

Davar Partners International records audio Bibles in indigenous languages around the world in order to make God's Word truly accessible for the global majority who either do not read or prefer to listen. When studies suggest that 80% of the world will not engage with the Bible in text format, text translation alone cannot offer the Word to a waiting world.

*Story by Debra Smith
Photos courtesy of Davar*

Businessman Brian Smith's excitement was draining into dismay. More than a year earlier, at considerable risk and expense, he had smuggled stacks of Bibles into China. Upon his return in 2009, Brian was eager to hear how they had been used. Yet he had just discovered that the volumes sat untouched in boxes. Brian was confused. The local ministry partners seemed so dedicated; some had even suffered persecution for Christ. Why weren't they distributing the Scriptures? What good could the books do languishing in cardboard? Brian's questions led to an uncomfortable conversation, and its conclusion shook him: The Bibles couldn't do much good distributed, either. "Our people don't read," the Chinese ministry leaders informed Brian.

Ending "Bible Poverty"

Like most first-century Christians, more than 5 billion people worldwide communicate orally, learn orally, and live in oral communities. They prefer to speak, listen, and engage rather than read and write, according to Jamie Schultz, the communications team leader of Davar Partners International. Jamie, who attends Calvary Chapel Quakertown, PA, observed, "There's a glaring need for God's Word in so many places. Of more than 7,000 languages spoken around the world, fewer than 700 have access to a full Bible in text. And less than 100 have a full audio Bible available. If we rely on our own understanding of Scripture engagement through reading, it will leave most of the world in darkness without an opportunity to hear God's Word in their language." This realization led the founders of Davar—ministry leaders and businessmen like Brian—into a season of prayer, fasting, and research in 2009. They wanted to find a solution to the very real problem of "Bible poverty."

Jamie noted, "Translating the Bible cannot be the last step to make God's Word accessible. When four out of five people will not read, we need to give them the opportunity to hear the Bible in their languages." She clarified that this is not an issue of literacy or illiteracy. Some may know how to read, some may prefer not to read, some may not read at all—culturally, it's a completely different frame of reference." Jamie continued, "We're westerners, and we operate with a heavy emphasis on learning to read and reading to learn. We have extensive resources and opportunities. Many cultures do things differently. But Romans 10:17 tells us, *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* To end Bible poverty, we must shift our mindset to understand that faith does not require reading." So began Davar, Hebrew for "the word." Jamie explained, "The connotation of 'davar' is God's voice speaking. It is the proclaimed, spoken, promised Word of God. Where 'logos' is used in Greek, such as in John 1:1, 'davar' is the same in Hebrew. It points directly to Christ. And that's our heart at Davar—that people would hear God speak in

GOD'S WORD

BELIEVERS HEAR SCRIPTURE IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE WITH AUDIO BIBLES

Bottom: A local ministry leader in Bihar, India, trains listening group leaders to engage with the audio Bible.





Top left: A large audio Bible listening group in Zambia hears the Genesis account of the flood with a solar-powered device.

Top right: An audio Bible listening group in India prepares to discuss God's Word after hearing it in their own language.



their language and come to know Christ, the living Word, through it." *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). Solar-powered players and Davar's cross-platform "AudiBible" app play the Scripture recordings.

Sharing Audio Bibles

South African businessman Corrie Moolman felt torn. His Norwegian knife import business needed his attention in hometown Pretoria, but an American missionary needed a ride northward through several nations into Malawi. Once before, Corrie had traversed the grueling three-day route through poverty, political instability, and potholes. Many vehicles cannot survive the trek. However, "Mine is properly equipped for overland," Corrie divulged. He believed God wanted him to make the sacrifice. The overjoyed American missionary, Matthew Meng, would get to Malawi for a Davar event. The two packed 300 solar-powered audio Bible devices. In the remote villages where

electricity and Internet are spotty at best, solar power is most reliable.

At each border, Corrie recalled, "I was looking for 'the guy—the one I had given an audio Bible to last time.' Corrie had felt prompted to give away one Davar Bible player per border crossing on his first journey to Malawi. On this second trip, Corrie found his man between Botswana and Zambia. "The guy said, 'I have good news and bad news,'" Corrie related. "The bad news is, I don't own that Bible anymore. My daughter found it and excitedly showed her grandmother. Because she's an elder, it's hers now and I'm culturally not allowed to ask for it back. The good news is, she shared it around. In our village 9,000 people have listened to that Bible in the last three months. I started crying; Matthew started crying. Davar has found each audio Bible impacts an average of 50 people [per month]. That's a lot! But 9,000? That's incredible. We were praising God as we drove away."

Upon arrival, Corrie met MacDonald Mushiya, a Malawian church planter who evangelizes and disciples using Davar's solar-powered Bible players. MacDonald was bicycling around a circuit of the churches, averaging 240 miles weekly. "I felt God nudging me to buy him a motorbike," reported Corrie. "I started arguing, telling God my company's profit margin was down—and I needed to replace my phone that was stolen that day!" But back in South Africa, Corrie searched for a certain model motorbike. He found the exact one he'd chosen, at a significant discount. Learning of Corrie's cause, the seller further reduced it to about 40 percent of market value. Corrie drove the motorbike back to MacDonald in Malawi. Corrie continues praying for the Malawians he gave audio Bibles to. "Every Bible that goes into a country where people can't read or write is a story God planned long ago," Corrie commented. "What a difference one audio Bible can make."

Collaborating till Completion

To complete the work, Davar collaborates with translation agencies, Bible societies, engagement ministries, and local churches. "The body of Christ can do more together than apart," said Davar CEO Mark Perkins. The team works not only to record the Bible, but also to ensure flourishing Scripture engagement at the local level. Focusing specifically on recording the full Bible when the translation

is complete, Davar also provides access to portions of Scripture when translation remains unfinished. "While we collaborate closely with other ministries that focus on New Testament recording, we prefer to record the whole Bible. We believe the Gospel is revealed from Genesis to Revelation. We want the nations to hear the full counsel of God's Word and be transformed by it," Mark added. *The entrance of Your words gives light* (Psalm 119:130a).

He related, "This year we recorded two New Testaments with [the organization] Faith Comes By Hearing. On our own, we've completed 34 full Bibles in audio and 26 other New Testaments already, but we realize that much work is still ahead." Additional funding Davar receives will be used to record audio Bibles and publish them freely. Concluding, Mark stated, "We are passionate about partnership with local churches. We want to learn more about where Calvary Chapels are working and what initiatives God is using to reach people—it will help shape our priorities for recording and engagement. We want to see God's Word deployed and changing the nations for His glory." 🙌



"WE WANT THE NATIONS TO HEAR THE FULL COUNSEL OF GOD'S WORD."
—MARK PERKINS, DAVAR CEO

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