

Broadcast 01 - Church Authority in Bible Translation

LIAM:

Hello! My name is Liam. I am here with my wife, Sofia.

SOFIA:

Hello everyone! We are so glad you are joining us. We have something very exciting to share with you.

LIAM:

It certainly is exciting. Some might even call it a miracle. The good news is that it is true. We saw it happen. You can help make it happen for your community as well.

SOFIA:

Wait! Before we say more, we need to tell everyone what we are talking about.

LIAM:

Of course! We are talking about Bible translation. That topic may sound like we should talk only to academics and theologians and that it will be a long, slow process. Keep following along with us, though. We want to tell you about a new method of translating Scripture.

SOFIA:

Maybe you wondered why the Word of God is available to you only in the national language and not in your mother-tongue language. I know I thought about it. I wanted to hear God's Word in the language I speak every day and talk to my friends and family in.

LIAM:

The way translation has been done in the past took many years to complete. Since progress was so slow, many languages are still without Scripture today. The responsibility for translation was given to academics that were experts in Scripture, but they were not experts in the language they were translating Scripture into. They were not translating into their mother-tongue language. Often these people moved into a community to learn the mother-tongue language and become competent enough to start a translation. As you can imagine, becoming fluent in a different language can take years. Then the translators would work for many more years on the translation itself. Even with the best intentions, they could find it challenging to capture the nuances of the mother-tongue language as they translate Scripture.

SOFIA:

That is what is so special about this method of Bible translation we want to share with you. This method entrusts local churches with the authority and responsibility for Bible translation. It uses local people, like you and me, to do the translation.

LIAM:

You do not need to be an academic or a theologian. Sofia and I are not but we were the ones doing the translating. The requirement to be a translator is that you know two languages – your mother-tongue language and the language you are translating from. This is usually your national language or a language of common use in your country.

SOFIA:

And you must be a believer who loves the Lord and wants people to hear His Word in your mother-tongue language.

LIAM:

This translation method is called MAST, which stands for Mobilized Assistance Supporting Translation. This method started being used about six years ago. Since that time, more than 400 languages around the world have completed a New Testament in their mother-tongue language, and there are 750 languages in the process of translating now. Some language groups have also started working on the Old Testament, and some have completed the entire Bible.

SOFIA:

Tell them more about the MAST method, so they understand what we are talking about and how it works.

LIAM:

Yes. Let me give a very quick overview. MAST has eight steps. Four steps are used to translate from the national language to your mother-tongue language. The first four steps focus on translation and flow of the language in your mother-tongue. Then there are four steps to check the translation. That provides assurance of accuracy and quality.

SOFIA:

That may sound like a lot of steps. Do not worry. Once you learn the method and start translating, it will not be long until you achieve your goal. Here is an example. The New Testament has 7957 verses. If two translators learn the method and translate 11 verses each day for a year, they will complete the entire New Testament in their mother-tongue language! The progress can be even faster if more people work together or if people are able to translate more verses each day.

LIAM:

Sometimes teams of people gather for one or two weeks to work full time on learning the translation steps and complete entire books by the end of the workshop.

SOFIA:

There was a workshop like that in our region. It included five different language groups. Each group brought a team of six volunteers. The volunteers were so excited about their work. Some nights they did not want to stop to go to bed. They became more confident each day. At the end of ten days, each team had completed the book of Mark in their mother-tongue language to take back to their community with plans to build their translation team and finish their New Testament once they returned home.

LIAM:

Imagine the excitement when they arrived back home with their translation of Mark! Imagine the thrill when their community heard the Word of God in their own language for the first time! There were tears of happiness and shouts of joy. The translators were overwhelmed by their achievement. One of them testified, saying "All glory to God for giving us a mind to know Him and understand his Word. We went to the translation workshop obeying Him but did not think we could really do it. We left knowing that He had given us the wisdom and the desire to do this work. We can translate because of God's Spirit working within us."

SOFIA:

Over the next year, we will follow the journey of some people who learned the MAST method and translated the New Testament for their community.

LIAM:

In the next broadcast, we will start a journey with a team through their translation. The team includes new believers like Oliver and Siara, who are a married couple. It includes young and old – like Oliver's younger sister, Mara, and Jade, who is an older businesswoman. It includes some people who are most comfortable doing their translation with paper and pencil. Others are most comfortable working on their tablets and computers. What they have in common is their desire to have God's Word in their mother-tongue language.

SOFIA:

We also will meet Pastor Fin. He knew it would be wonderful to have Scripture available in the mother-tongue language of his community. He was skeptical about the MAST method, though. He thought translation needed to be done by theologians. He worried that translations done by people without that level of training would be weak and inaccurate. Wait until you hear what happened when he heard Oliver share a portion from the book of Mark in their mother-tongue language for the first time!

LIAM:

Over the next several months this team will share with you their progress, challenges, and successes. They will take us through the whole Bible translation journey, from the desire to have Scripture in their mother-tongue language to beginning the translation to checking its accuracy to celebrating its completion!

SOFIA:

The purpose of these programs is to share with you the amazing movement of God among minority languages. We pray they will gain your interest and encourage you to become involved in Bible translation for your mother-tongue language. If you already are involved in Bible translation for your community, we pray these broadcasts will affirm your commitment and give you continued motivation for your important work. As you complete your project, maybe God will lead you to share Bible translation with another language community and help them to begin translation for their mother-tongue language.

LIAM:

You are very important to Bible translation. The more people who commit to collaborate on the project, the sooner you will have Scripture in your mother-tongue language for your community.

SOFIA:

Liam, it is exciting that translation is done by people like us. The translators are people from our family, our church, our community. They are people who have spoken our mother-tongue language all their lives and communicate in it every day. The translation truly will be ours and speak our language.

LIAM:

I agree, Sofia. It is not a process involving others coming to translate for us. It is not something that another organization takes control of. Instead, the local churches have ownership and responsibility for the translation project. They may ask questions and get support from other agencies, but the local church makes the final decisions. It is OUR translation, led by OUR church and OUR people. At the end of Matthew 28 the Lord gave the Church authority over making disciples, baptizing, and teaching His Word. I believe that the Lord has also given them authority and His Holy Spirit to help them translate Scripture so they can make disciples and teach others in their own language.

LIAM:

I am excited we get to present these broadcasts -- to learn from mother-tongue translators, to hear their story and celebrate with them. It is amazing to think that their story could be the beginning of many new stories. In your own town or village, you can begin a movement. You can be part of the team. You can be a part in helping your community have Scripture in your mother-tongue language. What Oliver, Siara, Mara, Pastor Fin and Jade are doing is extraordinary. But it is something many other communities are sharing – and many more can share in the future.

More than 1500 languages have portions of Scripture today because, walking in faith, members of their community took up the task that they felt the Lord was calling them to do. They learned the MAST method at a workshop or from others who have learned it. They faithfully made time to continue their translation work. They invited others to join them. Like Oliver, Siara, Mara, Pastor Fin and Jade, translators are learning together and translating Scripture for their communities. You can be an important part of this, too!

SOFIA:

You can learn the MAST steps by gathering a few Christian friends and listening to the broadcasts that follow this one. These programs will teach the method thoroughly. You and your friends can try the process. If you need help or have more questions, we will give you contact information at the end of each program.

LIAM:

Let us close this first broadcast in prayer. Dear Lord, Thank You for Your love for us and for Your gift of salvation. Thank you for the opportunity for us to have Scripture in our mother-tongue language. We thank you for each person who has joined with us today. Please encourage them in their translation work if they already are part of a team. If they are not part of a team, please inspire them to pursue how they can help to make Scripture available in their mother-tongue language. We ask your blessings on these broadcasts and all who listen to them throughout the year. Amen.

SOFIA:

Let me add a benediction. May the Lord watch between us while we are away from each other and keep us in His gracious care until we meet again for the next program. Have a blessed week!

LIAM:

Thank you for joining us. We pray you will join Oliver, Mara and their friends on their journey translating God's Word into their mother-tongue language.

If you have questions about your current project or want to start a project in your own mother-tongue language, please call or text (local country partner info) or send an email to reachingalldialects@gmail.com or radio@wycliffeassociates.org.