

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 305

EEM.org

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Guest: T. Dirk Smith (DS)

Episode Summary

In this episode of the podcast we welcome T. Dirk Smith, Vice President of EEM.org (formerly known as Eastern European Mission). Dirk tells us about the ministry's mission of getting Bibles to every person in Eastern Europe and beyond. EEM.org has shipped Bible to over 30 countries in 22 languages and has some unique opportunities in that regard, including some eastern European countries who require the Bible in their public schools.

book referenced: <https://www.thekjvstore.com/tripping.html>

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 305, EEM.org with Dirk Smith. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. We're getting right down to the wire here on the move. So any time now, we will be hitting the road, hopefully having fun while we're doing it. [laughs]

TS: Yeah. Y'all are going to have to video it now. You're taking video of it, right?

MH: Yeah, we'll do some of that for sure and we'll try to isolate that to the good moments. [laughter] Nothing tragic or unfortunate or breakdowns or people irritating each other beyond the point of self-composure. [laughs] Yeah, we'll try to keep it positive.

TS: Yeah, we want to follow along as you trek across America. We'll be looking forward to that. I hope you all have a safe trip and a good trip and everything goes well. Next time we talk to you... Let's see, by the time this show airs... No, we still have a couple more podcasts in us before we have our first one from Florida.

MH: Yeah, we'll be at a truckstop somewhere, is what you're saying. [Laughs]

TS: Yeah, you're going to have to pull over to the side of the road to do a couple of the podcasts.

MH: Yeah.

TS: Well Mike, this episode, we have a great topic. It's a great cause. The website is EEM.org. You can go to the website for more information. What they're doing is providing basically Bibles for people who are asking for them, specifically in the region of Eastern Europe. A great cause.

MH: Yep. We're just glad to be able to do this.

TS: Absolutely. Well, let's not keep Dirk waiting any longer. Let's just get right into it.

MH: Yeah, we're excited to have T. Dirk Smith on. He goes by Dirk, so I will refer to him as Dirk through the rest of the episode here. This is a ministry that we want to expose all of our listeners to, a ministry aimed at getting Bibles into the hands of people everywhere in their own language. So I'm going to ask Dirk to begin by introducing himself, but I also want to let people know that we're able to have this conversation because of a relationship that Trey has with someone within the organization. So Dirk or Trey, I'm going to let you riff off that. But we want to get to know Dirk a little bit and then we'll start talking about what it is that you all do.

DS: Yeah, it's good to be here, Mike and Trey. And I appreciate the opportunity to be on your podcast. It's an honor to be on this podcast. I appreciate what *you* are doing for people here and all your listeners with exposure to the Bible and getting it into the hearts of people. Yeah, the relationship that Trey has is with one of our board members, Kevin Taylor. And Trey, I just learned that you guys were childhood friends (is that right?) in Texas.

TS: Yeah. We grew up together. Absolutely. We met on the 7th grade football bus. [laughter]

DS: Very nice. Yeah, I'm sure there are some stories there that we might have to... I might have to get some stories on Kevin after we get off this podcast.

TS: Absolutely.

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DS: Yeah, Kevin and April are wonderful, wonderful people. He's on our board. But my background... I did not start in the nonprofit world. I started in for-profit. I have an MBA and have worked in healthcare consulting for a number of years and then transitioned over into business consulting up in the Northeast. I'm from Philadelphia originally, but lived in Dallas. Then I got into fundraising with my alma mater and then made the change in our organization that I work for. Our ministry is called EEM. We used be known as Eastern European Mission but we work in places that are not really Eastern Europe, and they don't consider themselves Eastern Europe, so we're kind of going the route of UPS and dropping the "Eastern European Mission," because we get into places and when they hear we're "Eastern European Mission," they say, "Well, what are you doing *here*? We're not Eastern Europe."

MH: Right, so it's not just branding. There's some substance to that. [laughs]

DS: There is, there is. There's some real substance. Because it's kind of bad to be offensive to the people you're trying to serve.

MH: Right. [laughs] "Note to self..."

DS: Yeah, right. So yeah, we are known as EEM. And the organization has been around since 1961. And we actually started... It was founded by seven couples who actually went to a university there where you are, Trey—Abilene Christian. And they were 20-somethings and they graduated from their undergrad and headed to Vienna, Austria, and enrolled in university there so that they could get passports that would allow them to cross the border (the Iron Curtain at the time). And their goal was to teach people about Jesus. But one of those couples, Gwen and Gayle Hensley... (Gwen is a guy.) Gwen got behind the Iron Curtain and quickly realized, "This is an impossible task because these people don't have Bibles in their language. How do we teach them about Jesus?" So he turned the mission and vision to providing people with Bibles. So they quickly became printers of Bibles. And I still have some of the originals that they produced. It was a very small Bible affectionately referred to as the "Marlboro Bible" because it was the exact size of a pack of cigarettes. [laughter] And they could smuggle those in. The guards didn't care if you smuggled cigarettes in, but they didn't want Bibles coming in. So they could smuggle those in. And then they began providing them for lots of Bible smugglers. And there's a good little book out that I don't even know if you can still get called *Tripping* by Thomas Henderson that really tells a lot about the process and the cycle of the Jesus Espionage that took place during those years.

MH: Does that book actually describe their methods?

DS: Yeah, it does.

MH: I have to read that. [laughs]

DS: It's very fascinating. But now, of course, the wall is down and we stayed put. So we publish, print, and distribute Bibles and Bible-based materials in 30 different countries in 22 different languages. So we're busy. We do about a million books a year.

MH: Wow! Man, that's a lot.

DS: It is. But it continues to grow. That's the neat thing. As I tell people, I'm in the "Parable of the Sower" business. We're getting God's Word out there. And it's fun to watch what happens when it lands on good soil and how it takes off.

MH: So how does it grow? Do you get... I imagine some of these places... Because as I look at your website and the people groups and whatnot, I'm sure obviously because of the fall of the Iron Curtain... We even forget about that: Berlin Wall, Iron Curtain. That's like ancient history. But even with that, there have to be some places where this is still operating like it was in the old days, really under the radar. So I'm wondering, do people hear about what you're doing and then contact you under the radar or secretly? Or is it more open? "Hey, include us in what you're doing"?

DS: That's a good question. It's different in different places. There are nations that are very open and requesting it openly like Ukraine, or like we're seeing happen in Croatia. Obviously in Russia, there's a little bit more of a... Not underhanded, but you can't be quite as open. You have to abide by their laws and their regulations that they have in their country. Kazakhstan is the same way. We're now distributing in Kazakhstan...

MH: Wow.

DS: ...and there are things that we have to do to abide by their laws. We do have some people that are smuggling. And I don't know how far-reaching this podcast will go, so I won't say where. But there are some countries where we are providing to people and they're letting us know that they're smuggling them into certain areas where Bibles are not allowed. But as I tell people, we're kind of like the wholesaler, free of charge to all the retailers out there. So people are doing evangelistic work. Our only requirement is A) these Bibles and books cannot be sold. And that's printed in every one of them. B) And they're not to be sitting on a shelf somewhere. They are for evangelistic work. That they're going in the hands of people. And then because we're not *them*, we ask for stories. "Tell us the God stories. Tell us how God is moving." It's amazing to watch. In our culture here, we discount the mystical a lot. And we don't understand. And it's a lot of fun to see God move in very vivid and real ways over there. And again, these are people whose lives have been transformed, because they're open to that transformation. And it would be like me having cancer and having the cure for cancer and finding out that somebody had cancer and then saying, "Nope, I'm not going to tell them

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about it.” Who would do that? And that’s why our requests are going up so rapidly. We’ve seen an increase... It’s just been crazy.

MH: So how do you know if the Bibles get to their intended destination? Is there a means of the people on the other end letting you know that?

DS: Yeah, with the stories. And again, there’s some trust in there. And you have to believe that, “Yeah, I’m going to trust the Holy Spirit and that he’s going to do what he intends to do.” But yeah, we have some checks and balances in place. Because we know the people that are distributing them. And we have what we call Country Coordinators. So we have a person in Ukraine. We have a person in Russia. We have a person in Prague. We have somebody in Athens. So they’re traveling around and checking up. And if they do... And very few, but on a couple of occasions, we have seen where they were not being used as we were told they were being used. And we just don’t... They talk to the distributor. And there have been a couple of occasions where we just don’t give them any more Bibles.

MH: Yeah, you have to think that if there’s a problem, you’re going to hear it somehow. It’s going to get through the grapevine.

DS: It does. Because we are very well known over there. It’s interesting. One of the reasons I appreciate this podcast is unfortunately over here, we’re still one of the best-kept secrets. But over there, we’re very well known. And one of the reasons we have to be very careful about what we promise is because we are known over there as the people who do what we say we’re going to do. And we don’t want that to change. We don’t want to mess that up, for sure.

MH: Did you ever have a problem with the profile? Because one of the *Supernatural* translation projects that is currently in process through my nonprofit... I’m not going to mention the language. But the people doing that basically said, like in the front matter, they can’t have any identification or location information about who the translator was, what group funded the tran-... Nothing like that. They really have to stay off the radar. In fact, the guy that coordinated this for me (and he had references with some major ministries over here that they’ve done translation work for where he is) actually spent some jail time for what they do. So I’m wondering, do you ever have to work around that? What kind of care has to be taken?

15:00 **DS:** Yeah. Depending on the translation that’s being done, most of the people that are doing the translation are in areas where their life would not be threatened. But for obvious reasons (and again, I won’t discuss what languages), yeah, there are some people that their name is never listed... The people that do translation work really for any of our languages, their name is not listed there. They’re paid as a contractor on those projects. Now, Bible translations we get from Bible societies. I ask people all the time, “You *do* know what the best

translation of the Bible is, right?" And they'll look at me, like, "No." "It's the one that they'll read."

MH: Yeah, the one that they'll read.

DS: So we don't really care. And all these translations, they're never translated from English to a language. They're translated from the Hebrew and the Greek. But books that we translate (and we've gotten involved)... Obviously with 22 different languages, there's a lot of projects that take place.

MH: Yeah, the last thing you want is for the people doing the work to be doing it under duress or be harassed. So this particular instance I'm thinking of is the first time I've had anybody say that. And we've done translations that are going to penetrate pretty hard areas. But that was a first. And this is about a month old, so it's kind of interesting that this opportunity to interview you would come along, because you're focused on translation. So I was just curious. Because I didn't even give it a thought until I got this email and had this exchange with this particular group. It was just like, "Really?" "Yeah, really." [laughs] You know?

DS: We've had that. In November of 2015, I got a call early in the morning from Europe. And I'm a pretty early morning guy. All my team knows, "Does this guy ever sleep?" Sleep's a little overrated. You can get a whole lot more done. And I operate on about four or five hours of sleep. You can get a lot done if you don't... People who get eight hours are just wasting time. [MH laughs] But anyway. I got a call early one morning from my counterpart in Vienna. Bart Rabinsky is our VP of European Operations. And he said, "You know, Dirk, I have a question for you. We got a request from one of our ministry partners for 4,000 New Testaments in Farsi and Arabic. What do you think?" And I said, "Well, I have three questions. Can we get the translation?" "Yep, we can get it." I said, "Alright. Can we get the quality that's our quality, and at the price point that we need?" He said, "Yep. All three." I said, "Then I'm in. I mean, this is our ministry. We have people that need Bibles in those language... I never thought we'd do Farsi and Arabic, but with all of the refugees pouring in, God's moving these people into our neighborhood. So let's do what we can do to help these partners." So we did.

MH: And that's a good thing to bring up. Because typically, when you think of Bible translation or translating books that are ministry-oriented or curriculum, it's easy to think of, "Oh, you're translating that for distribution in *that* country," when that's not actually the case. You just brought up a refugee situation. So a lot of these people groups and these languages... you would have a real difficult problem getting into native countries. You can still get the material to them, because they leave those countries (or are expelled or whatever).

DS: Yeah, they're coming to you. And that's exactly... We are heavily involved in work in Greece. And they're making their way to Turkey. And the pirating that took place there... And they pay these people money to get on those horrible (I

don't even call them boats) inflatables. They go across the sea and they land at the island of Lesbos, which is the first island they'd hit in Greece. So we agreed. I said, "Let's do it." So we did. We did 4,000. Well, word got out that EEM was now doing Farsi and Arabic. So that request was in November of 2015. By January of 2016, that request had grown to over 110,000 Bibles. So it was a real step of faith. But again, we stepped out there. We talked to our board. So we've done a lot in Farsi and Arabic. We're now in the process... We have a children's Bible that is basically just Bible stories with great pictures and a large font that is a wonderful reader. We've done it in Farsi and Arabic and we're working on what we call a pre-teen Bible. It's actually Bible text, but it does have pictures. It does have illustrations in it. It's a good pre-teen book. And we have found that it's wonderful for the parents. Because they sit down and they read with their children these stories. And then the next thing they're asking for is, "Okay, there's more to these stories. Where can I get a Bible?" And then the Bibles are being distributed as a result of that. So the Farsi and Arabic has really grown. And we are seeing a movement that we've never seen in our lifetime—the number of Muslim refugees that are turning to Christianity. We've had to be very careful there. When we go over there and we're in areas, we can't put their pictures out on the internet. We can't use certain names. But it's been amazing. One of the friends I made there... He doesn't mind me using his name. His name is Masoud. He's from Afghanistan. So one of the first times I met him, he shared with me his story in coming to Lesbos and how the Christians there at the shore took care of him. It was just an amazing story—how the boat hit a rock and everybody was dumped into the sea at night. Of course they're coming in at night, and he was holding his son who was a baby. And he lost his son in the water and he was frantically looking for him. And he prays out to God (what he called God—Allah) and I think the true God heard him. And he said, "I'm trying to bring my family to safety and do the right thing. Please save my son. If you're trying to get my attention, you've got it. I'm listening." And he comes up one last time after he's frantically looked for him numerous times. And a person from the boat yells, "Hey, look!" And the front of the boat was still intact. And his baby boy was laying right on the front of that boat. He swam over and got him. He was blue and cold. And he swims to shore and who meets him on the shore, but a Christian nurse who takes his baby and checks vitals and everything's good. And she warms him up by the fire and hands him back to him and said, "He's good." He told me that story and he said, "I knew right then. Okay, people kept telling me the reason they were doing this and taking care of me was because of Jesus. And so, okay, I need to meet Yeshua. I need to know who Jesus is." So he told me that numerous times. I was flying back over there and I thought, "You know, I need to ask Masoud something." So when I got to Greece and saw the people, I was asking, "Hey, where's Masoud?" And I see him and I say, "I got a question. Was there anything else, besides the way Christians treated you on the shores of Lesbos, that made you want to learn about Jesus?" He said, "Well, yeah. He was driving me crazy." I said, "What?" [MH laughs] He said, "He was driving me crazy."

MH: This is going to sound familiar. [laughs]

DS: I said, “Tell me about that.” He said, “He was waking me up.” I said, “Tell me about that.” He said, “He’s coming to me in my dreams.” I said, “Alright. How did you know it was Jesus?” He said, “He told me. He said, ‘I’m Yeshua. You need to know me.’” And I said, “No kidding. Wow, that’s awesome.” And so I start asking a lot of my friends over there, from Afghanistan, from Iran, from Iraq. There’s thousands and thousands of refugees there. And I’m telling you, Mike, without exception, same story from all of them.

MH: Yeah. It’s really interesting you mention that and the Lesvos connection. Because people who subscribe to my newsletter are going to know this, but just recently I read Tom Doyle’s book, *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* And then I also read the book, *The Strange Death of Europe*, which is about the immigration and demographic changes. He has one chapter in there specifically on Greece and the refugee issue. And the focus is on Lesvos. So listeners should know, these numbers... This is no exaggeration, about the number of refugees, the increase of... So when you say it went from 4,000 Bibles to 110,000, I can entirely believe that, just because of the numbers—the influx—that they’re having to deal with there. And then the *Dreams and Visions* book, there’s one place in the book where Doyle says it’s gotten to the point where somebody, I can’t remember if he identified them or if he knew, put up billboards (signs) in these Muslim countries. “If you’ve had a dream about Yeshua, call this number.” [laughs] It’s that widespread that they’re actually doing things like that to get these people in touch with a Christian. And lest people... I don’t want people to misunderstand. In Doyle’s book, he said, “Look, this isn’t like people have a dream and like... They go to bed a Muslim and they wake up a Christian. No. It’s like they have some sort of encounter or contact that ultimately they get directed to someone who knows the gospel. That’s just how it’s working. But it’s gotten to the point now where, “If you’ve had a dream, please call this number.” [laughter]

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DS: “Please call this number.” Yeah. It’s great. And again, I think that’s... What we’re seeing in every area that we’re working is God moving in ways that, if we tried to do this, we would mess it up. But there’s a movement taking place. And again, this is good soil. When you look at... What did Jesus say? When he goes into the synagogue that day when he starts his ministry and he’s handed the book of Isaiah. And he searches to find the passage and then he reads, “I have come to...” What? Look at the people groups that he’s come to take care of: the wounded, the prisoner, all of the people that are the down and outs, the people whose soil has been churned up. I mean, it’s been seriously churned up. Well, that’s who we’re dealing with. And we look at the nations that we’re in: Ukraine, the Holodomor. Nobody talks about that. I’ve got some Jewish heritage in me, so yeah, we all talk about the Holocaust, which was horrific and horrible, but what Stalin did in Ukraine, starving out those people... There were seven million of them. And that’s a part of their heritage. There’s been some serious soil churning

up. And so now they get the Bible and they hear hope and they hear of why I'm here and what the future is and that this life has meaning. They're ready to share it with everybody. They want this message out there. So that was our request. We had a request a number of years ago in the nation of Ukraine. They asked for Bibles for their public schools. And we thought, "What? Are you kidding?"

MH: Yeah, I noticed that on the website. I thought the same thing. "Really?" [laughs] Tell us a little bit about that—the whole public-school thing there.

DS: Yeah. The first request came in. And we asked them, "What are you doing with them?" And they said, "We have this class. It's an elective. It's called Christian Ethics. But 99% of the students take it. We said, "Alright." "But we can't get Bibles." It's a very poor country. Ukraine is coming up. They're working. But they just don't have the money. And so we said, "Absolutely. Yeah, we're in." And so we started helping them. And this thing grew. And listeners may not know their Ukrainian history and current events. But they had President Yanukovich in there. And he gets ousted and he flees to Russia for asylum and then Poroshenko is brought in as the President. So when Poroshenko came in, he's trying to get his arms around this country that he's now tasked with governing. He asked for reports from all the different ministries. And he gets the report from the Minister of Education. And he calls the guy in. And he says, "I'm trying to understand something here." We call them states; they call them oblasts or regions. So he says, "I'm looking in this oblast here. And this one and this one and this one. And test scores are up. And discipline problems are down. Why is it unique in those oblasts (in those regions) and it's not in the others? Is there a common denominator?" And the Minister of Education says, "Well, yeah. That's where we're teaching the Bible." And he says, "No kidding." And I don't know that Poroshenko is a believer, but he's pragmatic. And he says, "Well, if that's what's doing it, hey, we need to make this offering all over the entire country." So the guy that was really instrumental was a Ukrainian Orthodox priest, a gentleman by the name of Vasily Jakovski (a friend of mine), and he was one of the ones that was instrumental in opening that door and putting Bibles in the public schools. So I get an email from him. He says, "Dirk, when are you coming to Ukraine?" And it just so happened that year I was not, and I said, "I'm not going to be in Ukraine, Vasily. I'm going to be in Romania. And I'm sorry that I'm not going to get to see you this year." He said, "Nope. I need you to get a ticket and come to Ukraine. I need you in Kiev for 24 hours." And I said, "Okay. A) I'm not important enough to accomplish anything in 24 hours. [laughs] And B) why do I need to be there? What's going on?" So he tells me this story. He says, "So we've told the nation that we will provide them. So I need you to go with me to meet with the Minister of Education for the nation of Ukraine and Kiev, so we can talk about this process." So I said...

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MH: Yeah, "We promised on your behalf." [laughs]

DS: Yeah. So I said, "Alright, I'll change my ticket for that." So we went in and had this meeting. And boy, the door opened up. And it's been amazing what they're doing. So at the end of last year, we've now put Bibles in over 2/3 of the public schools in the nation of Ukraine.

MH: Wow. Is there anybody else doing that? Any other countries that have that sort of policy, or at least openness?

DS: Well, I tell you. Lots of nations are looking at Ukraine. They're watching what they're doing. So Croatia, we're working with the Catholic Church there, which has been interesting. The Catholic Church now is asking for children's Bibles for their public schools. So the year before last, we did about 110,000. This year, we did 125,000. We have a request for next year, which we're not going to be able to put all of them in the budget. So if there's a listener out there that wants to help... We have a request for 425,000 from Croatia.

MH: Wow.

DS: And that's the way it started in Ukraine. It started with the children's Bibles and then they asked for the pre-teen and then of course very quickly, you're distributing Bibles to the adults because Mom and Dad are reading these stories and they're saying, "What is this? Tell me about this. I need to know more about this." So we're seeing it there. We're also seeing it in Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. It's very interesting. In Hungary they have not been able to afford to pay for some of their schools, so they handed over some of their schools to the Baptist Union. And the Baptist Union took the approach that they liked, and that was, "Hey, we're not going to teach anything but the Bible. We're not going to teach traditions. We're just going to teach the Bible." And so subsequently, the Baptist Union now has over 60 schools that they're running and they're teaching the Bible. So we are their supplier.

MH: That's crazy.

DS: It is. It's nuts. And the neat thing is, you see this unity. You see this unity around the Bible. I had this in Serbia two years ago, this Orthodox priest sitting there. And he says in his broken English... He does his hands. And he says, "You know, the closer we come to God, the closer we come to each other." And I thought, "Yep. That's kind of it." If we'll all focus on the Bible, you'd be amazed at what we all agree on, and we'll quit focusing on traditions that we... And they're fine. I mean, traditions are great. But if we focus on God and we focus on the Bible, we will live out Jesus' prayer in John 17, right before he went to the cross. He said, "Make 'em one, as you and I are one." And we're seeing that over there. We're seeing this unity. And people aren't walking away from their traditions necessarily, but they're focused on the Bible and really wanting biblical literacy.

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MH: This is ironic, too, because just in the last couple of days, I've had... I say ironic. It feels Providential to me. But I've had an exchange. I'm not quite sure where this person lives, but based upon their name, it's probably Eastern Europe or maybe a Muslim part of that. But in the course of the conversation, it's very evident that this is yet another person... And I get a lot of this, where here you have a person. They've come to the Lord. They understand the gospel very clearly. They either latch on to a particular tradition or they've come from within one. And they don't necessarily... The question will occur to them, "Why didn't I grasp this or get this with clarity before? What should I do?" Sometimes they ask; sometimes they don't. But there is something to be said for, if you do... This is what we try to do on the podcast, not just with the gospel but with the gospel generally. Let's focus on the text and see what happens. And so you get these situations where people are genuine believers. They might be in a tradition where somebody (rightly so) might say, "Good grief! Isn't it hard to get the real gospel in there?" It may be. But I have found that there are people operating within all of these traditions that do understand the gospel very clearly. They want Scripture. They get dissatisfied that they're not being taught Scripture. They're being taught traditions or whatnot. But we live in a day and age where most people... Even people in these tougher parts of the world, they all have phones. They do have access to the internet. They will find content. They really will. They'll find content. And then they become essentially evangelists within the tradition.

DS: That's true.

MH: And the point is, if you have that happening across traditions, then the discussion is no longer about the points of tradition. It's no longer about the tradition. It's about, "Hey, look at the text here. What did we learn here?" And that actually has an impact. Because we are tradition-agnostic here. And that bugs some people, but a lot of people are like, "This is refreshing. Because I listen to the podcast and you're not trying to perpetuate a particular subculture here. It's just about Scripture." [laughs] So that's what we do.

DS: Man, you are singing our song. I tell people, "EEM is not about promoting religion. It's about promoting Jesus. It's about promoting the Bible." That's our tagline.

MH: The Lord will use that. Where tradition is an obstacle, he can get around that. Where it's not an obstacle, that's wonderful. But the biblical text has a way (this is going to sound goofy) of impacting people. [laughs]

DS: Yeah. That's right!

MH: Who would've thought, you know?

DS: Who would've thought. Yeah, go figure. You mean the Holy Spirit's actually moving? Man. Who would've thought *that* was happening.

MH: Who would've figured that would happen?

DS: Yeah.

MH: Yeah, so I understand the thought trajectory there. And any time you can get people into the text, there's going to be a real positive payoff in terms of people being exposed to the gospel in its simplicity and its clarity. And people will respond to it. It's just going to happen.

DS: I think that's our challenge here in the U.S. We have become (in my opinion)... This is "First Dirk 1". But I think we have become one of the most biblically illiterate societies. Our biblical literacy is a far cry from where it was just 10 years ago. And people have just quit reading the Bible. If we can get people back into the Bible, it's amazing... It's not rocket science. We're told it's going to happen that way. We focus on God and the Spirit's going to move. I had a meeting in Croatia. We were in Dubrovnik (beautiful city in Croatia) and sitting with the vicar. The bishop was called away on urgent church business. They're the ones who are opening the door to put the children's Bibles in the public schools. And so the vicar meets us and he apologizes that the bishop couldn't be there. And he just regrets... He was so looking forward to this meeting and he got called away on urgent church business. So we sit down in this conference room in the diocese and we just have this wonderful conversation about how even though they're Catholic and we're Protestant, we can agree on the Bible and that the Bible needs to be put in the hands of their children and in the hands of their people. And they need to read the Bible every day. Yada yada yada. And then he looks at me and he says, "You know, just this morning, as I was taking the bishop to the airport, he looked at me and he said, 'You know, the more I read Jesus, the more I am convinced that we have become the very people that Jesus came to preach against.'" [MH laughs] And I went, "Whoa." I thought, "Man." I just said a quick prayer. "God, don't let me mess this up." And I looked at him and I said, "But you know what? The question we all have to ask ourselves is this. If Jesus were here talking to me, face to face, how would he speak to me. Would he speak to me like one of his disciples or like one of the Pharisees? If I think it might be the latter, I need to repent and not be about religion, but be about Jesus." And a lot of what *you* [Dr. Heiser] talk about is, at least in the podcasts that I've listened to, is driving people back to understand context. Context matters. And let's just peel off all the stuff that's tradition. Let's just read the text. Let's read the text and see what we get. And it's phenomenal. It's wonderful. The Bible has been around for a long time for a reason. It's a phenomenal book.

40:00

MH: I think focusing on the text is meaningful for a lot of reason. One of them is, it's one of those things we can do to get out of our own way. [laughs] Where... It's very easy to... I hate to use the word "competition," but here in the West, we have some misperceptions. We have some real problems and some

misperceptions, too. We have this steady decline in church membership and church affiliation. That doesn't necessarily mean that there's a decline in interest. It means there's a decline in the institutional delivery—the institutional mode or trappings of what it means to be a Christian or a believer. So I think we need to not be too pessimistic when we see downward-trending numbers. Because at the end of the day, the answer to that isn't going to be to build another church. It's not going to be to circle the wagons and compete with brethren for the people that want to still come to the building. If you just get people to content, God will use his Word. He will use content to draw people in.

DS: I could not agree more.

MH: It's just going to happen. Sort of get out of your own way.

DS: Amen. And I travel a lot. I'm on the road a lot because I head up our U.S. operations and I have our regional directors, pretty much most of our U.S. team. Which is not huge... We're small. We run a really lean machine. You give me a dollar, and 78 cents of it is going out the door. But as I travel and I go to different churches, the churches that are really, truly growing (and I mean growth, where they're evangelistic) are the ones when I walk in, they're teaching the Bible. I don't hear about Brene Brown. I hear about Jesus. Because... And they are just opening up a book and saying, "Okay, we're in the book of John." Or "We're in Habakkuk. And here we go." And they are teaching the Bible. People are hungry for that.

MH: Yeah. Isn't it curious how that works? [laughs]

DS: Exactly. Exactly.

MH: I have two other questions for you yet. One is still about your ministry. And then of course, we want to wrap up with, "What are your needs? What does this cost? How can people give to this?" But before we get to the last question, do you guys do anything digitally? Because this is a podcast, so there's going to be a lot of people out that want to know, do you have either a plan now or is there something in the works now that you get Scripture to different places in different languages digitally? Or are you thinking about doing that? Because even in these hard... Iran. Everybody's got a phone. So there are obstacles to this, obviously, because of internet censoring and filtering and whatnot. But there's still Trans World Radio. There's still... People do have phones, and there are ways to get them content. So do you guys do anything digitally yet?

DS: We have some of our books (and you'll see them on our EEM Europe website that they can download)... But if somebody wants a digital Bible, you have plenty of options out there for those. So we don't really see a need necessarily there. We're talking to the market and listening to what people are requesting. But right now... And we're even seeing this in the U.S., as a traveler,

yeah, I have my iPad and I have a ton of books on my iPad. But even here in the U.S., we're seeing Barnes & Noble stock go up. And we're seeing book sales go up. And educationally, over there, they will use digital...

MH: Yeah, they're not doing the iPad thing over there yet.

45:00

DS: No, they're not. And they might use it as a... They might have a Bible on their phone. You see smartphones here and there in Eastern Europe. But they want a book. They want a book. They want the actual paper book. And I request... For 2019, our budget was \$5.35 million. And I turned away... Because when our European team came and made their requests, I had to say no to \$2 million worth of requests. Because it's one thing to step out in faith, but it's another thing altogether to be fiscally irresponsible.

MH: Yeah, right. To go under.

DS: Yeah. So we're not seeing it go away. So to answer your question, yes. We keep our ear to the market and we operate off of requests. We don't ever say, "Hey, here's a book you need." Now what we will do is, with *your* books, we will present those and say, "Hey, take a look at this." And if they say, "Wow! This would be fantastic! We really have a need for this!" Then we'll put it into project mode. But we operate off a pull, not a push.

MH: Yeah, you're in request mode. What you just described is significant because... There were a number of reasons why I asked the question. Because it's going to be (for this audience) sort of an obvious question. But I've had to learn, through the nonprofit thing... Yes, we're getting these things translated and we put the files up there and so on and so forth. And people can use the content, reproduce it any way they want, in any form. That's great and lots of people do and have used the translations. But I got an email once that... I won't say reminded me, because I never actually thought of it. [laughs] That "Hey, in my country," or this place next door, "most people can't read." And so that presents a different kind of obstacle. And it's like, "Boy, I guess I better get people to read these things and do audio that can be played in various formats." Well, there are still parts of the world where you go to a school and they're not all sitting there with iPads. They're not doing PowerPoint. They're not doing the audio/visual stuff that we just don't even think about anymore, because it's everywhere. So the need for an actual book [laughs] is still pretty profound in most of the world.

DS: I'll tell you a quick story on that. My guy that's in Greece traveled to Bulgaria and he was asked to speak in this church. It's (as he describes) a little room that probably should have housed about 40 people and they are about 70 people shoved in this little room. And he stands up and says his niceties and starts into his "sermon." He says, "Today, I want us to be in the text. Let's open up 1 Corinthians and let's start in chapter 13." And he said everybody stands up. And he's like, "Oh, okay. Maybe it's their tradition. They're going to stand for the

reading of God's word." But then they all started moving to the front of the room and crowding over to his right (their left). And he thought, "Where are they going? What's happening?" And he just paused and he watched till he saw a woman in the front lift up a Bible (the *one* Bible that they had) up over her head so that everybody could crowd around and read 1 Corinthians 13. This is Bulgaria. In 2019. And they have one Bible. He's like, "No, this is..." So he comes back and he tells me he told them, "I'm going to send you Bibles." And he sent them a box of Bibles. And he came back, and you'd have thought he'd given them a million dollars. They were just thrilled. So yeah, it's a good reminder. In places we see large requests for our children's Bible and they're going into what would be called the Roma. I don't know if you're familiar with the Roma. They're people very derogatorily refer to as gypsies. But they don't have a written language. So in certain countries like Romania and Bulgaria and others, they can't speak or read the local language. So we had ministries there that are requesting our children's Bibles. They're actually teaching the adult Roma population how to read using our children's Bibles, which is fantastic.

MH: Yeah, that stuff still happens.

DS: Yes! And it's hard for us in our Western culture to get our brains around that and to really realize that's really happening in places. It is.

50:00

MH: Well, tell us again about how people can contribute. I'd encourage everybody in the audience to send \$5 or \$10. If 100,000 people do that, that's awesome. You can fund something directly so that the answer doesn't have to be no. It's a real small thing, but it can multiply exponentially if everybody does it. So go ahead.

DS: Yeah. And our price point is \$5 provides a Bible. So anybody can get involved. But they can go to our website, EEM.org. Or we have an annual fund campaign that happens every year. It starts in September and ends at year-end. We call it Million Dollar Sunday. We actually have a website, MillionDollarSunday.org. But you can link to it from our other website. You can give there. You can give online securely. Like I said, \$5 provides a Bible. And we have the request right now for... There are quite a number of projects that we have sitting on the sidelines until we can get the funding. But every little bit helps. \$5 provides a Bible for somebody reading a Bible. And it's going to go in their hands. That's the nice thing. It's not sitting on the shelf. And if you want to designate certain languages, that's fine. Our request would be to make it as unrestricted as possible because we have the needs (as I said at the front end of the podcast, 30 different countries and 22 different languages)... So we have needs across a lot of different people groups out there.

MH: Again, we just encourage everybody to do that. Americans are very generous. And just people in general. But since I live here, I get to see it, and that's what I hear about. That's the focus of my comment. But a lot of the stuff

that we give money to isn't as important. [laughs] Let's just be blunt about it. So this is good stuff.

DS: That's why, eight years ago, when EEM approached me and I thought, "Wait a second. What's the downside of giving people Bibles who are asking for them in their language? I mean, it's about as foundational as it gets. It's pure. It's just a Bible. Nothing can change it. It's going out there to them." So I appreciate it, Mike and Trey, the opportunity to be on here. And I'd encourage your listeners. We all are evangelists. They need to be evangelists for this podcast. They need to be sharing this with other people and saying, "Hey, if you're not listening to the Naked Bible Podcast, you need to." Because we need it in this country. We need people to really be absorbing what you're presenting and being able to read the Bible in the way that they need to. So I appreciate you guys, because I know this takes time and effort.

MH: We appreciate it. And that's what we're here to do.

DS: Well, thank you.

MH: Mm hmm. Thank *you*.

TS: Okay, Mike. That was a good interview. It's really fascinating. He mentioned that he's going to present your books that you've done the translations for and present them and see if they would like that. And maybe your material will be included with that. But as far as providing Bibles alone, that's awesome.

MH: Mm hmm. Yep. You know, we don't do episodes like this to get *my* content out, even though I want it out. In this case, it's like, "Look this is really simple. [laughs] There are people who don't have Bibles. Get them Bibles. This is where it all starts." So this was really worthwhile. I'm glad we were able to do it.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. And again, his websites are EEM.org and MillionDollarSunday.org. And you can get more information. So we urge all listeners to go check them out and support them and help get Bibles into people's hands. So that's great.

MH: Yep, absolutely.

TS: Alright, well, next week, we're going to get back into Exodus. And we want to thank Dirk Smith for coming on. And we want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.
