide on rendering of some important Biblical terms in Dhurwa language. We also allowed them to learn basic translation principles and were helped to review some draft translation to be sure it sounds natural in the language.

We also taught the Dhurwa pastors and elders so that they could become familiar with the background information of the Biblical author. We should never assume that they would know. Barnwell said, *“This applies particularly to information about the cultural background of the Bible and about the situations in which the original texts were written. Without this supplementary information, the biblical message is often meaningless to a reader from a different cultural background, or at best it loses a great deal of its significance”* (Barnwell 1988:23). When they have this information, the pastors and elders can understand what the passages mean, and understand it correctly.

Background Information Workshop

The workshop that we are planning on the background information would be beneficial to understand the background of the various books and their authors. This workshop will give them an overview of the Bible to understand how specific passages fit into the whole story. Further, we hope to train them to use extra-textual helps like book introduction, section heading, illustration, footnotes and glossary. We also want to help them to access cross-references, reading of maps in the printed Scripture portions to understand the passage better.

New Testament Dedication and the Future

We had the dedication of the New Testament in Dhurwaon 17th October 2019. At the moment we are recording the audio of the Dhurwa New Testament. We are seeing rapid growth in the number of Dhurwa teens and adults using their smartphones. Smartphones and digital scripture distribution are a greater way to encourage literacy and engagement with the Scriptures. Many young people use it, and they know how to share apps. Hence the plan is to distribute the audio in MP3 players, SD cards, microchips and the Scripture App where the audio gets synchronized with the Bible text scroll on the screen. We also have plans to create a website so that many people can have access to God's word in their own Dhurwa language.

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Scripture Engagement among the GenNext (Youth) of South Asia

R. Theodore Srinivasagam*

I. Cultural engagement

We engage with culture in a variety of ways.

1. **Culture is the way we live:** This is the simplest definition of culture.
2. **Culture is changing at a fast pace:** We see this all around us.
3. **Media influence culture:** It influences through various means.
 - Global marketing economy
 - Development of the internet
 - Changes in information technology
 - Competitive influence of the media.

II. The Bible and Cultural Engagement

- **Understanding the Bible:** What people read and how they understand the message of the Bible is different today.
- **Seeing through a lens:** A multi-coloured cultural lens mediates culture.
- **The church and culture:** The church has preferred cultural accommodation rather than cultural engagement.
- **Helping the church:** Can we help the churches to re-engage in an appropriate model of mission? How can we do it?

III. Jesus and Scriptures

- Jesus used the Old Testament as an authoritative basis for beliefs and behaviour.
- Jesus and the Pharisees agreed that God had inspired the Scriptures.
- However, Jesus disagreed with them about interpretations.
- Jesus had a high view of Scripture. He always treated it as real, as conclusive proof, as correct teaching.
- Jesus said, *'I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them'* (Matt.5:17)
- God was communicating through human authors.

“**All Scripture is God-breathed** and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17).

IV. Scripture engagement

For Scripture engagement, the **strategies**, the **processes** and the **components** are needed.

1. The strategies: Three elements for essential mission strategies for Scripture Engagement are **Providing access**, **Facilitating encounter** and **Creating a receptive climate**.



Figure 1

2. The Processes: Scripture Engagement is a **process** through which people gain **access to the Bible**, **encounter God**, and with the **outcome those lives are changed**.

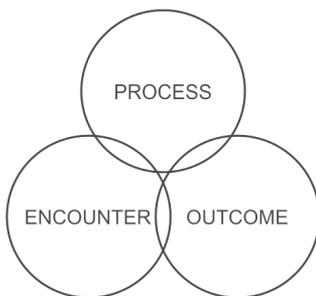


Figure 2

3. Components: A shared research and development is needed. It should have the following components: **missiological/audience research, technology/media research and program innovation.**



Figure 3

V. Survey Findings—The Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI)

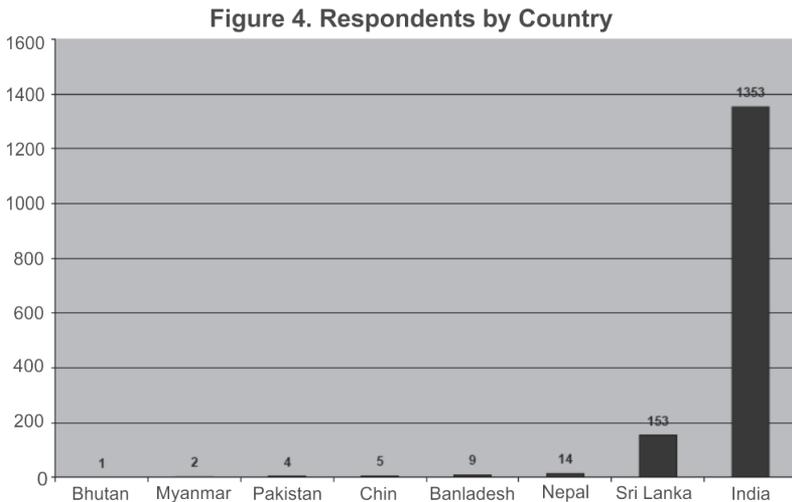
The Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI), an alliance of more than 25 leading International Bible Agencies and other missions organizations with a shared vision of: “working together to maximize the worldwide access and impact of God’s Word.”

That was in Partnership with India Forum of Bible Agencies (IFOBA), a network of over 20 Bible Agencies & Missions working in India. That was an initiative to “Explore Scripture Engagement among Next Generation (16-30 year-olds) in South Asia through research and case study in order to facilitate more effective Scripture Engagement in South Asia.”

- A designed questionnaire was the instrument and the primary method for collecting data on Scripture Engagement among NextGen in South Asia.
- We conducted a statistical analysis of questionnaire data in two phases.
- Phase I: Preliminary Findings. Questionnaire data were entered online from January 1-February 20, 2014 and was statistically analyzed.
- Phase II: Comprehensive Findings. Questionnaires were distributed throughout India through the Bible Society of India and to the rest

of Asia through other channels between February 21 – August 31, 2014

- All data gathered between January 1 and August 31, 2014, was statistically analyzed in 2015.
- We present the summary report here.



1. General data

- **Total respondents** -1541. The majority were from India and had 1363 respondents.
- **Reports:** Data analysis are the consolidated reports from South Asia Region
- **Different Regions:** We administered the survey in different regions such as North India, South India, North East India and West India (Gujarat) and some countries in South Asia.

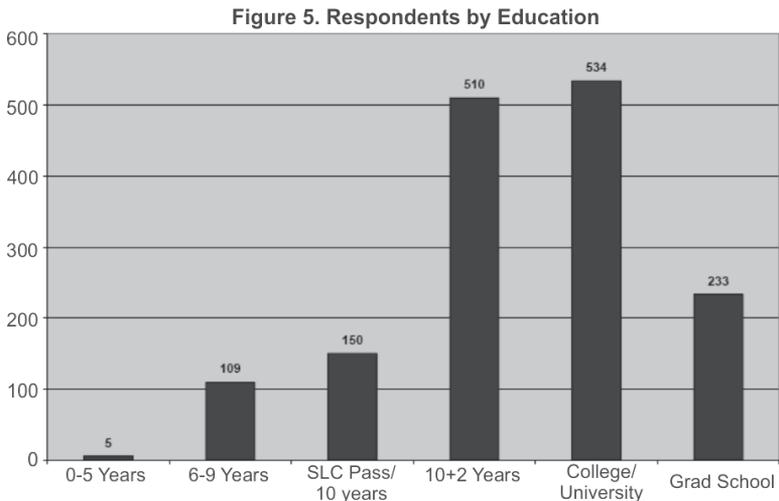
2. Frequency of Exposure (FOE) rates

Those analyzed were the following.

- 498 were 16-20 year-olds and have the lowest FOE in most regions;
- 661 were 21-25 year-olds. In South India these have the lowest FOE rates;
- 382 were 26-30 years.

3. Education

- Most analyzed had passed SLC or had 10 years or more of education.
- Those with higher education tend to have higher FOE rates.



4. Gender

- A total of 774 males and 767 females were analyzed.
- Females have higher FOE rates than males.

5. Parents Religion

Most came from Christian homes as both their parents were Christians. They were 1318 respondents out of 1541.

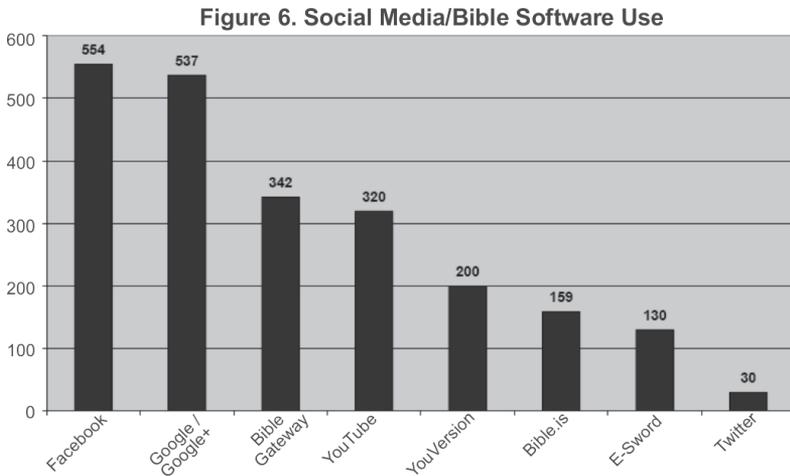
- 129 had one of their parents a non-Christian.
- 94 had neither of their parents as Christian.

6. Number of years as a Christian

- The majority (818) were Christians for at least 21 years.
- 194 were Christians for 0-10 years;
- 529 for 11-20 years

7. Church Attendance

- A majority, namely 769 attended church more than once a week.
- 681 attended church once a week.
- A minority attended church less frequently.
- Those who **attend church** more than once per **week have higher FOE rates** than those who attend just once a week in all regions.



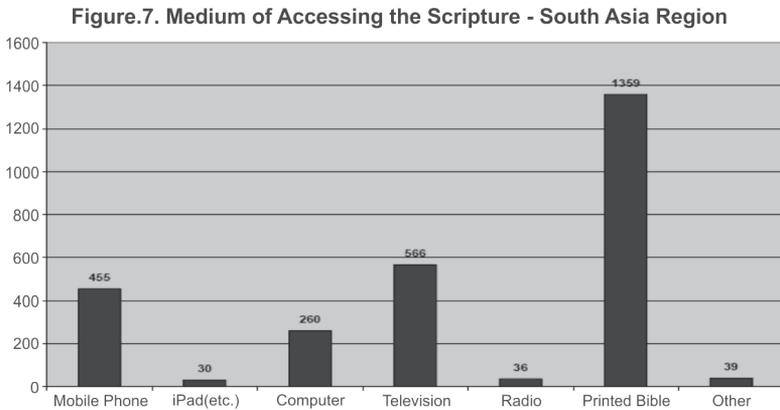
8. Social media

- Interacting with Scripture **using social media or Bible software** has a positive influence in all regions.
- The most frequently used social media are **Facebook** and **Google/Google+**
- **Bible Gateway** and **YouTube** came next.

9. The medium of access (using printed books, mobile phones, computers, television)

- It is not a significant variable influencing FOE in most regions.
- About 88% of respondents access Scripture using printed books/Bibles, 30% use mobile phones, and 37% use Bible-based television programs.

- Those older and have more than 10 years of education are likely to own mobile phones and use them to access Scripture.
- In South India and Hindi Belt, using a mobile phone to access Scripture has a negative impact on FOE. In the Gujarat region, using mobile phones to access Scripture have a positive impact on FOE.
- The youngest, least educated, or poorest respondents have the highest television access.



10. Language

- Reading/listening in the mother tongue or English behaved differently in every region. In some, it was positive and in others negative.
- Where “English version of the Bible is read or listened to” the NIV, or Good News version have a positive influence on FOE, while the KJV has a neutral influence in 3 regions. It was vice versa in Karnataka.

11. Phase 1 response from Bengaluru city

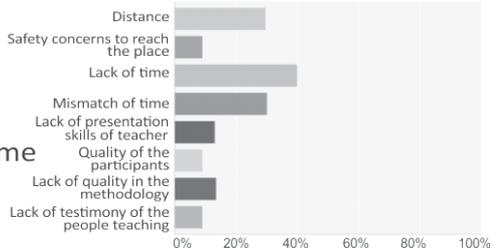
- Hindrances to engaging with Scripture: The majority that is 39% said “lack of time”. 30% said “mismatch of time” with church services, and 29% said “distance” from the church. Other difficulties mentioned are a lack of understanding with elders, personal difficulties and laziness. How to overcome these?



Hindrances to Engaging with Scripture - Phase 1 response

Major **hindrances** for engaging with the scriptures:

39% said **Lack of time**
30% said **Mismatch of time**
29% said **Distance**



Other Challenges Mentioned -

Lack of understanding
Personal difficulties
Laziness



12. Implications and recommendations

- Given that **16-20-year-old** respondents have the lowest FOE and impact rates, we need to place more emphasis on **connecting this age group with Scripture**. What are the factors contributing to low FOE and impact rates?
- **Printed books and Bibles** are still widely used to access Scripture in South Asia. So, printed materials should continue to be used to connect NextGen with the Word of God. How can this be done?
- Among the educated, the **NIV and Good News versions** of the English Bible have a more positive overall impact on FOE and impact than the KJV of the Bible. In what ways can we produce and give these to the young people?
- Theyounger (16-20 years old), less educated (less than 10 years of education), and poorer youth more widely utilize Bible-based television programmes. Do our TV programs cater to this need?
- **Bible applications on mobile phones** are more widely utilized by older (21- 30 year old), more educated (10+ years of education), and wealthier youth. Do we produce suitable material for these?
- **Frequency of church attendance** is a significant factor influencing both the frequency of exposure and impact. Therefore, Scripture engagement should include a church/discipleship component. Time spent in the church is a critical component influencing how often

youth read/listen to Scripture and the extent to which it impacts their lives. Therefore, how can we make the church more attractive to youth?

- **Interacting with Scripture using social media or Bible software** is increasing both exposure and impact. In what ways can we help in this?
- An equal representation was lacking to the less educated and poorer population in this study. If this segment of the population were more represented, mother tongue reading/listening would be more significant. **How to enhance Scripture used in the mother tongue?**
- It is obvious we need to do further research to find out regarding length of time or frequency spent reading in the mother tongue or another language by the respondents. There may be **further questions we may want to ask**. Are you willing to undertake further research and survey work among youth in your area?

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