

THE SOUND OF HOPE



REFUGEES OF WAR-TORN SOUTH SUDAN ARE FINDING HOPE & CHRIST'S POWER TO FORGIVE THROUGH HEARING THE WORD OF GOD IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

Story by Katie Bass
Photos by Tony Dang

“Everything we have is because of Jesus,” sang an old South Sudanese woman named Esther while dancing with a shaker in her hand. Brent Kaser of Promise Child Ministries and Pastor Charles Jjagwe of Calvary Chapel Midigo, Uganda, sat with her to ask how she came to the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement with thousands of other women and children. Speaking in her native language, Esther mimed slitting her throat and waved an imaginary gun while adding gunshot sounds. Before the translator could finish, Brent’s eyes grew wet with tears. She told how her village was attacked and the men slaughtered. She immediately fled south to Uganda. Initially, Esther had wanted God to kill the men who had murdered her husband and friends. After hearing the Gospel in her own language and placing her faith in Jesus Christ, she has been transformed. Leaders translated her words: “I have forgiven all those who killed my husband, and I pray that Jesus saves them.”

The sprawling Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement covers nearly 155 square miles in Yumbe District, northern Uganda, and lies about 25 miles below the South Sudanese

border. More than one million people have fled the civil war still raging after four years; now about 280,000 dwell at Bidi Bidi, though only 40,000 were expected when the camp first opened in August 2016. Most do not expect to return to their homeland. “They really have been forgotten by the world,” said Brent, founder of the relief program Promise Child and missions pastor of Calvary Chapel WestGrove, CA. Both ministries have partnered to bring the Word of God to these hurting people. While an estimated 60% of South Sudanese people identify as Christians, Brent related, most do not have a personal relationship with Jesus or access to Bibles in their language.

The Word of God

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. ROMANS 10:17

Because only 27% of the South Sudanese people are literate, the only way that most will learn the Gospel is by either hearing or seeing it, Brent stated. This past August, he led a team of 18 from CC WestGrove to Bidi Bidi.



Top left: A Proclaimer audio Bible fits in the palm of one’s hand. One Proclaimer can easily reach 100 refugees.

Left: Pastor Brent Kaser of CC WestGrove, CA (left) prays with South Sudanese refugees who shared testimonies at Camp Bidi Bidi. They participated in the audio Bible program.

Right: On an outreach with CC Midigo, Dr. Yong Park of CC WestGrove treats a Ugandan prison inmate for an eye infection and malaria. She gave birth to her child in prison.



Since January 2017, Promise Child has brought more than 800 solar-powered audio Bibles, called Proclaimers, to Bidi Bidi through the organization Faith Comes By Hearing. Their goal is to bring one Proclaimer for every 100 people in the camp—2,800 devices.

“We’re using these audio Bibles in their native language, training leaders to sit under a tree and invite people to listen for an hour or so and ask questions. Then the leaders connect people with one of the churches inside the camp,” Brent explained. Promise Child director in Uganda, Pastor Juventine Emuku, has been heavily involved in planting five CCs in Uganda near the sprawling refugee settlement, including CC Midigo, CC Arua, CC Yumbe, CC Kubala, and his new church, CC Soroti. CC Midigo has planted four Bible-teaching churches inside the camp, each led by indigenous pastors. Small group leaders and those in the audio Bible program have told Brent that the Bible is bringing them hope. “One man told me, ‘People have given us malaria nets, people have given us food, people have given us tarps, but nobody’s sat [with us] like you have. Nobody’s come to us with God’s Word.’” Brent continued, “The only thing that can heal the trauma and

bring lasting hope to these people is the Word of God. That’s why the [audio Bibles] are so important.”

Talia Jankowski, 20, of CC WestGrove joined the August trip. One day, while talking with children whom Promise Child sponsors, she asked a young girl if she knew who Jesus was. “I felt so deeply for her. I saw something in her, and it looked like a hurt but also an interest,” Talia said. The girl said *Yes* but could not answer when asked about what Jesus had done for her. “I was able to explain to her the full Gospel and why Jesus did what He did. I asked her, ‘Is that the kind of Jesus you would want in your heart? Are you ready now for Jesus, or do you want to think about it some more?’” The girl accepted Jesus but wanted to read God’s Word for herself to know it was true. Within a few days, Talia located a Proclaimer audio Bible in the girl’s language so that she could grow in her new faith.

The Power to Forgive

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”
MATTHEW 5:44

Before coming to the camp, refugees endured great hardship: their homes burned; families separated; constant gunshots and warfare raged on their doorsteps. Villages were destroyed; savage murders were witnessed; rampant rape, disease, and starvation tore through their villages.

Pastor Charles Jjagwe of CC Midigo, a Ugandan, explained that due to the communal culture in South Sudan and Uganda, people take long to forgive when they are hurt and seek revenge when they are attacked. He related that many refugees at first sought revenge against those who had murdered their families and destroyed their villages—until they learned the Word of God. “Some who have been bitter and seeking revenge have been delivered,” Charles recounted. “One of our church leaders had wanted to return to South Sudan to take revenge, but now, the Lord tells him to forgive.” This man now spreads the message of forgiveness to others.

Seeing Christ More Clearly

Refugees also learn the Gospel through *The Jesus Film* presentations in the camp. This past August, Brent witnessed 5,000 refugees huddled before and behind a screen with a solar-powered projector showing the story of Jesus’ life in their own language. His voice choked as he recalled one man’s response. “He told us, ‘When I heard Jesus on the cross say, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,’ it made me realize that I can’t harbor bitterness against my leaders in South Sudan and the people who have done this to me.’”

Brent remembered another refugee’s words: “We have heard in God’s Word that Jesus suffered. He suffered like we’re suffering.” Brent summarized, “People can relate to the suffering of Christ and know that they can endure [suffering] because of what He’s done. And they’re learning this from God’s Word!”

From Mourning to Gladness

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives ... to comfort all who mourn ... to give them ... the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”
ISAIAH 61:1-3a

Talia reflected, “You can’t walk through the camp without seeing both awful disaster and the healing hand of the Lord. There are people coming that we would never



Left: Talia Jankowski (left) ministers to a Christian South Sudanese refugee (right) who said the mission team brought her joy after her son died.

Top right: Pastor Bond Gaona of CC Saving Grace, CA, (right) hands Bible commentaries to pastors being trained at the refugee camp.

Lower right: Brent Kaser shows refugee children how to use the audio Bible to listen to God’s Word.

otherwise be able to reach. ... God literally set up a camp of nations and tongues ... in a place that we can go [and bring them] the Word of God.”

Promise Child Ministries has set in place a 7-point program in Bidi Bidi including pastoral training and caring for widows, pregnant women, and acutely malnourished children. “Regardless of the circumstance, joy comes from being in the presence of God, and the only way for [these] people to know that joy is to know Christ,” Brent said. “In the midst of some of the hardest circumstances that we can even imagine, people can still smile and have an inward joy because of Him.” ☞

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