

WHY I TRANSLATE THE BIBLE?

By Timothy Jones

I was recently digging a hole down the mountain on our farm to bury a child who had died in our community. There were about 30 people watching. Many of the people in the community moved here from the mountains and are far away from their traditional burial grounds. Their system is too broken down here for them to establish new burial grounds. But we have buried several people here because their family members had nowhere to take their dead.

The one condition we place on them is that they can't come back later to exhume the body to perform sacrifices for the dead. If they can't handle that, they can't bury their dead here.

In this particular instance they brought along a traditional burier to help, but he was so weak and sick that he didn't help much, except to tell us to quit digging when we were half done so he could get out of there. We paid him no attention.

When we decided that we had dug far enough, he decided to make sure we had placed the casket with the head of the body facing west, since that is the direction that the spirit takes to begin his journey.

I didn't stop him. But when he was satisfied, I stopped the whole job and said, "Now I am going to read the Bible to you." I read from 2 Cor. 5: Absent from the body present with the Lord. I also read some Psalms of praise to our God.



David, Timothy and Reinaldo checking the epistles of Paul

"Listen," I said, "it doesn't matter which way you place the child's head. Her spirit is gone. She is present with the Lord. We were made by a Creator who consciously created us to live a life for his purposes and to live the length of time that he designated," I said, after explaining Psalm 139. I also sang and prayed with them though not one of them joined in.

Many of these people have heard something of the Bible, but have never really understood who Jesus is or made a commitment to him. I don't know most of them that well. But they all call me Kibi, my tribal title of big brother.

"MANY OF THESE PEOPLE HAVE HEARD SOMETHING OF THE BIBLE, BUT HAVE NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD WHO JESUS IS..."

They shared what they had to eat or drink with me since we were all hungry and tired.

The Bible isn't just a book. It is truth that will give us life and set us free. That is why I translate the Bible.

A few days ago a woman was flown in to the local clinic. The doctors didn't think she was sick enough to be sent on to the hospital, so they gave her treatment for a urinary infection and let her go. One of our disciples from far away

A WORD FROM THE RIVER OF GOD BOARD

Imagine the Challenges

*Dear Friends and Family,
Sharing the Gospel of Grace with all people is a responsibility we, the church, collectively own. This issue is intended to provide you with a tiny peak at what it takes to share Christ with a nation of people whose language is as challenging as the rugged mountains in which they live.*

River of God Board-

Jay Shultz

Jack Folden

Chris McMichen

Randel Stringer

was at the clinic and recognized the sick woman and her husband. He called us to ask if we could send a truck to pick up the woman and put the couple up in our shelter.

The next day she came to the house complaining of her aches and pains. We fed her and sent a mattress to the shelter for her. Late that night her husband came saying she needed to be taken to the hospital. We told him she would have to wait till morning to be checked again at the clinic. In the morning he sent some men from the shelter to ask us to get her an ambulance, because he didn't think she would make it. We told the men we would send her in the truck to the clinic, so they brought her down to our house. She was rolled up in a sheet and she lay on our porch like she was going to die. Her husband said she couldn't

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HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

By David Jones

When I was a kid growing up my parents were working on Bible translation. Both my parents were very gifted linguists. At meal times, especially at lunch, my parents would talk linguistics. My mother would sit at one end of the table and my Father at the other end and us children would sit on the sides. While my parents talked we were not to interrupt nor intercept with our own conversation across the table. I think we children figured out ways to communicate across the table regardless! There was a black board in the dining room and my father would regularly jot down on it Cabécar words and phrases.



David, Lucy, Levi, and Andrew with David's parents Marian and Aziel Jones

As a child I grew a distaste for linguistics and translation issues. I was an outdoors person. I didn't like to read nor sit down and study. I liked hanging around our Cabécar friends and learning their language. I learned mostly by listening. I was much more interested in conversation with them than in analyzing their grammar and I could tell you nothing about the technical, linguistic terms for each complex part of Cabécar grammar but I could tell you a lot about birds and animals and the ways of the jungle.

Sometimes Daddy would come from the office to sit down to lunch excited about the new word he had just learned. He would say it and then often my mother would respond: "You already knew that word!" My father would also regularly emphasize the importance of writing down what one learned. Being that I was more practical than analytical, I reasoned that what I didn't have in my head wouldn't do me any good.

Now I am involved in Bible translation! Over the last eight years or so I have

progressively spent more and more time on it. I'm not a normal linguist nor a grammar expert- my mind just doesn't work like that. Nevertheless I do have talent in languages and in Bible translation, though I don't know if I'd ever call myself a "Bible translator".

Last year and some this year, I spent long hours revising part the text of the new edition of the Cabécar New Testament. A lot of this time I worked with a certain Cabécar friend who likes to

laugh, joke and teach his language. He is very expressive and was always throwing me new expressions and adjectives that I didn't know. I'd pull out a note pad and jot things down and then ask him to explain them. Then I learned to be more

efficient and avoid distractions, so when he would use an unfamiliar phrase I would quickly slide him the notepad for him to write it on and then I'd toss the note in my draw to someday review and memorize. He teased me saying I was a squirrel, saving up lots of little papers. More than once as I started to find the note pad he'd laugh and say; "but you already know that word"...

About ten years ago when I started learning Bribri, a very close language to Cabécar, I started to write words that I learned down. But because of its closeness to Cabécar, I managed to progress in learning their language without ever studying all the notes I took. But now, as I struggle to learn another more distantly related language, Guaymí of Panama, I am writing down as best I can everything I learn and spend lots of time studying my notes, struggling to memo-

rize the material and figure out to some degree the mechanics of the language...

Challenges and Blessings of Translation

In Corinthians in the context of his persecutions and hardships Paul also mentions: "the burden for all the churches". Giving time to the translation project has meant giving less time to hike the trails, visiting Christians in the jungle and helping the churches. It makes long treks to remote places on a regular basis nearly impossible. While I know that Christians need to grow up, mature and walk on their own, I also realize that Bible teaching, shepherding and encouraging the sheep is Biblical and important. The tension between the need to invest time in translation and the desire to hike the mountains is a constant struggle. Many times while working in the office my mind wanders to friends in the jungle, wondering how they are making out. All I can do is pray and wait for the Lord Jesus to build His Church.

Sometimes the challenges of translation seem endless but it is a huge blessing is to spend hour after hour poring over

each chapter and learning so much. What I have gleaned from the Word during the process is very valuable to me and I have grown much because of it.

We will see what the future holds for me in Bible translation and I would hope that whatever I do in this field would be effective and beneficial. My biggest desire

is that the Word would impact the lives of people in the mountains as much as it has impacted mine.

Revelation 1:3 "Blessed is the one who reads and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it, because the time is near."

"SOMETIMES THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATION SEEM ENDLESS BUT IT IS A HUGE BLESSING... LEARNING SO MUCH. "

YOU HAVE TO

By Philip Jones

“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and the kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island call Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches . . .” Revelation 1:9-11

It has been 4 ½ years since I joined the effort to revise the New Testament in the language of the people in these mountains. There was no voice from heaven, just a firm conviction that it was the right thing to do if these people are to survive and grow in their faith. I don’t know if there is any way to adequately communicate what it has meant to be a part of this translation project, but here is an attempt:

You have to decide: Decide to put other visions on the shelf. Decide to let other pressing needs in the communities slide. Decide that this is the one thing I must do if nothing else.

You have to sit down. A few years ago our local congregation fasted 100 days for a new Bible. But since then I have had to sit hundreds of days beside a local brother in front of a computer screen to help make it happen. Not to mention my brothers, who dedicated more time than I did and have carried this burden far longer than I have.

You have to ask questions. Hundreds of them a day: What does this word mean? How do you understand this phrase? To who or what does this pronoun or phrase refer to? Asking is always tricky because you don’t want to give away the answer or influence the response inadvertently.

You have to bust your brain: Keep your eyes on Greek, do word searches, compare translations, consult commentaries and other resources, all the while hammering out creative but natural ways of saying things, being consistent but not

rigid in the translation of key terms and concepts. For the parallel passage check of the synoptic gospels it meant tediously making every identical verse or phrase line up. By the end of the day your brain is fried and you realize you really should get your eyes checked out for glasses!

You have to go. Much of my job was checking the translation in my office at home with a native speaker of the language. But for other parts I had to get in the truck and drive to my brother’s office, a 45 minute commute each way (translate “commute”: bump all the way there and back as you try to get there as fast as possible without tearing up your truck, dodge potholes, ford creeks, cross a rickety bridge, maneuver slick hills, and pick up people along the way).



Philip and David Lopez checking the synoptic gospels

You have to stay. For Sao the translation has involved the many-faceted career of being a stay-at-home mom: run the house, cook the meals, teach the kids, tend the visitors and still put on a smile when I get home, even if it’s been a hard day or I’m late (again). It could have been a marriage-breaker if she hadn’t made it a marriage-maker.

You have to live. Go to town once a week for supplies, fix trucks, pay workers, make the money stretch and try not to think about better ways you could provide for your family. Notice your kids: take them to music lessons, play with them, teach them to work, discipline them, read the Bible with them. Wake up in the middle of the night wor-

rying and praying for them. Celebrate birthdays and go to the beach (hopefully once a year) and take care of aging parents as best you can from far away.

You have to be humble. I have learned a lot about how to translate, but I am still a novice. Working with brothers may be like precious oil on Aaron’s beard (Psalm 133), but oil can also be sticky. It can be hard to maintain unity and the bond of peace when we are all so different in our personalities and way of viewing things or doing things. Like Rich Mullins said in his song “My Brother’s Keeper”: “My friends aren’t the way I wish they were, they are just the way they are.”

You have to be thankful. Thankful for all computer programs and resources now available that have made our work easier and the product more precise; no more typewriters, carbon copies or musty commentaries that I grew up with --everything is only a click away. Thankful for Timothy’s wisdom and oversight of this project. Thankful for Fabio’s faithfulness working with me the last two years. Thankful for David Lopez’s skill with the computer and with his language. Thankful for each one of your gifts and prayers for this project.

You have to believe. Believe this translation is needed and worth the “dent” it is making on your life. Trust you are doing your best with your limited knowledge and ability. Leave the many imperfections in the hands of God. Cast yourself on God’s grace for what may have missed the eyes of you or someone else. And in the end, lay it down and let it go.

You have to see. See the big picture, not just the details that can obscure it. See the people for whom you are translating, even when it means serving another coffee, phoning another ambulance, or scrounging for another plastic bag. See all that has happened in their lives and communities, not just what hasn’t happened yet.

YOU HAVE TO...FROM PAGE 3

Recently I got to “see” again, when my old buddy Israel invited us to his house dedication. After giving a year and a half to the revision process of the NT, Israel returned to his job as a health worker, moving to his wife’s home place in Cocoa Tree. He and Ana began holding meetings with their six kids and young people from the high school, several of whom were baptized in June.

After a 4 hour hike through mud and rain, I arrived with my family for the dedication of the new house, a cute wooden structure painted mint green with pink trim. A stone’s throw away leaned an old-style thatched roof cook-house where the evening meal was being prepared. Approaching the hut in the evening light, I saw a word painted in big letters on the side of the cane pole walls: JESUS.

It was one of those moments when you see history in a flash. “What if Daddy hadn’t come?” I thought. “Would I have become friends with Israel 25 years ago, when he lived in a hovel in Nari? Would I have learned his language? What if Daddy hadn’t encouraged me to branch out from Nari since my brother was working there? Would I have gone to Cocoa Tree to hold meetings with Ana’s brothers? Would Israel have accompanied me and ended up marrying Ana? Would there be a group of young believers gathering here today? Would

this word be painted on a cane pole wall for all to see?

Standing outside the hut in the falling darkness, I meditated on that simple word. It was more than a Word painted on the side of a hut. It was a Person living inside the heart of my friend, whose Presence was so evident in everything around me: the clean yard, green grass and planted flowers; the clean house and folded blankets, an abundance of them; the generator, washing machine, and sound system—yes, bought with his earnings as a health worker, but earnings not spent on drinking or divorce pensions, like so many others of his kind; the order and joy in his family; the enthusiasm of the young people helping serve coffee and food.

It is in moments like this that you realize it is a privilege to have taken part, in a small way, in the tribulation, kingdom and perseverance that are ours in Jesus. Would my friend be who he is if it were not for Jesus? Yes, he has fallen many times, but by grace he is standing, raising up spiritual grandchildren of those who first came. Many have wiped out along the way, but others are being refined and made spotless.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1.14). Is that Word living in you? Is his Presence being fleshed out in all that you are and do? What good is translating “the Word” if we are not living out His Presence in us?

As my friend John Whited put it, “I may be the only Bible some people read.” It’s all about JESUS, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Col 1:27 ■



Preparing for baptisms.



Philip and Israel baptizing Israel’s son.

WHY I TRANSLATE...FROM PAGE 1

go in our truck since she couldn’t sit up. We promptly stuck her in the front seat and told her there was nothing wrong with going in the truck and to get over it. She was still completely shrouding herself with a sheet.

I was so angry. Everyone had been so nice to them: the doctors at the clinic, the folks with helicopter that brought her, the other guests in the shelter, and we as well. But no, her destiny was death or the hospital. In their culture,

once you are quite sick, you are made to lie on the ground of the dirt floored hut, and wait for fate to finish you off, or maybe you will just get better.

The other men staying at the shelter said they had shared food with her, but she wouldn’t eat it, since the taboo uncleanness would be passed around and that would worsen her condition. She didn’t want to stay in the shelter. So she would rather feed the gods her spirit and have

her way, than change her way of thinking and receive the help offered to her.

But then it hit me. The other families coming to and going from our shelter have been touched by the truth of the Bible in some way, so they have a different mindset, a mindset of mercy and kindness, of sharing, of life, of hope.

WHY I TRANSLATE...

This is why I translate the Bible. Translating the Bible is not a cause. It is what can change the face of a society.

I got to talking to a man sitting next to me on the plane the other day. I was reading my Spanish Reina Valera Bible, so he asked me if I was Roman Catholic. “No,” I replied. “I just like to read the Bible.” And I told him that I like the Reina Valera Bible especially because of the men who translated it.

Reina was converted in Spain the 1500’s through the influence of some Calvinists. But coming to some differences with them, he moved on. He did not spend the rest of his life arguing with the Calvinists. He translated the Bible. He did not worry about what the church thought. He translated the Bible. He spent his life in exile, but he finished the translation of the Bible in 1569. Valera honored Reina by revising his work and getting a reprint done in 1602, as the 2600 copies of Valera’s original work were exhausted. I have a facsimile of the original Reina Valera that I treasure. Keiry keeps it in our living room.

“Yes,” said the man next to me on the plane. “I keep a copy of Luther’s original Bible in my living room. My father preached in German.”

“I greatly admire Luther,” I said. “Yes,” my seat mate replied “Luther’s work changed Germany. Before it they had been a bunch of warring tribes that did not know how to read. But the influence of Luther’s Bible made modern Germany.”

This is why I am translating the Bible. My father and mother spent years translating the New Testament into Cabécar. “If God can use me, God can use anyone,” Daddy always said. He did not claim his translation was perfect. He simply trusted God to use it.

He believed it was the Word of God. He got out on the trails every Sunday and went to whoever would listen and read the Bible with them. He wanted them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to base their faith on something

concrete, the written record of the Lord’s words.

One day, years ago, in one of my translation classes, someone asked the question, “When is your translation inspired?” Everyone had to chuckle a bit because everyone knew that the whole process is a human process, and that it is hard to believe that it will be perfect. How can you ever know then that it is inspired? So someone said with a smile, “It’s inspired when it goes to print.”

It takes faith to believe that God himself will be able to speak to people. There are so many problems of texts, of theories of communication, of difficulties in interpreting the original languages. How can we know our work is right? Eugene Nida, a man who did much to inspire and train people to translate the Bible, said that though human communication is limited, God has chosen it as the medium of communication by which he speaks to us. The original languages were different from each other and could not express things uniformly. The copyists got tired, or had opinions of their own, and so the copies aren’t uniform.

But God is not weak. He does not mind sharing with us the privilege of communicating his truth. He wants us to reign with Jesus in his kingdom by expressing truth and to let him do the watering and growing of the seed.

What Eugene Nida meant is that God is not limited by human limitations. He still can use limited vehicles for unlimited truth.

My daddy said he always struggled in school. He struggled with Greek in college. He learned his first word of Cabécar when he was 30 years old. He said if his teacher spanked him in school as a child in Alabama, when he got home his father would spank him also. They assumed he wasn’t putting out his best effort. But he exercised faith as a com-

municator. He didn’t believe in himself. He believed in the God who would use his translation work done in faith.

Now it is my turn. Can I believe that God will bring about the transformation in this society that I so long for? Will he feed and deliver my sheep that are his sheep? Zechariah reported Yahweh God as saying to Zerababel, “Not by might, nor power but by my Spirit will this mountain be made a plain.” Its not by how smart or skilled you are.

Next year will be the year that I have waited for so long: the year that work will begin in earnest on the Old Testament in Cabécar. I have said for years that my dream in life is to translate the book of Isaiah, the book that in many ways ties the whole Bible together, the book that connects the Old and the New testaments, the book that has brought me so much hope.

I will leave you with the words of Reina, in his introduction to the revised Spanish Bible in in 1602: “My intention [in translating the Bible] has been to serve my God, and to do good to my nation. And what greater good can I do than to give to them the means that God has ordained to win souls, the reading of the Holy Scriptures? Herein liberty is proclaimed to the captives

and sight to the blind. Herein is given medicine to heal the brokenhearted. Herein is announced the favorable year of our God. Herein the sad are comforted, and all the rest that Isaiah 61 says. Ask that His Majesty, may, through his Christ, accept this, my evening sacrifice, which I offer in my old age. I plead of him that he bless this piece of work, so that his sacred holy name, which is proclaimed in it, be hal- lowed in Spain as it is in other nations.”

Amen. So be it among the Cabécar as well.

May God be with us, Timothy for Keiry, Rebekah, Hannah, Mark, Ruth, John, and Abigail Jones.

**“IF GOD CAN USE
ME, GOD CAN
USE ANYONE,”
DADDY ALWAYS
SAID.**

MONEY IS A TOOL

By Blane McMichen

Most of you may not know who I am and that is fine. I don't serve as a board member for the River of God, but I am here to help in different ways. I support the board in different activities, such as the ministry web site, ministry email communications, editor of these newsletters, and leading mission teams on trips to Costa Rica to work with the Jones brothers.

Part of my own testimony has roots on Grano de Oro. My first mission trip was in February of 2001, shortly after my own baptism a few months earlier in October 2000. I was part of a large team that came to work on the church building. In short, it was there that I realized that I had known about Jesus my whole life, but I never "knew" Jesus. Now I know him as Christ, Lord and Savior of my life. As I told friends recently, it's the difference between hearing about a fireman that did a heroic act many years ago, and knowing the one that just carried you out of a burning building. The second is very real to you. Jesus Christ is like that... He is real. He is alive. He is Savior!

So why did I call this article "Money is a tool"? When you first come to believe, you are filled with excitement. You want to go places and do things for the Lord. You may see so many opportunities that you don't even know where to focus your energies.

As you mature in your faith, you start to wonder if you are doing what God needs you to do and you wonder if you are a good steward of what you've been blessed to have. You may not have experienced what I have described, but there were definitely some changes that were hard to understand. That is part of your new creation. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." — 2 Corinthians 5:17

As the Lord reveals his plan for you, you begin to see how you fit in to the body of Christ. Some have time to give, some have specific talents, but we all (in America) have the potential to give. This is not some shameless plea for your money. I am challenging you to consider your own situation. A friend of mine came to Costa Rica a number of years back, and returned with a new focus and understanding of the purpose of money. He sold his vehicle and bought a used one, he changed his lifestyle and lived on a budget. All this was for one purpose, so that he could get out of debt and contribute to those that are doing the work of spreading the Gospel.

Most of us work every day and are exposed to a limited number of people for the purpose of witnessing for the Lord. But through our support we can help others in ministry with broader reach and a clear vision. This is how I came

to be along side Timothy, Philip, and David. We are not called to be part of every ministry. There are many good ones out there, and the Lord will tug at your heart when the time is right. As blood bought believers, it is our duty to yield to the Spirit. Have you every felt like the beggar at the street corner is a scam artist? Then there's an occasion when, for reasons you don't understand, you pull out some money, and hand it to one of them. If so, then you understand that you need to act without always fully understanding why.

We recently were blessed to have David and his family in our home. A week later we were able to be with Timothy. In the course of a few weeks, the Lord opened my eyes and others involved in this ministry to the fact that we need to build stronger relationships with those that support the work in Costa Rica. We need to be better communicators, which means we need to send newsletters more often, send email communications, and bring the Jones bothers and their families to the states more often. This will take money, which is a tool. If you can help or you need information for your church mission board, please let us know. If you have doubts or questions, please talk with us. We look forward to sharing. Thanks! ■

Merry Christmas!



email

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"These are the things you are to teach and insist on. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

— 1 Timothy 6:2b-10 (NIV)