

If God is good, why is life hard?

Christian leaders are often asked this question. How do they respond? The people under their care hear all kinds of teaching about this. Some will tell them it's because they haven't given enough money, or they've made God angry, or someone has put a curse on them. These and many other questions are best answered by walking through the whole Bible and seeing God's big story.

Cursed to Bless is a Bible teaching audio drama. It helps pastors teach God's whole story of salvation to their church, with Jesus as the central character and the gospel of grace as the main message. It's an entertaining drama about characters like the people in their church. It covers the big Bible story through the experiences of the characters. Each episode presents a key point in the Bible. It doesn't require high levels of education. The free audio lessons can be downloaded and shared by anyone. There will be also an option to enrol, with a conference, a tutor, a test, and certificate (fees apply). As you use this to teach your church, we trust it will help you grow as a leader.

As someone empowering future church leaders, you face a large need with few resources. Cursed to Bless would help maximize your long-term impact and empower these leaders to pass on what they have learned in an effective way. It could identify potential leaders that would benefit from support.

Get started by downloading the free audio lessons and doing these with a group. You can sign up for updates and explore enrolling information at the website.

Free Mizo audio lessons at cursedtobless.com

How it works

The drama series has ten episodes. In each episode, we hear the topic introduced and read the key Bible passage. We then hear the first part of the drama, where Tluanga, the main character, finds himself in trouble. He goes to his two friends for help, who are usually arguing about the Bible passage. When Tluanga needs to decide what to do, we pause for some questions about the drama and passage. An interview with a bible expert explains the passage. We then hear the rest of the drama. Lastly, we reflect on an application question.

There are two ways to learn:

- **Free Audio Lessons.** These MP3 files can be played on a phone or other devices. They are designed to be completed as a group. They include questions for the group to answer.
- **Paid Enrolment.** Online lessons including the drama will be completed on our mobile-friendly website. The affordable fee provides a conference, a tutor, a supervised test, and a certificate.

Current Progress

We have trialed different formats and improve our offerings with our learning. We have nine episodes professionally produced in Aizawl, Eastern India, freely available on our website. We expect the last two to be available by early 2019, complete our series covering the whole biblical story. We will then promote it more heavily and shift our focus to developed paid enrolments with online lessons, a local tutor, supervised test, and certificate.

About Us

We are Christians across Australia, Myanmar, and India who are keen to help Christians in Myanmar to learn how the Bible fits together with Jesus and his gospel of grace at its heart.

Richard Utber has been a pastor for 28 years and is now involved in global mission through an organisation called Growing Global Churches. He and his wife Jill visit Myanmar regularly as they partner with a number of ministries there.

Martin Olmos has several years' experience in educational technology, including in a leading theological college. He developed the initial concept and brought together a team to develop it. He has several years' experience in designing technology to support learning. He is passionate about using technology in innovative ways to provide theological education to Christians in developing countries. [LinkedIn Profile](#)

Lal Vei Lian (Veia) is our local partner and coordinator. He is a pastor, Bible College lecturer and Principal of the recently formed Myanmar Ministry Training Centre. He translated our scripts into Mizo, and in consultation with Richard has provided invaluable advice and logistical support. He is excited about Cursed to Bless as he sees it meeting a great need in Myanmar for Biblical Theology which has Jesus at the centre of all life and ministry.

James Hmun Kam Lova reviewed the Mizo translations.

Aizawl production team are professional actors and media producers who have produced a high quality, credible drama for our Mizo audience.

Getting Started

This exciting project is still developing, and we are looking for more local trials and feedback.

How might Cursed to Bless help you empower your students to teach the Bible effectively?

Get in touch: biblesoapopera@gmail.com

Questions

Why would people listen to Cursed to Bless?

Cursed to Bless is an engaging drama that addresses a question in many Christians' minds: "If God so good, why is my life so hard?" Life is tough for our intended audience, and a good story is a temporary way out. Dramas such as 'soap operas' are very common in developing countries, popular across ages and gender. Further, Christians will desire to learn and grow, particularly if done together as a church. Cursed to Bless teaches the Bible very differently to what they would usually hear. Simple curiosity combined with the joy of seeing the Bible come together would be compelling. Lastly, students completing a paid enrolment would value the recognition and opportunities that come with a certificate.

Read our detailed analysis of the five key challenges for theological education at biblesoapopera.com/need.html

Why audio?

Audio has a number of advantages. It's much cheaper to produce, is more culturally neutral, it can be enjoyed while doing chores, and it can be delivered in different ways (online, radio, media players, or shared across phones). Critically, it is cheaper for the audience to download over the web and can be enjoyed on the technology they have access to – the mobile phone. In the long term, however, there is potential for a video production.

Can you really have entertainment that is educational?

Yes. We have researched this area and we're confident it can be done, and our trials so far confirm this. Our team includes an educational technologist with training in education theory. Educational Entertainment is an established and proven format.

How might the paid enrolment work?

Students complete online lessons at their own pace. Each episode's lesson must be completed correctly, before the next is opened. Progress is tracked, with feedback messages sent to the student.

Once all ten lessons are completed, students can attend an intensive conference with a tutor. Completing all online lessons is a requirement of attendance. The conference starts with a supervised test of the Cursed to Bless content. The vast majority of students would pass the test, given they have completed the online lessons already. In the rare event that one fails, they would be given an opportunity to review the content and lessons, and resit the test. Once they pass, they could join the rest of the group at the conference.

At the conference, a trained tutor leads a group of 10-15 students. The program would consolidate the Cursed to Bless content, and then expand on Biblical Theology. Conferences would be interactive, promoting discussion and addressing students' questions. Conferences could be staged, with the first day covering Cursed to Bless, and second and possibly third days each covering more advanced topics.

The conferences could be run regularly (e.g. every three months) at some central locations. Each conference would have a second assessment covering the extension material and conclude with a certificate ceremony and meal celebration. Conference tutors would be selected, trained, and supported in a standard process that would ensure consistent quality. The conference would be a good time to identify potential future leaders.

Development

Our bible teaching drama was launched in Myanmar at a pastors' conference in October, 2017. This followed a trip in March, where we trialed a locally produced audio episode with a local audience, with the help of our local partner, Veia. We found that the format needed some explaining, and so decided to introduce a 'host' character into the audio. Once the group understood the format, however, they were very positive about the experience and the learning.

We have set up a website (cursedtobless.com) to deliver these lessons and provide analytics. We have set up Moodle, a very popular and powerful Learning Management System, to manage the audio lessons, paid online lessons, enrolments, and reports. We are already the top result in both Google and Bing for 'Malsawm tura Anchhedawng' (Mizo for 'Cursed to Bless'). This new site will be the platform used for other languages and series. It allows us to implement our 'freemium' business model of free audio lessons and paid enrolments, designed to make this a financially sustainable project and ministry for local partners.

Richard Utber presented the website while speaking at a pastors' conference, where he trained them on expository preaching and biblical theology. The drama was seen as a helpful resource to help leaders teach their own congregations how the Bible fits together.

Response

The following is feedback from Richard Utber on the launch.

What did the pastors say about the resource? How might they use it?

I was greatly encouraged by the reception of the Bible Teaching Drama by the pastors as well as others we showed it to. There was obvious engagement with the audio and even, at times, delight at hearing such a thing in their own language from their mobile phone. I received comments praising the quality of the production, the interesting storyline and the good and helpful questions that went along with the drama. A couple of people unsolicited said that it was suitable to use in their evangelistic and children's ministries. The drama is very different to anything they've heard or experienced before. These pastors come from a context where personal and small group Bible study is rare. We are therefore in the process now of following up the pastors to help them see the potential of the drama for starting a Bible study movement.

What did we learn about our project?

We have made significant progress and it is clearly worth pursuing! It has great potential to help individuals and pastors start a Bible study movement where at present it doesn't exist. Mizo people are genuinely enthusiastic about it. It appears that to convey the concept and do the necessary set up of the drama in a new location will require someone from outside with the time and expertise. It is not necessarily a difficult task, but the learning curve for a time-strapped missionary (for example) may be too great without outside help. Follow up of those who have shown interest is essential.

How did people receive our dual model?

It took some explaining initially, but eventually most people did get the concept, and were downloading and listening to the free audio resource. There was also considerable interest in the "paid-for" certificate. Some people wanted to sign up for it then and there.