

God's Word for All

The mission of Bibles For The World is inherent in its name. Based in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the ministry believes in the power of God's Word to not only transform individual lives but also to change the sinful and sometimes violent ways of people groups who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John Pudaite, the ministry's president and CEO since 2015, knows that full well, for it was out of his family's tribal heritage in Northeast India that Bibles For The World (BFTW) came to be. Pudaite, an award-winning filmmaker with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and art history from Wheaton College, honored the work of his parents, Drs. Rochunga and Mawii Pudaite, by leading the ministry they founded.

Planting Gospel Seeds

The Pudaite family comes from Northeast India, an area that is now majority Christian, but in the early 20th century, the warriors in his Hmar tribe had a reputation that put fear in the hearts of their foes.

"Before the gospel came to our people, the British ruled across India, and they kept extending their empire across into our area," Pudaite says. "Because of that constant encroachment of our traditional tribal land, our people went down and raided a British tea plantation, and in one night, they took 500 heads of all the plantation workers and kidnapped the tea manager's daughter, so we had this reputation as one of the fiercest headhunting tribes in the entire British Empire."

In 1910, a lone missionary defied government orders to present the gospel to the unreached Hmar tribe. Only 22 at the time, Watkin Roberts was a product of the now-famous Welsh Revival. Once the Gospel of John was translated and printed in the tongue of a neighboring tribe, Roberts sent one copy of it to

Pudaite's grandfather's village.

"Most of the people still couldn't read, but they knew it was something important," Pudaite says. "So they sent a message back to the missionary who had sent it and said, 'Please, sir, come and explain the meaning of this book.' So the missionary knew that was a call from God. That was his Macedonian call, so he trekked through the jungles up to my grandfather's village more than seven days on foot, defying the British government authorities' orders, so that he could share the gospel with our people."

Although Roberts was able to spend only five days in the village, God used him mightily.

"In that time, the Holy Spirit spoke through him, and he was able to convey the message of salvation through Jesus Christ," Pudaite says. "Five young men gave their hearts to Christ, and my grandfather was one of those."

The missionary left the village and said he would return, but he had raised the ire of the British.

"They banished him from the area first, from the district and then the state and eventually out of India altogether," says Pudaite, noting that the missionary tried to maintain contact with the tribe but was unsuccessful.

"But the seed of God's Word had been planted among our people, and it spread like wildfire across our hills, from hut to hut, from village to village. My grandfather and those other early Christians shared the gospel message, the good news of Jesus Christ, with anyone who would listen to them. Within that first 30 years, before World War II when the Japanese invaded our area, almost every single village in our tribe had been reached with the gospel."

Through the generations, Pudaite's tribe bore fruit for God's kingdom well beyond his grandfather's jungle home.

“Our people have reached out to the neighboring tribes,” he says. “We now have missionaries in almost every state of India. We have missionaries in neighboring countries like Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, even as far away as Cambodia and South Korea. We’ve also sent a missionary to Japan. And you see this amazing transformation. It’s only by the power of God and His Holy Spirit that we can say God has transformed our people entirely from headhunters to heart hunters for Jesus Christ.”

Pursuing a Dream

After decades, Pudaite’s grandparents and their tribe still only had the Gospel of John in the tongue of a neighboring tribe.

“My grandparents, in their simplicity, knew that we had to have God’s Word in our own language,” he says. “We were still working from a different language, a neighboring language. That was the only Scripture we had. And so, when my father was 10 years old, they dedicated him to get the education needed to translate God’s Word into the language of our people, into the Hmar language. In their own innocent way, they just knew this was something that our people needed, and that set Dad on a journey that led him out of our jungle hills into other parts of India and eventually to Scotland and to America as he pursued that dream of translating the Bible into our language.”

That simple dedication at such a young age went a long way.

“God put people in his path along the way,” Pudaite says. “While he was a student and in junior college and college in India, he met Dr. Bob Pierce, who went on to found World Vision and Samaritan’s Purse, Dr. Bob and he became lifelong friends, and Dr. Bob helped arrange for Dad to go to Glasgow Bible Institute first, and while he was there, God brought another person to Scotland, a guy by the name of Billy Graham, for the All Scotland Crusade [in 1955].”

As Graham traveled from place to place ministering in Scotland, he took notice of this diligent young man from Northeast India.

“As Dr. Graham moved around that country for three months, Dad was volunteering at the crusade in promotion and counseling, and I guess he caught Dr. Graham’s eye,” he says. “So Dr. Graham called him up to his hotel room and said, ‘I’ve seen you around here. Tell me your story. Where are you from, and what are you doing here?’ And Dad told him that he comes from this little tribe in Northeast India, and he’s here studying God’s Word so he could translate it into the language of his people. And Dr. Graham said, ‘We’ve got to get you to Wheaton.’”

All it took was Graham’s phone call, and “Dad was accepted to Wheaton College Graduate School of Theology, and that’s where he continued his work in the translation with the guidance of the wonderful professors and colleagues there. That’s where he finished the New Testament in the early ’60s.”

In the late ’60s and early ’70s, Pudaite’s father went on to establish and organize the indigenous church as the Evangelical Free Church of India. He also led the indigenous Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, which was later renamed Partnership Mission.

“The mission work included Christian schools and child sponsorship, health care, relief and development projects and more,” Pudaite says.

Through Bibles For The World’s child sponsorship program, Partnership Mission Society, as it was known in India, continues to run the schools in Northeast India.

“Dad registered Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission in Wheaton, Illinois, in 1958, and formed its first board of directors,” Pudaite says. “As the various programs were launched in the United States to raise funds from ‘partners’ in the ministry

in the '60s, the name was changed to Partnership Mission Inc. in the States. In India, the name was changed from Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission to Partnership Mission Society."

After Pudaite's father finished translating the Bible in Hmar, he prayed, "God, what is the next task? What is the next challenge that you have for me?"

"That's when God spoke to him and said, 'I want you to take my Word to people all over India, to send the Bible to people across the world,' and that's when the vision for Bibles For The World started. In 1971, God gave Dad the vision to distribute Bibles across India and around the world. That aspect of the ministry grew tremendously, and the name of the U.S. entity was changed to Bibles For The World, with the ministry operations of Partnership Mission becoming a division within BFTW. But the entity in India, Partnership Mission Society, never changed its name."

Bibles For The World sent New Testaments to all of the telephone subscribers across India and then to neighboring countries.

"By God's grace, 45 years later, we've been blessed to be able to provide God's Word in over 120 countries," Pudaite says.

Although the organization began out of a commitment to translate the Scriptures in Hmar, Bibles For The World now focuses largely on distribution.

"We try to focus on strategic distribution of God's Word, especially where we see things happening, where the Holy Spirit is working," Pudaite says. "We know that people, as they're being reached and come to Christ, they need God's Word. And so we will use our Scriptures both in evangelism, trying to provide those to people who are going out as indigenous national missionaries, pastors, ministries, churches, and also in the follow-up of that as new believers come to Christ. We like to provide them with at least a New

Testament, sometimes the whole Bible.”

Contending for Souls

Instead of recruiting missionaries, Bibles For The World uses “nationals,” people who can reach their own people group with the gospel.

“We always focus on using the nationals, using the indigenous ministries, pastors, missionaries, evangelists, those who are working on the front lines,” Pudaite says. “And so as we go into a country, as God has placed it on our heart and we feel led toward exploring that, we try to build networks of those national partners. This is a strategy that we have used for years now, and it comes out of our own background in Northeast India because no missionaries were allowed in our area, yet our entire people group and so many of the neighboring people groups were evangelized by their own people.”

Bibles For The World also carefully stewards its support funds.

“We don’t have a single office outside of the U.S. and even have a little office [in the U.S.], and yet we have, in so many countries, developed partnerships and networks with the believers there and with missionaries who are working there,” he says. “We don’t set up an office. We don’t have a national director for each country that we work in. We find a partner that we feel we’re aligned with who has a real burning passion for evangelism, for reaching out to the people in his neighborhood, in his country, and so we partner with him. Sometimes these partnerships last for the season, maybe a couple of years. Sometimes it may go on for five, six, seven, eight years, but we never try to establish our own operations.”

The mission wants to strengthen nationals in the ministry to their own people.

“They can do it far better than we can,” Pudaite says. “They can do it more cost- effectively, more efficiently, than we can coming in from outside. But we’re there as we hear that God is working, the Holy Spirit is in action, and these people, this church, this ministry, is going out and reaching their fellow people, then we want to be there and provide God’s Word for them. So at any given time, we may have about five to eight countries that we are actively focusing on. We always have an ongoing focus in India. There’s such a tremendous need, the most unreached people groups in the world, are in the country of India.”

True to its name, Bibles For The World works with nationals in countries such as Bhutan and Cambodia in Asia; Malawi and Burkina Faso in Africa; and Cuba and Guatemala in Latin America.

The organization has also ministered in India’s neighboring country Nepal, “where we’ve put together a network of over 2,000 national frontline workers, pastors, evangelists and missionaries who are providing God’s Word across the country,” Pudaite says. “By God’s grace, we have now provided 2.5 million Gospels of Johns for them to use.”

Another focus is providing Bible portions at festivals and crusades where key partners—including Luis Palau and Franklin Graham—share the gospel.

“Everybody who attends that meeting will go away with their own copy of the Gospel of John,” Pudaite says. “We know that there’s been a tremendous amount of effort, a tremendous amount of prayer, that’s gone into those events. At the same time, in a lot of these cultures and countries, the decision to follow Christ is not something you can always make right on the spot. Of course, the Holy Spirit moves so many in those audiences to come forward and accept Jesus as their Savior, but at the same time, there are many who want to think about it. They want to take it home, they want to meditate on it,

they want to share it with their family, they want to talk it over. For many people in these countries and cultures, it's a family decision, and it has a lot of ramifications—social, community, family—and they need to think it through, and so we want to make sure that they've got a copy of God's Word so that even if they did hear the message, they've got something written in their hands that they can share. They can read that, they can think over, and then God can continue to work in their hearts so that the Holy Spirit may speak to them as they read His Word."

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bibles For The World has had to rework its outreach plans and events.

"We had projects that were planned for Turkey, reaching out to the Iranians who come there to celebrate the New Year," Pudaite says. "But we're also seeing a tremendous hunger for God's Word in some countries where we had outreach events planned."

On the positive side, there is a new openness to the gospel.

"All over India, people are searching now," Pudaite says. "They need the truth. They need the hope that only Jesus can bring them."

Blessing the Persecuted

Bibles For The World also does not forget those who are persecuted for the gospel's sake.

Partners who are ministering in countries where persecution is rampant need encouragement, and along with the Scriptures, the mission comes alongside in support of these partners.

"As we provide Gospels of John, we bring them together for what we call a Seed Sower Seminar," Pudaite says. "This may be a two- to four-day seminar where we will do, in essence, an intensive study on the Gospel of John. We may have pastors or

missionaries. Sometimes it's a multinational group that comes. We've had people come from the U.S., from Canada, from India, going to other countries, all sharing on the Gospel of John. In the process of that time together, we try to encourage them. We want them to have this time to just rest in the Lord, rest in His Spirit with us and get recharged to go back out."

The gathering also allows time for those who need to be restored to share some of the difficulties they face, "the oppression, the persecution, even the hardships caused by natural calamities like the earthquake in Nepal," Pudaite says. "Our heart goes out to them. We know these people are on the front lines suffering."

Pudaite finds it exciting to see the gospel go forth "in the same way it spread from our tribe, from my grandfather and those early Christians to the neighboring tribes and now through the ministry of Bibles For The World literally around the world. God is going to do that over and over as these people reach out to their fellow Nepalis or fellow Indians or fellow Cambodians, whoever it may be. And we know that God is going to write another wonderful chapter in His story through these people who we are equipping and ministering to."

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