

INTRODUCTION TO CONFIRMATION

READING GOD'S WORD

STORY

"The Bible is the destruction of the people. The Bible must not be given ordinary people; it would lead to disaster." These words were penned by the governor of Ethiopia in 1905 in the trial of Onesimos Nesib, who had translated the Bible into Oromo, the language of the people, and had opened schools to teach them how to read.

Onesimos was kidnapped by slave traders when he was just four years old. He was a slave for twelve years until a missionary purchased him in 1871 and set him free. He was the first Oromo to become a Christian and be baptized.

Impressed with his love of learning, missionaries sent him to college in Sweden, where he earned a teacher's diploma and was commissioned as a missionary. When he returned to Africa, he began teaching former slaves and translating the Bible into his native language. Several years later, he returned to Ethiopia with the Bible, Luther's Catechism, and a book of religious songs, which he had translated into Oromo.

Leaders did not want the people to become educated or learn about Christianity. They banned his books and schools, which were among the first in the nation. Despite the ban, Onesimos continued preaching and sharing the Gospel. (Mekuria Bulcha, "Onesimos Nesib's Pioneering Contributions to Oromo Writing," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 4, no. 1 [1995]: 36–59, www.njas.helsinki.fi/)

Discuss one-on-one or in small groups the following questions.

1. Why was it important for the people to have the Bible in their language? *So they could understand it, learn their own language, and by the power of the Gospel it contains, receive forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation.*
2. Why would leaders be threatened by common people possessing and being able to read Bibles? *Most likely they feared the people would become harder to manipulate and less isolated. They would be better equipped to seek justice. Perhaps they feared Christians would use their freedom in Christ to work for social improvements and justice.*
3. In what ways does God change lives as He works through the Word? *God works through the Word to bring people to a realization of their sin. Then He brings them to faith in Christ and His redeeming work. Further, working through the same Word, God guides and enables believers to walk in His will and ways.*