If we are to understand the Word of God, God needs to translate himself into our language, so that his words can speak deeply to each person,” Elvis Guenekean reflects. “It’s the translation of the Word of God into my language that is at the base of my own faith.”

Elvis was once an atheist, an eager student of humanistic philosophy and firmly set against Christian faith.

“When my wife would return home from prayer meetings, I would mock her, asking her a series of philosophical questions,” he remembers. “I aimed to persuade her that God didn’t exist and that her faith was useless.”

His remarks would often make her cry, but she was never dissuaded from praying for him.

After completing his studies and training as a teacher, Elvis’ further academic plans were blocked by a lack of finances. In answer to his wife’s prayers, this roadblock became a turning point in his life. He decided to look for opportunities to use his skills to benefit the local community. He even approached the pastor of a local church and offered to start literacy classes.

The pastor encouraged him to instead enroll in a translation training course under the direction of Christians with experience in translation. It was being offered to members of the community so that they could begin to translate the Bible into Gbeya, Elvis’ own mother tongue, which is spoken by more than 200,000 people in the Bossangoa region of the Central African Republic.

“I had no idea at the time that this was God’s plan for me,” Elvis said.

At first Elvis saw translation as just a challenging intellectual exercise. But as he sought the meaning of each passage of Scripture, and grappled with the best way to express it in Gbeya, he began to discover the God of the Bible.

“As I became immersed in the Word of God, I began to understand the incredible love and grace which he freely gives each one of us,” Elvis recalls. “I couldn’t even imagine why God would want a relationship with me. My deep intimacy with God is one of the most amazing things I take from this ministry.”

Soon Elvis went from being one of the translators on the Gbeya translation team to being the coordinator for translation and literacy projects in the whole Bossangoa region.

“Ever since I accepted Jesus as my Savior,” he said, “my entire life has been such an adventure in faith.”

It has now been over a decade since Elvis first got involved in Bible translation, and today he oversees the translation and literacy projects for the whole country.

“God chose [Elvis] to work for him, studying the Bible,” said Michel Samedi, Elvis’ older brother. “My prayer is that his work will be a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God.”
In Your Own Words

The Bible is the way we draw close to God and are transformed by the truth of the gospel. And that’s why Bible translation is so crucial — it connects people to a God who speaks their language. Because of Scripture, people are freed from addiction, families are healed and lives are transformed. Read more stories like Elvis’ (front page) in our free e-book, “In Your Own Words,” available for download at wycliffe.org/whybible.

COUNTRY Profile

A Glimpse of Central African Republic

NUMBER OF PEOPLE: 4,616,000

MAIN LANGUAGE: FRENCH

MAIN RELIGION: CHRISTIANITY

TOTAL NUMBER OF LANGUAGES: 82

NUMBER OF LANGUAGES ...

Without any of the Bible: 53
With part of the Bible: 7
With a New Testament: 11
With a whole Bible: 11

Statistics from wycliffe.net and joshuaproject.net

The Central African Republic (CAR) is in the geographical center of the continent of Africa. It’s also at the center of a broad region known as Central Africa.

CAR gained independence from European influence — primarily the French — in 1960, but has struggled with decades of turmoil ever since. A civil conflict broke out in 2012 that continues to affect the whole country today. The nation is one of the least developed in all of Africa.

ACATBA (The Central African Bible Translation and Literacy Association) was established in 1993 in CAR and seeks to see the lives of the Central African people restored and transformed by the Word of God in their own languages. ACATBA contributes to the holistic mission of the Church in CAR and to the development of the language communities it serves through Bible translation and through literacy and community development initiatives.

You can make a difference in countries like the Central African Republic by joining our prayer team. Sign up at wycliffe.org/prayer to receive weekly prayer emails on different countries, people groups and more that help you pray for what God is doing around the world.

Ways to Pray for the World

» Pray that God would continue to further the work of Bible translation in CAR.

» Ask God to make his name known to people in the language and form that speaks to their hearts.

» Praise God for ACATBA and the work they’re doing to make his Word accessible throughout CAR.