Pastor Bennett Marona has had countless reasons to mourn. Ministering to his people in South Sudan, he knows what it means to persevere through trials and suffering.

Bennett speaks Baka, a language used by about 26,000 people. He got started in Bible translation in 1992, the same year Wycliffe linguists Doug and Anne Sampson joined the Baka New Testament translation project.

The Baka project had actually begun years earlier but stalled due to increasing instability caused by Sudan’s second civil war. Thousands of South Sudanese, including Bennett’s family and the Baka community, were forced to evacuate to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly called Zaire).

Bennett remembers hastily gathering his family and fleeing into the bush with just the clothing they were wearing.

“My family and I, we walked for seven days, walking day and night, day and night,” he said. “There was no food; many children died on the way because of thirst and hunger.”

Then one night about halfway to the DRC, while they were sleeping hidden in the bush, they heard gunshots. The crowds leapt up and ran, but Bennett heard a voice speak directly to him, telling him to take a different route. Later he learned that hundreds of those who’d gone the opposite way had run directly into the ambush and been killed.

His family eventually settled into a refugee camp about eight miles outside the town of Dungu, in the DRC, where the Sampsons were living. Bennett stayed in a small hut in town to work on literacy and the Baka New Testament translation with Doug.

At one point when the war made it impossible for the Sampsons to remain in the refugee camp, Bennett and a fellow Baka rode bicycles for two hundred miles to meet with them at a safer location in Uganda.

Still, they kept the project moving forward.

Then one day armed soldiers kidnapped Bennett from the translation office in the DRC. He was one of nine held captive. Each night the soldiers killed one of the prisoners with machetes.

For eight nights in a row, Bennett witnessed this brutality and awaited his own fate, until he was the only prisoner left. At midnight, they came for him.

“One of the soldiers said, ‘Pastor, come. The commanders are calling you,’” Bennett remembers. “I thought, ‘They’re going to kill me … just like they killed the others.’” But with no explanation, the soldiers let him go.

“It’s hard for me to know why I was not killed,” he said. “Truly, God chose me to be a translator.”

Facing trial after trial, Bennett demonstrated his commitment to the task God called him to complete, his dedication to the Sampsons, and his willingness to sacrifice his life for their shared mission.

Finally, in March 2017, Bennett’s prayer for the Bakas was answered. After more than 30 years of perseverance, thousands of Baka speakers came together to dance, sing and experience the Word of God in their language at the Baka New Testament dedication.

“Now that the whole New Testament is out, thousands of Bakas are going to say, ‘Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!’” he said. “I see every Baka community member as my biological child. I love them.”

His favorite part of the day was when the boxes of New Testaments were opened, and hundreds of his fellow Bakas rushed forward to get their copies.

“At that time, I forgot all the challenges I went through.”
The #Blessed Life

“Blessed” is a word that we use often to describe everything from a wonderful vacation with family to a job promotion to enjoying a beautiful fall day with a pumpkin spice latte in hand.

In our minds, “blessed” probably equates to a comfortable life with good health, few problems and special moments that make our days better. But what does it look like to be blessed, from a biblical perspective? Can we be blessed even if our circumstances are difficult?

Explore the Beatitudes with us as we look at what Jesus really meant when he used the word “blessed” at wycliffe.org/blessed.

AFRICA Fast Facts

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES: 54

LARGEST COUNTRY: ALGERIA (919,595 sq. mi.)

SMALLEST COUNTRY: SEYCHELLES (176 sq. mi.)

NUMBER OF LANGUAGES WITH ...

Scriptures portions: 387
New Testaments: 414
Bibles: 258

*These statistics are pulled from wycliffe.net.

Africa is the world’s second-largest continent, and 30 percent of the world’s languages are spoken there. Africa’s climate is diverse, ranging from savanna to tropical forests to snowy mountains and valleys.

The church in Africa has grown tremendously over the years. Since 1965, the percentage of the population claiming faith in Christianity has grown from roughly 25 percent to about 46 percent. Bible translation in Africa is crucial for the continued growth of the church, and also for the spread of evangelism and discipleship throughout the continent. Mother-tongue translators like Bennett Marona are making this a reality.

You can make a difference in countries around the world by joining our prayer team. Sign up at wycliffe.org/prayer to receive 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

» Much work has been done throughout Africa, but there are still people groups waiting for Scripture. Pray that Bible translation would start in the languages still needing it.

» Ask God to equip teams as they bring his Word to communities in the language and format that will speak directly to their hearts.

» As Scripture is translated and distributed, pray that people would engage with it and be transformed by the power of the gospel in their own language.