

General Topics :: Interview: Bibles Needed for the Underground house churches in China

Interview: Bibles Needed for the Underground house churches in China - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2016/1/24 20:00

Saints,

This is a powerful challenge to the Western Church to equip one of the largest Churches in the world, the Word of God for all believers so they can fulfill the great commission with the world.

Asia Harvest: Let's get straight to the main topic of this interview. Are Bibles still needed in China? Paul Hattaway: Yes! But first, please let me thank everyone reading this interview who has prayed and given so that believers in China can have Bibles. On behalf of our brothers and sisters who now have God's Word to help them grow, thank you and God bless you!

Not only are Bibles still greatly needed, many Chinese church leaders are telling us the need is greater now than at any time since the 1980s. There is a growing emergency in China because of the lack of God's Word among the rural house churches. If this need is not rebalanced soon, I fear it will have dire consequences for the revival that has been burning so brightly in China for the last 30 years.

AH: If there is such an urgent need for Bibles in China now, how come so few Christians around the world are aware of it?

Paul: There are several main reasons for this. The first is that providing Bibles for China (and many other countries) seems "out of fashion" in many churches today. Someone recently told a friend that helping get Bibles to China's Christians is "so 1990s!" It seems to no longer be the "in thing." If providing God's Word to hungry believers who can't access it is no longer a priority, may the Lord have mercy on us!

Another misconception is that many people believe China is now a rich country, so they no longer need our help. One American Christian recently told us, "We owe China billions of dollars, so they can take care of themselves." The first thing to say to this statement is that the Chinese government owning American debt does not mean the average person in China benefits in any way! About 90% of China's house church Christians live in rural areas of the country, often thousands of miles away from the glistening skyscrapers of modern cities like Beijing and Shanghai. The revival in China at the moment is burning brightest in remote provinces like Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu and Qinghai. Thousands of people in these regions are coming to Christ daily, and they are among the poorest of the poor in China.

I wish I could take people who think China is now swimming in wealth to some of the areas we go. They would get the shock of their lives! The recently updated Operation World book lists the average annual US income at \$47,000 per person. The UK and Australia are slightly lower. China's average per-capita income is just \$3,200 per year, but there is a massive division between what those in major cities and those in the countryside earn. Many of the Christians we provide Bibles to are among the poorest people in China. They are burdened by grinding poverty and struggling to survive on just a few hundred dollars a year. For most, even if they were able to access a Bible, they would struggle to afford one.

AH: Most Christians have heard that Bibles are now legally printed inside China, so hasn't that taken care of the need?

Paul: You have raised the main reason why people are confused about the current need for Bibles in China. For years there has been a concerted attempt by the government-approved church to convince the world that Bibles are now freely available in China. They have successfully launched a global offensive via Christian radio, television and magazines to announce the "good news" that China no longer needs Bibles. Can you imagine any other country in the world saying they have no need for more Bibles? Yet the government church leaders in China — home to one-fifth of the world's population — say this with a straight face and many Christians foolishly believe them.

Some high-profile Western Christian leaders have joined in the chorus of support, reinforcing the false notion that China

has plenty of Bibles. The propaganda campaign has been so successful that we regularly receive letters and emails from around the world, informing us that we are so out of touch we haven't realized that China is now "awash with Bibles."

It is true that for many years the government has allowed the printing of a limited number of Bibles in China. These are all produced at the Amity Press in the city of Nanjing, and each Bible has an official permit number. I am thankful for every one of them!

These official Bibles are printed primarily for members of the state-sanctioned churches in China, known as the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement." There are approximately 20 million Christians in these churches. It is usually not difficult for Christians living in most major urban centers to buy a Bible at one of these churches. However, if you want to buy more than five or ten Bibles you will probably find it difficult, and questions may be asked about who they are for.

For the last 23 years we have been serving the unregistered house churches in China, who number more than 50 million believers. I can tell you that it simply isn't true that the official Bibles are freely available inside China for all Christians. It would be wonderful if it were true, but it is not the case.

Each of the house church networks we serve have verified needs of hundreds of thousands of Bibles just to provide God's Word to their new converts!

AH: The Amity Press, which prints Bibles with government permission in China, report to have printed tens of millions of Bibles in China since its inception. Surely many of these find their way to the house churches too? Paul: The numbers of Bibles reportedly produced by Amity Press are impressive. What they fail to mention, for some strange reason, is that two-thirds of the Bibles they print in China are for EXPORT! Amity Press has become one of the largest commercial printers in the world, and two-thirds of the Bibles they produce are in other languages and are exported out of China. If you have a look at an English NIV Bible, for example, don't be surprised if it says it was printed in China.

The bottom line is that the Chinese Bibles that do remain inside the country are for distribution among members of the Three-Self churches. The more than 50 million house church Christians struggle to pick up more than a few crumbs that fall from the table of the registered church.

My heart breaks for these believers, and the way they have been neglected by much of the Body of Christ. More and more mission groups are signing up to work with the Three-Self Church in China, because it is safer for them to do so. What about the 50 million precious followers of Jesus among the "illegal" and despised unregistered house churches? Should we just ignore them and let them waste away without access to God's Word?

Although they wouldn't say so publicly, I know how painful it is to house church leaders when yet another big-name Western Christian comes to China and saddles up with the government. One world-famous preacher, convinced he was an expert after a week or two in China, even had the audacity to rebuke the house churches for their refusal to register with the Communist government. Such statements show a complete ignorance and disrespect for our brothers and sisters who have suffered so much for their faith and the principles they have taken a stand for. After 50 years of persecution, the house church Christians in China do not need further wounds at the hands of ill-informed Christians from other nations.

Many house church leaders have shared with us that they consider being deprived of Bibles as another form of persecution.

We are not ashamed to say how privileged we are to serve the illegal and increasingly-neglected house churches of China. We aim, by God's grace, to provide as many Bibles to our dear brothers and sisters as the Lord grants us the resources to print and deliver.

AH: What do you say to those Christians who say we must obey the laws of the land, and the laws of China right now say you can not print Bibles except through the Amity Press?

Paul: I agree that we should always obey the laws of governments and those in authority, as long as those laws do not go against the higher law of God. Jesus commanded us to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all of mankind.

About 60 countries in the world today do not allow missionaries and are hostile to the message of Christ. Should we obey the laws of the land and forget about the hundreds of millions of people who live in those countries? Should we let them go to hell without hearing about Jesus?

Was Daniel misguided when he refused to obey the law of the land to bow before an idol? Were Peter and John sinning when they defied orders to stop telling people about Jesus? Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we can not help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

I suspect many Christians today use the "obey the laws of the land" verse as a self-righteous excuse for doing nothing.

Jesus commanded us to feed those who are hungry, and in China today there are multitudes of His children spiritually starving because of a lack of God's Word.

We look forward to a day when Bibles are freely available to all people in China—including house church Christians. In the meantime, we continue to print as many Bibles as God grants us the ability to do.

AH: Some people say the house churches should get their Bibles via the government churches. Is this possible? Paul: Some well-meaning missionaries have told me that official channels in China will provide Bibles to the house churches if we ask. I reply, "Great! We need 50,000 Bibles delivered here, and 35,000 delivered there," and so on. Immediately my friends' eyes look down, as they realize they can't help with so many. If we needed 50 or 100 Bibles it could be arranged, but such a tiny trickle of Scriptures is like trying to put out a raging forest fire with a garden hose!

Even if the house churches were able to access large quantities of Bibles that have been printed for the registered churches, this might temporarily alleviate some of their needs, but doing this would not add a single Bible to the total number available in China. In a way it would be like taking a bucket of water from one end of a swimming pool and pouring it into the other end.

AH: How can people reading this interview respond?

Paul: On behalf of the Christians in China, I would firstly ask you to pray. The structure is already in place to supply many millions more Bibles to the house churches than are currently being provided. Please pray that the most basic need every Christian has—access to God's Word—would not be hindered.

There is no point us trying to persuade people to get involved with this need by mere human strength or reasoning. Please ask the Holy Spirit to reveal God's heart on this matter, so that more people and churches might respond to this need from a position of understanding and because they see a God-given opportunity to make a strategic difference in the lives of many.

Part of the problem is a lack of support. Quite simply, the more funds come in, the more Bibles we can print and deliver for \$1.80 each.

Amid all the talk of millions of Bibles needed, let's remember that each individual person is precious to God. These Bibles go to real believers, young and old, who have been saved by the grace of God, and who desire to know more of the Lord Jesus. For this reason, every single Bible is precious and life-changing. Every donation to this project is important and strategic, whatever the amount. Please also consider sharing the need for Bibles in China with your Christian friends and relatives.

AH: We have ascertained that there is a huge need for Bibles in China among the house churches. Just how great is the need?

Paul: Our co-workers needed to answer the same question, so last year they asked many leaders of house church networks in China to survey their members and tell us of their needs. The result was staggering. Added together, the house churches throughout China urgently need 34 million Bibles, just to provide the Word of God to all of their members. It would be many millions more if enquirers are considered, but our priority is to provide Bibles to as many believers as possible.

AH: This is a huge number. How did the need get to be so large?

Paul: It has been stated that "every Christian in China is an evangelist," and generally this is true. In one sense, the problem of providing Bibles can never be fully met while the church is in revival.

The more Bibles that are printed, the more people get saved and the more Bibles are needed!

Many China ministries believe that, on average, two to three people come to faith in Jesus Christ for every Bible that is printed in China.

For years one major mission group has said at least five people experience salvation for every Chinese Bible. Our experiences line up with these claims.

We have received numerous letters from church leaders telling us how they used to have 500 believers in their area, for example, but after we delivered a shipment of Bibles they grew to two or three times that number in a short time. It is a great problem to have!

In the past, many missionaries to China were greatly discouraged because of the difficulty trying to reach people. The Welsh missionary Griffith John wrote, "The good news is moving very slowly. The people are as hard as steel. They are eaten up both soul and body by the world, and do not seem to feel that there can be reality in anything beyond sense. To them our doctrine is foolishness, our talk jargon. We discuss and beat them in argument. We reason them into silence and shame; but the whole effort falls upon them like showers upon a sandy desert."

The seasons have changed, and for the past 30 years God has done a mighty work in China. Countless millions are meeting Him for the first time. Now is the time of salvation in China!

People reading this may feel that their own communities bear little resemblance to what is happening in China and many other parts of the world today.

Don't be jealous, however. For when God was powerfully visiting many parts of the Western world in past generations, China was blind and hardened to the Gospel message. Millions who perished are now burning in hell because of it.

AH: When we share about the needs of China and Asia with Christians in our country, someone invariably says, "We have plenty of needs in our area too, so why should we worry about people on the other side of the world?" How do you respond to this?

Paul: Certainly there are needs everywhere, but there are a few different ways I would respond to this attitude. The first and most important thing people need to consider is what does the Bible teach? God clearly reveals that His heart is for the whole world. Our God is a missionary God, who sent His own Son to reach the lost. He didn't command His followers to only go into their local communities, but to the ends of the earth. The disciples were told, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Notice the Lord didn't say they should "first" reach Jerusalem, "then" Judea and Samaria, and "ultimately" the ends of the earth. All three are to be done simultaneously. Christians need to be involved in reaching the far ends of the earth at the same time they are reaching their local communities.

People often think they are at the center of the universe, whereas God's primary concern is for the lost masses and people groups who have never heard the Gospel. If we count ourselves among His followers, we need to have an interest in the big picture. He cares for His lost sheep wherever they are, especially for those in the most remote and neglected lands.

Often during my travels in the West I feel a bit weird. We meet many sincere Christians who spend all their time and energy "reaching" towns in their country which already have churches on every street corner.

Then we travel thousands of miles through areas of Tibet or Central Asia where not a single church building can be seen. There are no Christian workers, and few people have ever heard the Name of Jesus. Such things must look strange in heaven.

AH: Many Christians don't help with needs on the other side of the world because they are unable to relate to those languages and cultures. How can this be overcome?

Paul: In regards to Bibles in China, we are all one family in Christ. We have millions of brothers and sisters in China starving without God's Word, despite there being a proven and efficient method to provide Bibles for just \$1.80 each. This opportunity should excite Christians who hear about it, regardless of where they live in the world.

Another way to look at things is from a strategic investment point of view.

Several years ago the World Christian Encyclopedia published a fascinating study on the financial cost of producing one new baptized follower of Christ in various parts of the world. This was calculated by finding the total spent on all Christian activities (outreach, church buildings, Christian television and radio, literature etc.) in a country, and dividing the amount by the number of baptisms each year.

Incredibly, the study estimated that it costs \$1.5 million to produce every new baptized believer in the United States! Are these believers precious to God? Of course they are! But so are souls in China, the most populated country on earth, where about 1,300,000,000 people are lost in their sin and hell-bound.

Providing God's Word to fellow believers in China should appeal to all kinds of Christians. For those with a shepherd's heart, here is an opportunity to nourish and strengthen new believers with the Scriptures. For those with the heart of an evangelist, I can't think of a more attractive investment. \$1.80 will provide a Bible, which will bring an additional two or three Chinese people (on average) to salvation. That's unbeatable investment value!

AH: Can you share a little about why the Bibles we print in China are so inexpensive? Most people think \$1.80 is a very low price for a Bible. Other organizations charge anywhere from \$3 to \$10.50 for similar Chinese Bibles.

Paul: There are no gimmicks or trickery involved with our cost price of \$1.80 per Bible! If someone sends us \$1.80, then one Bible really is printed and delivered to a believer in China. If we receive a donation of \$180, then 100 Bibles really are printed and delivered.

The Bibles we print in China are full Bibles (not just New Testaments), excellent quality, with strong covers and binding. As a ministry, we have always wanted to supply as many Bibles as possible, for as economically as possible. After 3.7 million Bibles, we have yet to receive a single complaint from anyone in China!

The reason why our cost price is much less than most other organizations is something people who want to know will need to ask the other organizations involved. We are glad for every Bible that is produced for China. We just wish there were a lot more!

We do not use this or any other project as an excuse to raise funds for ourselves. Anyone who knows the way we operate will testify that we do so with a bare minimum of staff and overhead expenses.

Our goal is simply to do what the Lord has told us to do, and that is to provide as many Bibles as possible to His children in China. We have been doing this since 1988. This is a matter of life and death. We have been blessed to see the life-changing difference God's Word makes when it is provided to a community, and horrified to experience the depravity and deception that envelops a people group or place when the Scriptures are absent or ignored.

We feel the time available to reach the lost is running out, and God's clock will soon strike midnight. There is no time to play games or make excuses. This is no time to live our lives like we will be on this earth forever, while the lost perish around us. May we pray like Moses, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

Another key reason for the low cost of our Bibles is the diligence of our Chinese co-workers. They have spent a lot of time finding the most secure and economical way to print Bibles, because their motive is also to reach as many people with God's Word as possible.

AH: How do you know that all the Bibles being printed in China are really getting delivered to believers?

Paul: Many people who are experienced in China Christian work have told us they are greatly impressed by the level of reporting we receive from our Chinese co-workers.

Within weeks of each print-run, we receive detailed reports showing us where every single box of Bibles ended up, along with extensive accounting.

We then have some Western colleagues who do "spot checks" to ensure the information we receive is correct, that the funds have been used with full integrity and the Bibles have been delivered as reported.

For partner ministries, we take the distribution reports and overlay the information on maps of China, giving a powerful visual display of the locations in China their support has impacted.

This tested and effective method of providing Bibles to the hungry believers in China has not just fallen into place by accident. It has come about through many years of prayer, faith, and hard work by many people in China. Some have been arrested and imprisoned for their involvement, so it has also come at great cost.

AH: The house churches in China need 34 million Bibles for their members. At \$1.80 each we would need \$61.2 million!
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Paul: Let me interrupt you there. Such numbers often discourage people from thinking they can make a difference. When one missionary arrived in India he was asked, "How do you plan to reach a billion people?" He replied, "One at a time!"

In the same way, every single Bible that is printed makes a huge difference in the lives of those who receive it. These are people just like you and me. They are young men and women whose lives have been transformed by the Gospel. They are families who desire more of Christ, and who want to raise their children in a godly home.

After receiving a Bible, their faith is established and strengthened, and they in turn share the Gospel with their neighbors and friends.

Everyone reading these words can make a huge difference in China, regardless of whatever resources they may or may not have at their disposal.

Firstly, please pray for this project. We don't want to take on this need in our own strength, without God's blessing, because our endeavors will fall flat.

Believe me when I say that every person who becomes closely involved with the Bible project immediately finds themselves in an intense spiritual battle. Satan does all he can to disrupt and destroy this work. Please pray for God's power, protection, and provision to cover all who are involved in providing Bibles to the Chinese house churches.

Secondly, in this time of economic difficulty for many, let us remember the words of the hymn, "Little is much, when God is in it!" You don't need to be materially wealthy to make a great difference in people's lives in China.

Recently we received a letter from a friend named Rich, who lives in New Jersey. He wrote, "How's this for a clever way of sending Bibles... I called up my private garbage collector and requested a smaller size can. Now I save \$5.40 every two months—just enough for three more Bibles!"

With this simple action, Rich is able to provide 18 more Bibles to the believers in China each year. These 18 Bibles will result in between 36 and 54 people coming to know Jesus for the first time. I realize that this sounds too good to be true, except that all the evidence points towards it being true!

Therefore please don't think you are unable to make a difference in China. God always looks for an obedient heart, and is not impressed by the things that people are often impressed by.

AH: At the same time isn't it true that those who do have a lot of resources at their disposal should also be involved?

Paul: Yes, of course. It is a huge responsibility to be a Christian with the means to help God's work. To those whom much has been given, much will be required.

May I be really blunt with you? The main reason 34 million Christians in China are without access to God's Word is not because China is a Communist nation, but because the priorities of the Church around the world has become so skewed.

Multitudes of believers are spiritually blind to things that matter most to God, and they major in things of little consequence.

You mentioned earlier that if we had \$61 million we would be able to provide God's Word to every believer in China who is without a Bible.

When we think of such a large number we may feel personally helpless, but is such an amount a lot of money for the worldwide Church to provide?

A few years ago my family and I were in the United States, where we visited some friends. They took us to see their church building where several thousand believers meet every week. As far as buildings go, the church was an impressive structure, but our friends explained the church was building another facility right next to the existing one.

The "old" building (which was actually quite new) would then be used for Sunday school classes and other purposes. The church had purchased a row of houses on an adjoining street, and demolished them to make room for more parking spaces. The total cost of this new church building was \$40 million.

I wonder what the leaders and members of that one congregation would say if we met with them and asked them to abandon their plans? Instead, they could remain in their existing building and use the spare money to provide more than 22 million Bibles to the Christians in China, who in turn would lead 40, 50, or 60 million lost souls into the kingdom of God.

The above example is just one congregation, in one medium-size city, in one state of America.

There are countless other examples of far more lavish expenditure on things God has little interest in. It is by no means just an American problem either. One church in Singapore has recently raised \$400 million to construct their new church building!

All of this must look very strange in heaven, the dwelling place of our God who "is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands" (Acts 17:24).

So after sharing this perspective, let me ask you this rhetorical question: is \$61 million really a lot of money for the whole Body of Christ to provide so that all believers in China will have a Bible?

Could it be that the main reason the Gospel has yet to impact thousands of people groups in the world after 2,000 years is because Christians have their priorities all messed up?

I am reminded of a church in Australia who stopped supporting all of their missionaries, and instead used the money to pay for a 20-minute fireworks display. I'm sure it was an amazing show, but what does God think of such things? I could continue with many similar examples but they wouldn't be very edifying!

Our responsibility, in our own lives and families, is to earnestly seek the Lord and ask Him to make sure our priorities line up with God's priorities.

Bob Pierce, who founded World Vision, often prayed, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." The Lord answered his prayers, and today millions of children throughout the world are fed, clothed and educated every day as a result.

Please pray our Heavenly Father would break through the spiritual blindness. Pray the Holy Spirit would reveal God's broken heart about those in China and elsewhere who are without access to His Word.

AH: Thanks for sharing your heart on the need for Bibles in China today. I think many readers will be surprised by the things you have shared. Is there anything you would like to say in conclusion?

PH: I am thankful for everyone who has taken the time to read this interview. If all you have learned is the size of the ne

ed in China, then we have failed. I hope you can clearly see the exciting opportunities that exists to help meet this need.

On behalf of our neglected spiritual family who meet in China's house churches, I ask you to prayerfully consider how you can help provide Bibles, regardless of the amount. Every single Bible is important.

It is a great opportunity to be involved in transforming many lives from darkness to light through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our commitment to you is that we will continue to print and deliver as many Bibles to the Christians in China as we are able, as inexpensively as possible.

By God's grace we will not tire until the need is met, or the Lord Jesus returns for His bride!

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You can get a bible into the hands of an underground house church believer in China for \$1.80 here: <http://asiaharvest.org/china-bible-fund/>

Re: Interview: Bibles Needed for the Underground house churches in China - posted by Lysa (), on: 2016/1/25 5:35

My friends used to travel to Taiwan once a year for a missions trip and everyday they would spend their time at the airport (with interpreters) to hand out Bibles to those getting off or on the planes from C.h.i.n.a. She remembers this one man who came up to them crying that he had been praying for Bible his whole life.

I listened to a woman from our community who went there for two weeks and in "007" style and passed out Bibles in the late 80's.

God is using many different organizations to get Bibles in the hands of believers there!! Praise God for it!! If you can't actually go with any of these people, then \$1.80 or more is not much at all to help out, is it not?

God bless!!

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2016/1/26 1:35

Amen dear sister. A brother in the Lord had a small box with a note on it on his dinner table for Bibles for China. It was convicting to look at it the whole meal that just \$1.80 would provide a Bible for an underground Church believer.

By the end of my meal I realized it was a very little sacrifice for me to put in a \$2 bill.