

TUTORIAL
9.3

Access to the Bible

This tutorial discusses the first question in the area of *Word*: 'Are they able to access the Bible in a form that clearly and faithfully communicates God's revelation to them?'

Matthew 28:18-20: Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (New Living Translation)

Looking at those verses above in light of the session, we see a reference to the Great Commission, a commission for all God's children to be disciple-makers. But in order for us to be able to do that we have to have God's Word in a way that we can understand for ourselves so that we can communicate it clearly to others. To do that cross-culturally is very challenging. Those who are wanting to teach need to be able to hear it, understand it, and then be able to, in turn, pass it on. To be disciple-makers, people need to have His Word. It's quite a simple concept but it actually becomes an incredible challenge to the work. It's refreshing that He says that He's with us in that. That's our authority and also the way that we're empowered to do it.

Last Time

We looked at some snapshots of the cross-cultural church planting scenarios we will be focusing on during this Module. In this tutorial we will look at the first question in the WILD outline and hear from some experienced church planters on how this area impacts their work.

Are they able to access the Bible in a form that clearly and faithfully communicates God's revelation to them?

Kaikou talks about their first experience of hearing God's Word clearly taught:

In the past, we thought we understood who the Creator was, but we were just in darkness. But we now understand the plan that God had to bring His Word to us. Some foreigners came to live among us and they

learned our language and culture. At that time, they realized that we thought we knew about God, but the reality was that we knew nothing about God. During that time, they began to ask us questions like, "Where do you think animals came from originally?" And we didn't have a good clear answer for that. Another question that was raised during that time was, "What actually happens to a person when they die?"

In answering that question, we gave many different responses. We didn't have one clear answer. All of that helped to prepare us for God's Word, and for us to sense our real need. So when the time came when they began to share God's Word with us, our hearts had been prepared beforehand, because it was clear to us that there were many important things that we needed to understand. So when we heard God's Word in our own true language, we understood it clearly and it revealed many things that we had previously been confused about.

Gebi adds to what Kaikou said, specifically talking about hearing God's Word in their own language:

Before, we only had the Bible in the national language, but the message just did not speak to our hearts. Then, we heard God's Word in our own specific language, explained clearly from the beginning, and so it made sense. We heard it like that and then we were in awe of God as He described Himself. We understood God's character and His intentions towards us as human beings.

Do they feel as though it's God Himself speaking to them through the Bible when they hear or read it, OR does the language tend to create barriers and give the idea that it is for someone else?

Dave talks about their experience of providing access to a natural, clear translation of God's Word:

It gave us great pleasure to be able to take God's Word to the people we worked among, and give it to them in their own language, something that they had never had. And when we translated God's Word, we wanted to be sure that it spoke the language that they speak. We wanted to make sure that it truly represented the meaning of the source texts, but we also wanted to make sure that it spoke in a way that was clearly understandable to them and even sounded natural, to sound like the way they speak.

Phil explained how significant it is when people connect God's narrative to the real events of their lives:

As we're teaching the story, we're wanting them to fit themselves into that story. And the degree to which we see them fitting themselves into the story that we're teaching from God's Word is the

degree to which their identity becomes guided by the things that they're learning from God's Word. To us, that's where the progress is. So, for instance, when some guy comes to me and says, "Oh, you're struggling with our language today. You're tripping up on stuff." He's like "Man, God did a really good job there in Babel when he mixed up all those languages." And I'm thinking to myself, Bingo. They're interpreting something that happens to them today from something that they've heard from God's Word. They're recognising that this is affecting us today, whether it's sin—"Man, Adam and Eve really messed it up"—and looking at some situation. I'm thinking to myself, Bingo. You're relating this terrible thing that happened in the community to Adam and Eve's sin."

Does the language they are hearing the Truth in give them the ability to talk about it in their homes, with their friends, and in the community?

Clark talks about the significant difference since the group they work with have had Scripture translated in their own language:

When we first moved in, and we first started teaching, it was pretty much an oral presentation of the Gospel. We worked off lessons, but didn't have any Scripture that we were using. If we did use Scripture, it was the Thai Scriptures. We started Bible translation about eight or nine years into the church plant. The people don't have a real desire for God's Word in their own language, they can read Thai, but we've found as we've translated, the more we've translated the more they've appreciated having God's Word in their own language. And we've seen the effect of that on the church has been more of an understanding. We've seen more growth the more we've had it in their own language.

Greg talks about the process of learning culture and language and the depth of understanding needed to share the Truth clearly in that setting:

When arriving in the country, as we began developing relationships, one of the first things we did was to begin to understand how they saw the world, what they valued in the world, and what was lacking in their understanding of who God is and how God impacts them and their society. We began by taking time to discuss with them and by asking questions like what do they see in the world? How do they perceive the world? What do they value? We began to learn a lot about what communism had brought in and what even this new view of Buddhism was. They had a very limited view of God. They had a very superstitious view in the way they understood the world. They were very strong in this idea that they could somehow manipulate society by luck or by chance. And we began to understand a little bit better about how they perceive the world around them.

Even though it was a communist society, my perception of that meant, at the time, that they didn't believe in anything spiritual—that they had no spiritual values—and that wasn't true. They actually had a pretty strong spiritual perception of the world, although they could hold an atheistic view. They didn't see it as a dichotomy that they would have somehow a perception of being atheist, they believed they could be atheist and also believe in a god or believe in a million gods as in Buddhism. We found that there could be all kinds of contradictions for them.

Matt talks about their situation in which house-to-house teaching is important: Our strategies or our focus in teaching our friends who wanted to be taught, or were open to being taught in their homes was teaching foundationally from Creation to Christ. And at this point, due to their work schedule and their lifestyle, we are able to teach three to four times a month in this situation, so it takes us a considerable amount of time to work our way through the teaching with them. We've made adjustments to our teaching because the people have exposure to the Catholic church and exposure to other churches in our area; they have an understanding of some of the content of the Scripture, but they have no understanding of the meaning of that content. And so one of the things we did recently with this family is we, in our first conversation together, gave them a panoramic view of where the story is going. So we started in creation and we, very quickly in one session, went through to Christ coming back in the future. And that has really helped us with them—to help keep them on the storyline and where we're at when we're teaching the Bible. It helps them relate to what they're hearing in the story, how that relates to when Jesus lived and when they are living, and to keep it straight on the storyline and in line with history.

Are they able to access God's Word in the available media and technologies that the wider society is using?

Greg talks about the communication challenges in their work among the deaf community:

It was a process of developing sign language. We were in the process of working with some of the educated leaders in the deaf community, developing ways to express those thoughts in sign language, and even to be able to describe that literacy was a problem amongst deaf people. We had to work with them in the area of literacy, helping them understand how to read, how to understand the Bible, how to understand God's Word and what it meant for them. That was a big challenge for most of them. Much of the Bible was difficult for them to get or grasp. Even though they might have understood the word or been able to spell the word, to understand

the depth of meaning of it, we had to teach this idea of what it means, a meaning-based understanding of God's Word.

Dave talks about the importance of literacy and how it has impacted the lives of the people:

Along with giving them the translated Scriptures, of course, we had to teach them how to read and write their own language, which they had never done before. We produced a literacy course of several booklets that we took several of the adults through and eventually trained literacy teachers. It's still ongoing today. There are literacy teachers there that are teaching literacy, teaching more of the people how to read and write their own language. We knew that some of the older people would never learn how to read and write their own language, but that was okay.

We found that with the people we worked with, when they read the Scriptures or when they read anything really, they pretty much always read aloud. It's like it never occurred to them to just look at the words and just think them because when they speak, they're speaking aloud, so when they read, they read aloud. Often, someone will be sitting in a house and they'll be reading Scripture aloud and other people will gather around and start to listen. We also encouraged the younger ones, the ones who were able to learn how to read, to read the Scriptures aloud to their parents and grandparents, as some of them were perhaps at the age where it would have been very, very difficult for them to learn how to read. It didn't really matter because they could hear the Scriptures being read regularly by their children and grandchildren.

Matt explains some of the ways they are equipping the church:

We view ourselves as assisting the believers in any way we can through teaching, discipleship, and developing more curriculum. One of our biggest projects right now is to bring the written curriculum into an audio form so that we can get more people listening to the Word, listening to the teaching. And so those are just different ways we want to assist.

We started off this session with the Great Commission in Matthew 28. As disciples, the goal is to make more disciples of Christ. In order for them to become disciples of Christ, they need to know God's Word and not just at a surface level, but actually know Him in deep ways. And that requires being familiar with God's Word to the point that it impacts their lives, to the point where they become disciples of Christ who in turn can make more disciples of Christ. It's quite a high level of Bible-literacy that is required to be able to achieve in-depth understanding. We need to make every effort so that others

can have access to God's Word and the ability to know it, and then to know Him through it, and then to help others to do the same.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Access to the Bible

1. As you watch the tutorial video, note any reasons given for the importance of having the Bible in a language that clearly communicates.
2. Reflect on any connection that you can see between:
 - a. A community having access to a Bible translation that is both accurate and natural, and
 - b. God's Word becoming a part of people's everyday lives rather than just a religious manuscript.



ACTIVITIES

Access to the Bible

1. Research the concept of 'High Religion/Low Religion'. Note down three or four contrasting characteristics of 'High Religion' and 'Low Religion'.
2. This week try to talk with two people who might use a Bible in more than one language. Prepare a few questions beforehand to ask them about Bible translations or versions in languages they understand (include questions about: languages they speak, preferences for Bible translation for personal use, etc.). Note your questions and the responses you get.