## **AFRICAN PARADIGM SHIFTS**

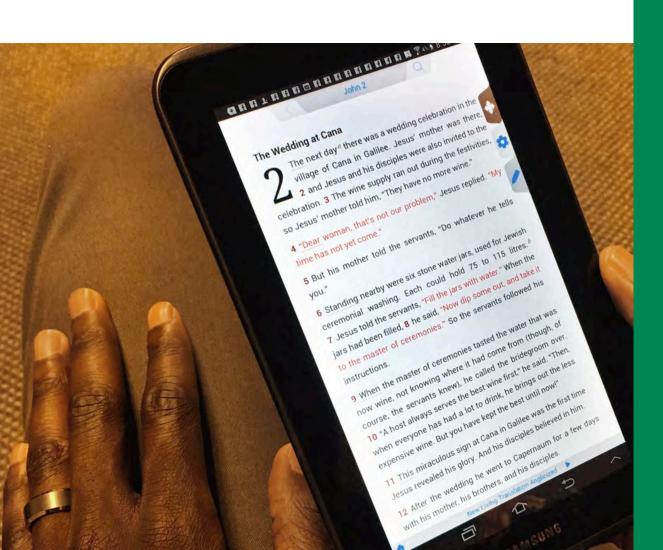
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Bible Engagement and Discipleship in Africa: Are we on the right track?

Questions and Ideas from 30 Years of Work in Africa

**ARTICLE 5** 

THE RACE IS ON TO REACH THE WORLD THROUGH DIGITAL BIBLES! BUT IS IT THE RIGHT RACE?



"...THE PHYSICAL SENSATION OF A PRINT BOOK CHANGES THE WHOLE

– Matthew Elliott, PhD

## THE RACE IS ON TO REACH THE WORLD THROUGH DIGITAL BIBLES! BUT IS IT THE **RIGHT RACE?**

When digital books were first introduced, publishers feared paper books might be replaced in the same way digital music replaced cassette tapes. But something very different happened. While music sounds the same no matter what it is stored on, the physical sensation of a print book changes the whole experience of reading.

Although many people enjoy reading eBooks when they have limited space for books, few read eBooks exclusively. There is some evidence that people are less likely to read eBooks even after buying them. Many early adopters of eBooks have gone back to reading on paper, and eBook market share and revenue have decreased from their pandemic high.

(https://www.statista.com/statistics/426799/ebook-unit-sales-usa/)

When you read a book, turn a page, underline, or highlight a sentence, your bodily engagement helps your brain connect with the book's information. When you read a paper book you read more deeply, understand more holistically, and take in long arguments more

(See the 2022 revision of The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brain; Nicholas Carr and "Reading on Paper Versus Screens What's the Difference?")

Brain science suggests that iPhones and eBooks cannot take the place of books. God made our bodies and minds as an intricately connected system.

We affirm that eBooks, education by digital means, and digital Bibles are important. These tools give people more and better access to God's Word. Oasis offers our books and Bibles in every digital format we can!

au brought shame among when I reveal my holiness 36:24 list 43:5:6 Ezek 34:13, 37:21 e their very eyes, says the nen the nations will know 24 For I will gather you ions and bring you home sprinkle clean water on e clean. Your filth will be you will no longer worship 36:27 Isa 59:21 Ezek 37:14 36:28 ive you a new heart, and I in you. I will take out your art and give you a tender, Jer 30 22 Ezek 14 11 37:23, 27 7 And I will put my Spirit vill follow my decrees and 36:29 Ezek 34:27-29 Hos 2:21-23 my regulations. live in Israel, the land I 36:30 Lev 28:4 rs long ago. You will be will be your God. 29 I will be god. 10th will be 36:31 Ezek 69, 16:61. 63: 20:43 filthy behaviour. I will give grain, and I will send no 36:32 Deut 9.5 he land. 30 I will give you 36:33 Isa 58.12 Zech 8:7-8 your fruit trees and fields, l the surrounding nations 36:35 Isa 51:3 your land for its famines. emember your past sins 36:36 Hos 14:4-7 elves for all the detestable 36:38 1 Kgs 8:63 2 Chr 35:7-9 it remember, says the Sov-2 Chr 35:7-9 37:1 Jer 7:32-8:2 Ezek 33:22, 40:1 Acts 8:39 37:3 Deut 32:29 1 Sam 2:6 Isa 26:19 ot doing this because you ople of Israel, you should of all you have done! he Sovereign LORD says: u from your sins, I will res, and the ruins will be rehat used to lie empty and 37:4 Isa 42:18 ew of everyone will again 37:5 Ps 104:29-30 John 20:22 Eph 2:5 Rev 11:11 when I bring you back, his former wasteland is of Eden! The abandoned ow have strong walls and 37:6 Joel 2:27; 3:17 le!' 36Then the surroundvive will know that I, the the ruins and replanted I, the LORD, have spoken, sav. he Sovereign LORD says: srael's prayers and to inrs like a flock. 38 They will the sacred flocks that fill

at the time of her festiies will be crowded with and everyone will know

1197 EZEKIEL 37-8 AFRICAS TOUCH POISTS 36:28 Zoch 13:1 John 3.5 Run 3.5-6 Heb 10:22 RESTORED BY GOD Farmers know when selecting seed to sow that some seeds are corrupted. We throw corrupted seeds away since they cannot germinate if put in the soil. Such 30:26 Pt 51:10 Ezek 11:19 2 Cor 5:17 grains are so useless for the farmer that he does not even want to try to find a space for them The people of Israel were corrupted and therefore useless for God's plan. However, unlike the farmer. God decided to restore his people so they could serve When God punished Israel, it was not to throw them away but to correct and cleanse them. God said that when he finished cleansing them, after they had learned the lesson, he would bless them and draw them closer to himself. In addition, their land would be restored to fertility. It would be done in a way that the nations who knew the people of Israel when they were being chastened would be amazed at the land's renewal This shows God's willingness and power to restore his people after they have learned the lessons he wanted them to learn. When God punishes us, he does not throw us away for ever. He disciplines us and teaches us to repent so we may be restored.

## A Valley of Dry Bones

37 The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD 7 The LORD took hold of me, and I was to a valley filled with bones. 2He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. 3Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?"

"O Sovereign LORD," I replied, "you alone

know the answer to that."

4Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup>This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! 61 will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

7So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. 8Then Donor communities like phone and eLearning Bibles because they are cost-effective, and app activity can be measured. You can tell if users downloaded books, and often how they read them. This information is gold for building metrics, ROI reports, and impact statements. But just because these tools help inform donors doesn't mean they help Africans.

Research suggests that people who read the Bible on their phones likely don't read as deeply as those who read paper Bibles. They can easily be pulled away from time with God by apps, notifications, and other distractions.



## In addition, here are more considerations:

- We should promote dignity. As a Christian in North America, we desire our child, our grandchild, and our loved ones to have a precious Bible by their bedside that they can meditate on and read deeply in contrast to the rush and hurry of the always-on digital world. We should want the same for Africans.
- We know that social media and video game addictions harm us and damage the minds and mental health of our youth. Do we want to drive people in other countries toward a device that already does so much harm?
- In times of persecution and social media censorship, governments cannot turn off physical Bibles.

- Millions of African students study the Bible in classrooms that have strict no-phone rules. As a textbook, the Bible must be a physical book to receive approval from African departments of education.
- Many Africans cannot afford a smartphone, but a print Bible can be purchased for only \$5. Furthermore, data is expensive and few Africans use data-heavy apps that may work poorly on available infrastructure.
- Many people in Africa lack access to reliable electricity. Times when the power goes out might be when they need access to the Bible most.
- Most African pastors and Christian leaders cannot afford a tablet or a computer. It's extremely difficult to prepare teaching and sermons exclusively from a phone.

A printed Bible is still an important way to slowly and deeply meditate on God's Word and receive spiritual nourishment. Print books work for our minds and bodies in ways that digital books don't.

Still, eBooks and Bible apps are part of the answer. As a scholar with a PhD in the New Testament, I use my Bible app in church to read the original Greek. I am glad we have invested in creating such useful ministry tools. But funding phone Bibles at the expense of paper Bibles is misguided.

It's a little ironic that a series about new methods for empowering African discipleship argues for greater emphasis on printing oldfashioned paper books. But maybe we need to discover anew the power of the printed page.

Want to continue in your discovery of Christianity in Africa? **Check out our free ministry resources.** 

Interested in becoming a partner in the growth that's already happening in Africa? **Equip a local pastor here.** 

This is a free resource courtesy of Oasis International. Oasis is devoted to satisfying Africa's thirst for God's Word.



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