

Record

LIVES CHANGED BY GOD'S WORD

2023

Today, God speaks Aja!

**Aja people welcome your gift
of the New Testament!**



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY



Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

▣ MATTHEW 19:14

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ABOUT THE COVER

Aja churches in Benin rejoiced on the first Sunday after they received your gift of the Aja New Testament! Finally, Aja believers can read and share Scripture in their heart language. Now, they are praying and longing for the translation of the Old Testament, so that they can receive the full Word of God!

The mission of American Bible Society is to make the Bible available to every person in a language and format each can understand and afford, so all people may experience its life-changing message. American Bible Society is a member of United Bible Societies, a fellowship of Bible Societies throughout the world cooperating to make Scriptures available to people everywhere in their own language.

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Back to the Beginning

A message from Interim CEO Paul Cleckner

Dear Friend,

Do you remember the moment you met Jesus?

For some of us, this moment happened decades ago. For others—like the joyful men, women, and children you’ll meet in the pages of Record magazine—this moment happened this year, thanks to the Scripture you provided!

Recently, I had the chance to meditate on my own “beginnings” with Jesus as I spent 100 days reading the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20). Something struck me about the location Jesus chose for this world-changing message:

“The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.” (Matthew 28:16)

Galilee: the region where Jesus’s ministry started. The place where he called his faithful disciples to follow him. And now, the point from which the gospel would go forth to all the world.

The story that started in Galilee is still unfolding today! As you read this issue of Record, I hope you’ll return to the moment you met Jesus. Spend time reflecting on how his Word transformed your life. And rejoice in what God has done through your faithful response to the Great Commission! Thanks to you, people around the world received God’s Word and encountered Jesus in the pages of Scripture. I pray that your heart is richly blessed by their stories!

Thank you, friend, for your faithful partnership in ministry with American Bible Society. Thank you for trusting us to help you answer Jesus’s call to share his Word, so that people everywhere can join us in experiencing its life-changing message!

Gratefully yours,

Record

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Bibles for Once-Forgotten People in Vietnam

COVER: Douglas Notlage, American Bible Society / PRIOR SPREAD: Bible Society Vietnam

PHOTO CREDITS: Douglas Notlage, American Bible Society / Quan Phan, Bible Society Vietnam



PHOTO CREDITS: Quan Phan, Bible Society Vietnam

NO LONGER *Forgotten*

You sent Bibles to waiting people in Vietnam. Now, witness the difference your gift is making in the lives of your Vietnamese brothers and sisters!

By Elisabeth Trefsgar | Photos by Quan Phan

A field laborer who wakes up at 4 a.m. each morning to provide for her daughter.

A rural Sunday school teacher without any Scripture resources.

A young child who helps his family scrape together a living on the shores of Dau Tieng Lake.

These are just a few of the people in Vietnam who received Scripture thanks to you! Now, hear their stories for yourself as you take a tour of Vietnam with Quan, who traveled by plane, bus, and motorbike to see firsthand how your gift of God's Word is changing lives!



To many Vietnamese believers, the Bible you give them is among their most precious possessions! This sister in Christ owns very little besides a Vietnamese Bible and two Scripture portions in her Muong language. “These are a few things I have, and I treasure them,” she says.

“Go and buy a Bible for yourself”—it’s almost impossible for them, because they don’t make enough for their living. But they always wait and hope.”

He remembers visiting a woman who invited him into her home. It was just a crude wooden structure, but she’d taken out a significant loan to build it. Ten years later, she was still paying the bank.

“There was no furniture in that house, just a small wooden table,” Quan says.

For those with so little, the possibility of ever owning a Bible seems slim.

“To tell them, ‘Go and buy a Bible for yourself’—it’s almost impossible for them, because they don’t make enough for their living,” Quan says. “But they always wait and hope.”

That’s where you come in!

You help local churches share the truth of Jesus with precious children! This Tai Dam Sunday School teacher says her class was overjoyed to receive your gift of Scripture storybooks: “They love them! It’s unusual for Tai Dam kids to have beautiful books like these.”

Many people can’t afford basic necessities—let alone the Bible.

Imagine if your entire livelihood depended on a bountiful coffee bean crop—but it hasn’t rained in six months.

Or if the land you live on is scorched by the sun and can’t grow the vegetables you need to feed your family.

Or if your only option for work is fishing in lakes and rivers, starting when you’re just a few years old.

For many minority language and ethnic groups, these are the realities of life in rural Vietnam.

And in a country of more than 97 million people, these are the men, women, and children who often slip through the cracks.

Quan Phan is a senior communications officer with our partner, Bible Society Vietnam. He recently spent a full month visiting all three of Vietnam’s regions: North, Central, and South.

Along the way, he got to see the challenges that churches and believers in these communities face.

“For many people, even the basic necessities are lacking,” Quan says.





Thanks to you, Thelma is finding daily hope in the Koho Bible you gave her. “I believe a new and better life is ahead,” she says.

Your gift of God’s Word shows people that they are not forgotten.

Thelma* was only married for a year before her husband died.

“There was no word that could describe my pain at that time,” she remembers.

Thelma’s Christian friend brought her a copy of the Koho Bible. As she read the Bible, Thelma’s eyes were opened to a God who not only knew about her sorrow, but cared about her suffering.

“Whenever I was stricken by the pain, I said to myself, ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’ [Matthew 11:28],” Thelma says. “I found the strength to continue living.”

Thelma took a job harvesting carrots to provide for her daughter. Her day started at 4 a.m., and although she still enjoyed reading the Bible to her daughter when she could, Thelma didn’t have as much time to spend in God’s Word.

But last year, you gave Thelma a brand-new Koho Bible that came with a special gift: an audio Bible device!

“During the day when I am in the field, I put the player in my bag and play the Koho Bible while working,” she says.

Thanks to you, Thelma can keep Scripture close all day long. Even better, she can share her audio Bible with the other field workers.

“Others found it quite unusual when they first heard the voice speaking,” she remembers. Now, Thelma says, the people who labor alongside her enjoy listening to Scripture with her, and the sound of God’s Word echoes over the field each day. “I have the audio Bible with me always!” she says.

The Bibles you provide give children hope for the future.

For Quan, the most memorable stop on his trip is the place where your gift of Scripture is making the most unexpected difference.

In southeast Vietnam, a Cambodian-Vietnamese community lives on the shores of Dau Tieng Lake. Ignored by authorities and shunned by society, these families are among the poorest of the poor. Up to 90 percent of the community is illiterate. Instead of going to school, children begin helping their families survive by fishing as soon as they can swim.

“The kind of life they lead is very poor and very uneducated,” Quan says.

But this community wasn’t forgotten by believers like you.

Your generous support provided the Gospel of John. Then, the local Vietnamese church took your gift and added their own: lessons on how to read, so that every child can understand the Word of God!

“To see the children of illiterate parents now fluently reading about hope in the Gospel of John—it is very heartwarming!” Quan says.

To these grateful children, your gift of Scripture is life-changing in more way than one!

Makeshift homes crowd the shores of Dau Tieng Lake, where many families rely on fishing to survive. Your gift of Scripture, paired with reading lessons from the local church, is helping once-forgotten children find new hope for the future!





Tom* sits among his family's fishing nets with the Gospel of John that you sent him. The Scripture you provided his Cambodian-Vietnamese community has become a double blessing as children like Tom learn how to read and discover the truths of Jesus Christ!

Thank you for sowing seeds of faith in Vietnam!

Across Vietnam, the Scripture you provided is filling the hearts of men, women, and children with the hope of Jesus Christ.

“You don’t always see the immediate result,” Quan says. “But the work of bringing the Bible to the community really changes the community in a miraculous way.”

Thank you for sharing God’s Word as you live out the words of Jesus through your generous gift:

“Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25:40 CEV) 🙏

.....
*Names changed to protect identity.

Bless people still waiting for God’s Word with the gift of Scripture: **Give.Bible/GodsWord**

IN MEMORIAM

“If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”

ROMANS 14:8

in memory of my mother,
brother and sister, and husband
Antonetta Barillaro, Anthony and Daisy Barillaro, and Alexander Roberts
given by Mary Roberts

in memory of our grandmother
Frances Clark Braxton
given by The Braxton Fund, Inc.

in memory of my husband
Gordon M. Brown
given by Mrs. Lynette Brown

in memory of my mother
Jennie M. Crafts
given by Putnam L. Crafts, Sr.

in memory of my wife and daughter
June and Kim Handwerker
given by Bob Handwerker

in memory of my wife
Alice S. Patton
given by Richard E. Patton

in memory of my parents
Harold and Eunice Powell
given by Mrs. Paula L. Shedd

in memory of my wife
Jennifer Riordan
given by Col. Richard Gould Riordan

in memory of my parents
Omar Z. and Mary E. Stoltzfus
given by Mrs. Susanna Hemond

in memory of our Christian brother
Mr. H. Moffette Tharpe, Jr.
given by Frederick and Lisa Yuengling

You can honor the memory of a loved one by providing Bibles to people who don’t yet have them. Memorials of \$500 or more for one individual or family unit will be published in *Record*.

For further details about the memorial process, please contact our Partner Care team at:
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Ministry Milestones

Your generosity today is continuing a Bible ministry legacy spanning more than 200 years!



1 Million Bibles for Africa!

Since 1816, believers like you have helped send more than 6.9 billion Bibles around the world. This year, you added to that number by 1 million! Thanks to you, people in 34 African nations now own a personal copy of God's Word—most for the first time ever!

PHOTO CREDIT: Angel Mann, American Bible Society

Hope and Healing for Ukraine

For more than two centuries, American Bible Society partners like you have sent God's Word of peace and hope into war zones. Today, you answered the prayers of Ukrainian refugees in Ukraine, Poland, and beyond by providing more than 800,000 Bibles and children's Scripture portions! Your support also equips children's camps with Bible-based trauma healing materials, offering precious young people a safe place to learn about God's love and begin to heal. Some children have even decided to give their lives to Jesus! According to one Ukrainian Bible Society staff member, through your gift of God's Word, "God worked a miracle!"

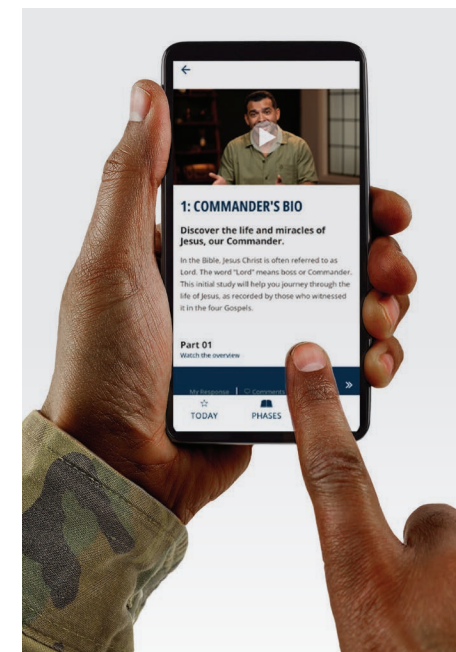


PHOTO CREDITS: Ukrainian Bible Society, Getty Images

New Bible App for Military Communities

Since 1817, American Bible Society partners like you have supported our military heroes by providing God's Word in seasons of war and peace. This year, we added an exciting new digital resource specially designed for a military context. The free Military Bible Challenge app invites military members on a 75-day journey in God's Word. You can bless a Service member or Veteran by sharing this free devotional plan with them today:

[ABS.Bible/Challenge](https://abs.bible/challenge)



Scripture in Sign Language for Central and South America

In 2020, the very first complete Bible in Sign Language was released to the world, thanks to your generous support and prayers! Today, American Sign Language Version (ASLV) is reaching Deaf communities with the good news of Jesus. It's also the model for dozens of Sign Language Bible translation projects around the world! In countries like Ecuador, Argentina, and Guatemala, your support is helping committed translation teams communicate the gospel in their heart language. One Guatemalan woman shared, "Our hearts are being transformed and touched thanks to the Bible translated into Sign Language!"



Fresh Comfort for the Hurting

Since 2010, American Bible Society partners like you have cared for people suffering from trauma through our Bible-based trauma healing ministry. Now, with the new Trauma Healing Institute app, people in the United States and around the world are finding a fresh way to experience the comfort and hope of God's Word! Learn how this app can bless hurting people in your own community:

[ABS.Bible/Healing](https://www.abs.bible/healing)

PHOTO CREDIT: Bible Society of Brazil; Douglas Nottage, American Bible Society



Light in the Amazon

In the early days of American Bible Society, courageous volunteers carried God's Word to waiting people by train, wagon, horseback, and even on foot. And while a lot has changed since 1816, your gift of the Bible is still delivered in creative ways—even by boat! For more than 60 years, the *Luz na Amazônia* ("Light in the Amazon") has sailed up and down the Amazon River, bringing Bibles, Scripture resources, and health services to hundreds of communities on islands and riverbanks. Through your support, this boat reached 100,000 people last year with the love of Jesus and will continue sailing for years to come!

Thank you for helping us reach these milestones! Will you invest in the next 200 years of Bible ministry by sharing God's Word today? [Give.Bible/GodsWord](https://www.give.bible/godsword)

PHOTO CREDIT: Damaris Pires, Bible Society of Brazil

Praise from the Prison

3 lessons on praise to help you fix your eyes on Jesus

By Rev. Enid Almanzar



This spring, I spent time with several of our American Bible Society ministry partners in the Middle East. I had the immense honor of worshiping in a small underground church with a handful of Christians. When I was asked to share from God’s Word, the Holy Spirit compelled me to turn to Acts 16:25–28. It’s a short passage, but it’s packed with power!

We read that Paul and Silas followed God’s call to preach the gospel in Macedonia. In the city of Philippi, their journey seems to hit a wall when the two men are thrown into prison. But instead of falling into despair or lashing out at God in anger, Paul and Silas do something unthinkable.

They *praise* God from the prison!

As I read this passage, I realized that I had modern-day examples of Paul and Silas kneeling beside me on the tile floor. Our fellow believers in closed countries often live under the daily threat of persecution and prison. But they still gather to pray, worship, and read God’s Word—choosing to lead lives of praise despite their difficult circumstances.

You and I may never understand what it’s like to face prison for Christ. But we all know what it feels like to be trapped by sorrow, sickness, fear, or unforgiveness. Here are three lessons we can learn from Paul, Silas, and our modern brothers and sisters about praising God from the prison and rejoicing in him always! (Philippians 4:4)

1. PRAISE CHANGES US


Paul and Silas didn’t have Scripture in their hands. They had it buried deep in their hearts, like precious treasure. When our hearts overflow with God’s Word, we are equipped to praise God from any prison we face. God uses our heart posture of praise to do something extraordinary! The more we meditate on God’s Word, recite his promises,

and praise him for his goodness, the more comfort, grace, and hope we receive. And instead of prison bars, we see Jesus!


2. PRAISE CHANGES OTHERS

Many times, our response to difficult circumstances can be our greatest witness. Even in places where the Bible is banned, God uses lives of praise to draw people to Christ. I heard many testimonies of this during my time in the Middle East, where Christians are seeing firsthand how living in the light and love of Jesus makes people around them take notice. Think about the people in your own life: children, grandchildren, coworkers, neighbors, friends, and even strangers. How could your posture of praise—especially during challenging times—be a witness to them?

3. PRAISE STRENGTHENS THE CHURCH

True praise isn’t restricted to a church building, and it doesn’t end after Sunday morning. When our hearts are dedicated to praising God at all times, the impact and witness of our churches multiply. We can better focus on Jesus’s call to love God and our neighbors (Mark 12:30–31). We can center our worship, ministry, and outreach on praising God. And—by his grace—we can create a chorus of praise to God that echoes through generations! So, “Let us praise his name together!” (Psalm 34:3b) 

 READ
Meditate on Psalm 34.

 PRAY
Ask God for a heart posture of praise.


 ACT
Think of three people you can encourage with Psalm 34 today!



PHOTO CREDIT: Douglas Nottage, American Bible Society

Celebrate with your Aja brothers and sisters as they welcome your gift of the New Testament!

By Elisabeth Trefsgar
Photos by Douglas Nottage

It's a common practice for Christians in Benin: church on Sunday morning, voodoo temple on Sunday evening.

For many of the 1.2 million Aja speakers living in the West African nations of Benin and neighboring Togo, the ancient religion of voodoo is woven into the fabric of everyday life.

When you're sick, you seek healing from the local shaman.

When you need good luck, you sacrifice an animal at your local temple.

When you lose a loved one, you house their spirit in a carved charm or sacred object.



The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Isaiah 9:2a

In Benin, symbols of voodoo, including carved idols and sacred pythons, can be seen in roadside markets and local temples. For many Aja believers, these objects remind them of the spiritual darkness in which they walked before they experienced the light of the gospel!

Voodoo has its roots in West Africa and, specifically, Benin. Today, roughly sixty percent of Aja people still follow voodoo and similar ancestral worship religions. But even the thirty percent of Aja people who claim Christ often mix the truth of the gospel with voodoo traditions.

Why?

The strong tides of culture can easily cause us to drift from the truths of Scripture. But imagine how difficult it would be to remain secure in God's Word when you don't have it in your own language!

Until today, that was the case for the Aja people.

For generations, Aja pastors preached from Bibles in French or other local languages like Ewe or Fon. More often than not, Aja Christians—and even the pastors themselves—could not completely grasp the meaning of Scripture.

This lack of God's Word didn't just affect the Aja church. Without Scripture in the language they spoke with their families, Aja Christians struggled to connect their faith to their everyday lives. Many clung to the old practices of voodoo—caught between something familiar, and a message of hope they could not fully



understand. Your Aja brothers and sisters in Christ knew that God's Word was the only force powerful enough to open eyes to the spiritual bondage of voodoo—and to open hearts to the life-changing light of the gospel.

And that's exactly what you provided when you gave them the first New Testament in Aja!





You have given them
great joy, Lord!

Isaiah 9:3a

On the day of the Aja New Testament release, local pastors prayed over your gift of the New Testament and a choir rejoiced that God used you to bless the Aja people with his Word!

**“God spoke to us in Fon!
God spoke to us in Ewe!
God spoke to us in French!
Today, God speaks to us in Aja!”**

Against a backdrop of blue tents, a choir of Aja women sing a new song, written just for this celebration. First, they list the languages they once relied on to hear God’s voice.

Then, they shout the joyous truth: today, God will finally speak to them in their own language!

Their voices fill the afternoon air, drawing curious onlookers from the town of Azovè. What they find is a full-blown Bible celebration—full of dancing, singing, and joyful anticipation as hundreds of Aja people wait to hold God’s

Word in their hands for the first time!

“It’s a great delight for the whole Aja people living everywhere, because it is the day the Lord has chosen so that we know his words in the Aja language!” says Pastor Eugene, who pastors a local Aja church.

Like the other pastors in attendance, he felt the lack of Scripture in a unique way. “Preaching was very difficult because we did not have the Aja Bible,” he says.

Today, that will all change.

The crowd quiets. Three pastors pull away a traditionally patterned cloth, revealing the Aja New Testaments. They pray over the books, thanking God for the gift of his Word and asking him to bless the Aja people through this Scripture.

Then, the ceremony is over, and the crowd rushes to receive the New Testaments.

Volunteers can barely pass out books fast enough—people push closer, reaching out their hands. Once they have the New Testament, they step aside, opening the book and staring at the pages with expressions of joy and wonder. In the background, the band plays triumphantly.

Kondo is one of the Aja speakers who received your gift of God’s Word. He first became a Christian 52 years ago.

For half a century, he has waited and prayed for Scripture in Aja that he could share with his four children and six grandchildren.

Today, he traveled 72 kilometers on motorbike from his home in Togo to receive the New Testament.

And now, he holds it in his hands—*finally!*

“I’m very happy because they started translating the New Testament about 20 years ago,” he says. “And today, we have that New Testament!”

Kondo is eager to go home and read Scripture to his grandchildren, who will grow up with God’s Word thanks to you. And, like other Aja believers, he’s already looking forward to tomorrow—the first Sunday the Aja church will worship with God’s Word in the language of their hearts.

“I’m very happy,” Kondo says. “Tomorrow, I will read my New Testament in church!”



“Today, God speaks
to us in Aja!”



Thanks to you, churches full of Aja believers can hear, read, and share the Word of God in their heart language!

Already, the Aja Christians who worshipped while holding their precious New Testaments and heard the first sermons preached directly from Aja Scripture are looking for ways to share God’s Word with their friends, family, and neighbors.

“Now, since we have the New Testament, we will see the spread of the Word of God go further,” says Pastor Eugene.

Through literacy programs and radio broadcasts, Aja churches hope to reach even more people in Benin and Togo with the hope of Jesus Christ. And, thanks to the Scripture you placed in their hands, Aja Christians can fully understand the life-changing and culture-transforming message of the gospel.

Now, as they hide the truths of the New Testament in their hearts, they also look forward to the day when they—like you—will be able to experience the complete Word of God!

“I’m very happy, and I thank you so much for what you have done for us!” says Jerome, who looks forward to using the New Testament in literacy programs. “Now I ask that you continue to help us so we can finish the Old Testament and publish the whole Bible!”

You can help Bible translation projects cross the finish line!
Give.Bible/Translation

Thanks to you, when Aja believers go to church on Sunday, they can hear God’s Word read and preached in their heart language. And it doesn’t stop there—your grateful brothers and sisters are already eagerly sharing your wonderful gift with others!

Come and See!

Have you ever longed to see your gift of God’s Word reach the hands and hearts of waiting people? Now you can!

This special video experience brings you along to the Aja New Testament launch in Benin. Travel with our American Bible Society team, celebrate your gift of the New Testament with Aja churches, and learn how you can continue praying and giving to support the work of Bible translation.

Watch the video now:

ABS.Bible/Benin





Lucy holds her handmade American Bible Society donation jar.

Lucy's Gift

Meet one of American Bible Society's youngest partners and learn how she invited others to join her in sharing God's Word!

Like many 11-year-old girls, Lucy loves horseback riding, playing outside, and making crafts.

She loves her cat, Tulip, and wants to be a farmer when she grows up.

And, just like you, Lucy loves the Bible!

"When she was little, she would listen to her audio Bible while she was having breakfast," her mom, Theresa, says. "She listened to it every day!"

Lucy doesn't remember a time when she didn't have God's Word. Her grandma gave her a children's Bible when she was five. She began reading through the Bible in a year when she started school. And now, she's graduated to a student Bible. Her favorite Bible story is the story of Moses. "I've read it over and over and over!" she says.

Because she loves the Bible, Lucy wants to share it with others. And at the end of 2021, a new opportunity to share God's Word arrived in Lucy's mailbox when Lucy's family received a letter from American Bible Society.

The first thing Lucy noticed was the message stamped across the envelope: "Just \$5 can send someone a Bible!"

Curious, she opened the letter.

She read stories about how faithful financial partners like you made a difference around the world through God's Word. She also learned about refugees, U.S. Veterans, and schoolchildren who all shared one thing in common: they didn't have the Bible.

I have five dollars! Lucy thought. I can help!

Theresa watched Lucy run upstairs, get five dollars from her bank, and put it in the return envelope.

"The thing that really caught her attention was that, for five dollars, she could make a difference," Theresa says. "She could give someone a Bible!"

Lucy felt proud and excited after dropping her return envelope in the mail. But she wasn't done.

Last summer, while planning her tenth birthday party, Lucy had an idea. What if she invited friends and family to join her in providing Bibles around the world?

"We made a donation jar and Lucy wrote a letter explaining her idea," Theresa says. "People were excited about it!"

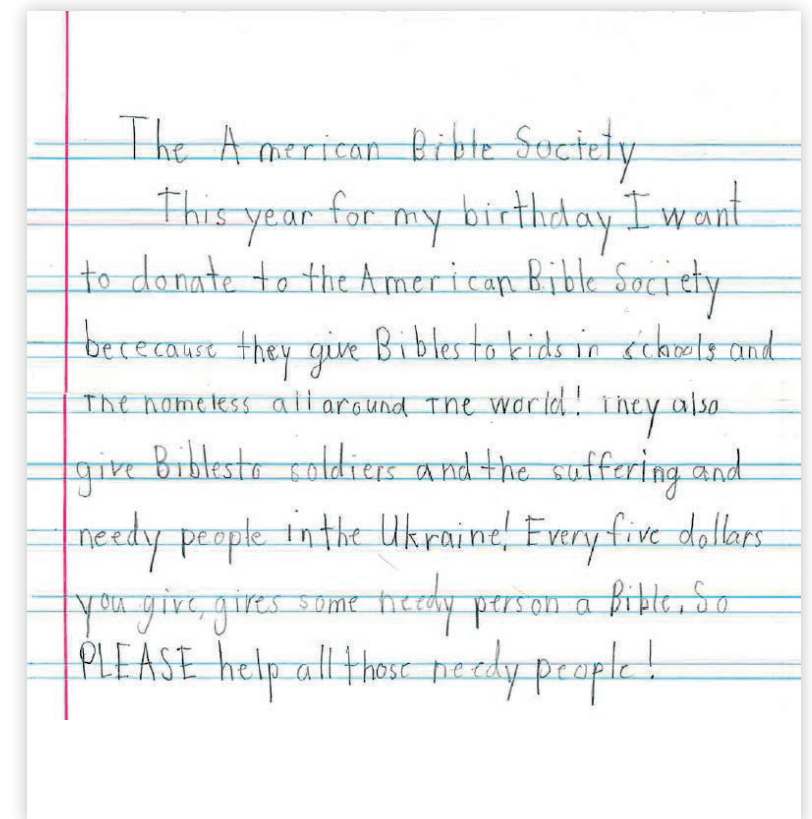
Inspired by Lucy's generosity, her friends and family donated money of their own, even after her party was over. And, thanks to Lucy's invitation to give, people around the world received the hope and comfort of God's Word—the greatest gift of all!

When asked why it's important for people to have the Bible, Lucy answered right away: "So they can go to heaven!"

"I was very proud of her," Theresa says. "Honestly, we're

not the perfect Bible-studying and memorizing family. But despite that, Lucy knew the Bible was important, and she knew it was important to give."

American Bible Society is thankful for our precious partners like Lucy, who help us remember the words of Jesus: "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35b). ■■



Will you join Lucy in sending God's Word to someone longing for their very own Bible? Make your gift now! [Give.Bible/GodsWord](https://www.givebible.org)

FOR A TIME

Like This



One military mom shares how God used you to bless her family through Hero Squad!

By Elisabeth Trefsgar



There are three things Illianna Morel never expected for her life.

One: for her husband to join the U.S. Army.

Two: for her family to adopt their third child.

And three: for faithful, supportive believers like you to bless her entire family with the gift of God's Word—right when they needed it most.

Thanks to you, our Hero Squad program is serving more than 21,000 military family members with quarterly Scripture care packages delivered right to their front doors.

Now, discover how you blessed Illianna's family through this unique ministry!

PHOTO CREDIT: Courtesy of Illianna Morel



Military kids like Amayah, Elijah, and Nate make sacrifices alongside their parents to serve their nation. For many families, this includes the long separation of deployment.

CALLED TO SERVE

Five years ago, Illianna and her husband, Francisco, led a typical American life.

They lived in the same South Florida community where they were born and raised. They had two young children: gymnastics-loving Amayah and soccer-obsessed Elijah. And they both had full careers.

Years earlier, Francisco had shared the idea of joining the military with Illianna. But she immediately said no.

“I said I couldn’t do that,” Illianna remembers. “I couldn’t say goodbye to him over and over again.”

After experiencing two high-risk pregnancies and becoming parents to Amayah and Elijah, Illianna and Francisco saw the God-sized hole in their life. They gave their lives to Jesus. Shortly after, things began to change.

Illianna became close friends with several military families. She felt God working in her heart. At the same time, Francisco’s job left him feeling more and more empty. He still had a strong desire to serve his country. Then, at a crossroads in his career, a door opened for Francisco to join the U.S. Army.

This time, Illianna said yes.

“It was very much God’s divine plan for our family to do this,” she says.

Stepping into military life wasn’t easy—especially for Amayah and Elijah, then just seven and six years old. Suddenly, their dad wasn’t home every night. And none of their friends could relate to what they were feeling.

While Francisco was away for basic training, Illianna used their family’s faith in God to help Amayah and Elijah understand that they had their own call to serve—just like their dad.

“Military life is servanthood,” Illianna says. “We’re serving others, and sacrificing for others. If you don’t have that faith foundation to understand how to love our neighbor as ourselves, you’ll quickly find that serving others isn’t desirable. So, faith is everything.”

CALLED TO LOVE

In 2019, the Morel family moved to their first on-base assignment. But an even bigger change was about to come their way.

For years, Illianna longed to add a third child to their family. Her previous high-risk pregnancies made it seem impossible for her to have any more children. When she brought up adoption, Francisco shared concerns about venturing into a broken foster care system.

“He was against it at first,” she says, “just like I was against joining the military.”

At the end of 2019, God answered Illianna’s prayers when Francisco agreed to move forward and complete the ten-week foster care training. Their very first placement was a three-week-old baby named Nate.

Instantly, the entire family felt like Nate was supposed to stay forever. They began the adoption process, but soon found themselves trapped in a painful custody case that made it seem like Nate would be taken away.

In those moments, Illianna remembers clinging to the Bible.

“I remember reading Nate a Bible story one night,” she says. “It was the story of Abraham, where God points to the stars in the sky and promises Abraham that his descendants will outnumber them. And God kept that promise to Abraham. I sat there with Nate and I cried. But I had so much peace, because that story reminded me of God’s promises to our family. Even if Nate went somewhere else, even if we lost him—fill in the blank with all my deepest worries and fears—God was still going to be good.”

In the end, God answered the Morel family’s prayers, and they officially adopted Nate, who is now three years old. “Just like in our military calling, we saw God’s divine intervention again,” Illianna says.

CALLED TO SHARE

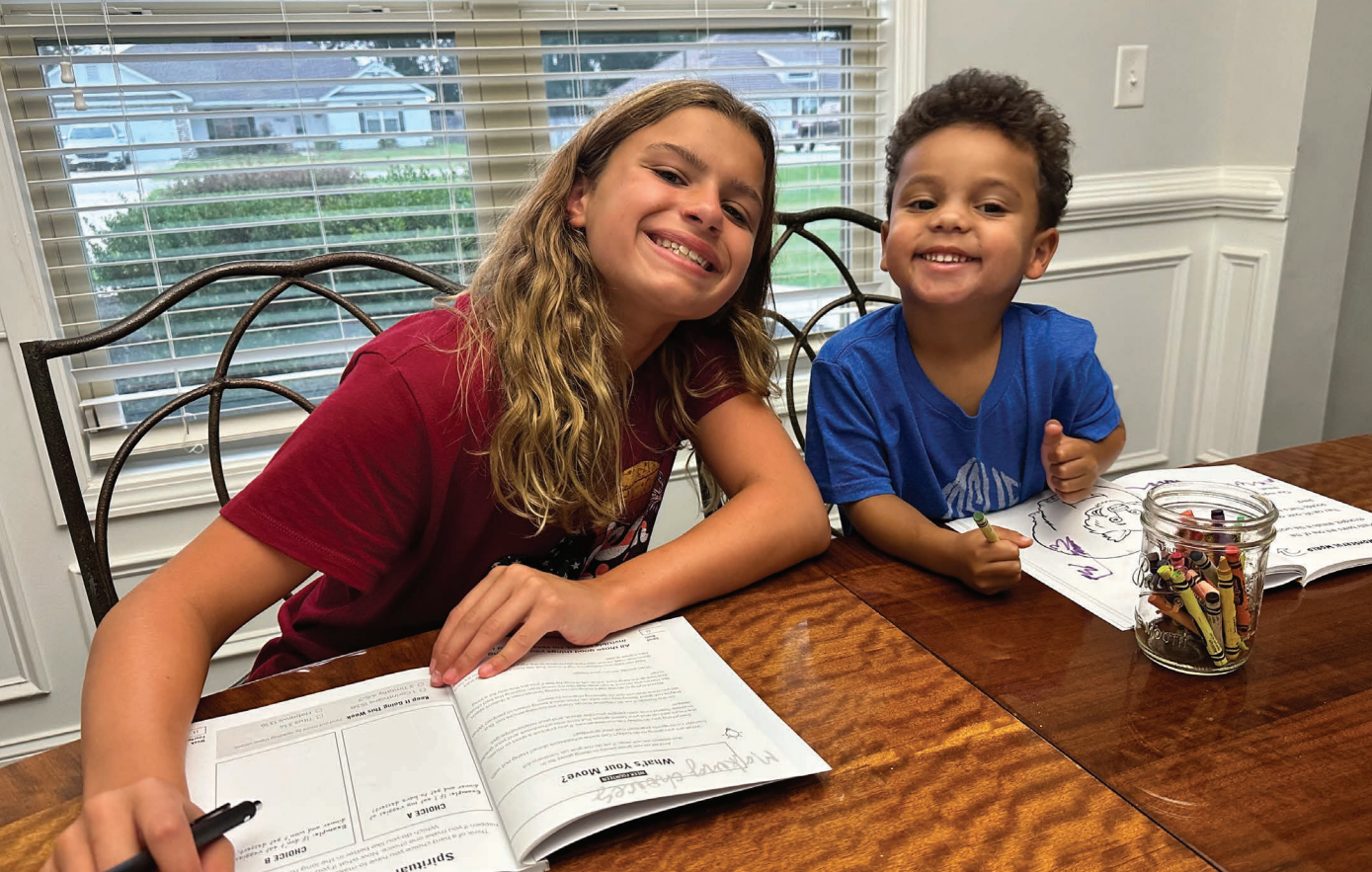
Last year, the Morel family experienced their first deployment. For Illianna, those six long months were a wakeup call to the community and support her family so desperately needed. She began searching for military devotionals and found Hero Squad: quarterly, military-specific Scripture care packages, designed for kids and generously provided by faithful American Bible Society partners like you!

The Morel family’s first package arrived at the very end of Francisco’s deployment—and right before he was about to leave again for an unexpected assignment.

“You don’t realize how timely it was, and how much our family needed it,” Illianna remembers. “We were all struggling. Francisco was about to leave again after being gone for six months. And then, your package arrived!”

You sent the Morel family age-appropriate first Bibles, age and gender-specific devotionals for the kids, and gifts and activities for the family to enjoy together. Through you, they experienced God’s care in a difficult season of deployment. Now, four times a year, they look forward to receiving encouraging Scripture resources from you—their Hero Squad community.

“Thanks to you, I see my children building a personal relationship with God,” Illianna says. “To me, that’s everything. If I do nothing else in life but lead my children to Jesus, I will have done enough.”



Thanks to you, military families are finding courage, peace, and comfort through Hero Squad's unique Scripture resources!

Your support of Hero Squad also equips kids like Amayah, Elijah, and Nate to apply Scripture's truths to their military experiences—and even use those experiences to encourage others.

“My kids now understand what it's like to have deployed family,” Illianna says. “And we've seen God show up when we are missing our parent. He's there. He is our Father, and he wants us to bring our hard times to him.”

This opportunity for her family to live out their faith in a military context reminds Illianna of one of her favorite verses: Esther 4:14b: “Yet who knows—maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen!” For the Morel

family, these words have become a reminder of God's faithful calling in every season—whether it was civilian life, adoption, or military service.

But these words also apply to you!

“For a time like this.” God used you to bless the Morel family right when they needed it. And for that, Illianna is abundantly thankful!

“From all the empty seasons that our family has gone through, and for all the ways this community has been there for us, thank you,” Illianna says. “Through your faithfulness, God has shown up!” ■■

Become a Hero Squad partner and bless waiting military families with Scripture:
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American Bible Society partners just like you dedicate their lives to placing God's Word in hands and hearts



Linda Carley had a very special Christmas wish.

She asked her husband Don for a unique gift . . . not to receive, but to share! She wanted to place Bibles in the hands of spiritually hungry people in China and around the world.

The Carleys are no strangers to sharing God's Word. They've both been giving to American Bible Society for more than 65 years!

“The big thing for us is getting God's Word out,” Don says. “We appreciate what American Bible Society is doing, not only in countries around the world, but also here in the United States. If we're faithful to getting God's Word out, people will be uplifted. People will be saved!”

After hearing about the need for Bibles in China, Linda wanted to use one of American Bible Society's gift planning options to make a difference. Linda told Don, “I want *that* for Christmas!”

Don and Linda talked to Rob Smith, American Bible Society's National Director of Gift Planning. They learned about the **IRA Charitable Rollover**, which not only helps provide more Bibles, but also provides the Carleys with tax benefits!

“You can't outgive God!” Linda says. “We've always put God first in every way of our lives. He's blessed us so much.”

We are so thankful to God for friends like the Carleys—and like you! Through your gifts, you are sharing Bibles with believers in China, our American Troops, and waiting people around the world.

If you would like a FREE consultation about IRA gifts, estate planning, or other ways to share God's Word, please call Rob Smith and our Gift Planning team. We look forward to serving you!

- Call 1-800-549-3328
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PHOTO CREDIT: Courtesy of Don and Linda Carley



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