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Urban Wanderer

## Words of Jesus ride the bus



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Late one afternoon last winter I was riding a crowded Sheppard Avenue bus to my appointment with Luisa, my hairdresser. All the passengers looked tired, weighed down with daily baggage. I glanced at the ads above their heads and saw the words of Jesus: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, NLT). Beside the verse was a simple question: "Weary of life?"

I couldn't believe my eyes. The

Bible on a Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) bus? Among the ads for cosmetics, entertainment and "men's health" services? And bearing a message so apt for the situation? I jotted down the reference and the URL: [www.busstopbiblestudies.com](http://www.busstopbiblestudies.com).

Luisa is a Catholic with a hunger to know God's Word and a sister who's battling cancer. As she snipped my hair, our conversation drifted to Bible study. Her face lit up. "Have you seen those ads on the bus?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, just this afternoon!" I replied.

"I write them down and share them with my sister," Luisa said.

That was my introduction to Bus Stop Bible Studies. The web address led me to their founder and director, David Harrison, a Scarborough businessman and former elder at Bendale Bible Chapel. In December 2001, a provocative lingerie ad on a bus shelter made him think: "If only that was the Word of God being displayed." Four years later he asked friends from several denominations to form a board. On December 5, 2006 560 posters went up on Toronto buses.

The website speaks to two audiences: those who seek spiritual help after reading the posters and those who want to participate in the ministry. Individuals can submit a brief lesson that meets the

### God can help...

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand."

The Bible: Philippians 4:6-7 New Living Translation

### Is this for real?

[www.busstopbiblestudies.com](http://www.busstopbiblestudies.com)



ministry's mandate, which David summarizes as Isaiah 61:1-3.

"No hellfire and damnation," he says. Churches can choose from the 200 messages already available on the website and sponsor posters bearing the church name and contact information.

Scarborough Chinese Alliance Church sponsored the only other poster I've seen. Under the headline "What's worrying you?" it quoted Philippians 4:5-7 and Corrie Ten Boom: "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength."

Edward Ho, one of the pastors, says his Cantonese-speaking congregation hadn't received any direct response from their English ads—nor did they expect to. "Our purpose was to support Christianity."

The ads certainly have done that.

"We've had some wonderful testimonies," says David. One bus rider who e-mailed him was unemployed and facing eviction. David prayed with her and shared the message of salvation. She called "100 Huntley Street," accepted Christ and later wrote to the Toronto Transit Commission that the ad on the bus had probably saved her life.

Christians across Canada contacted David after he was interviewed on "100 Huntley Street" last January. As a result, Ottawa, Calgary and four or five other local transit companies approved

Bus Stop Bible Studies. Others such as Mississauga and Hamilton have rejected them.

In Toronto, however, there are virtually no Bus Stop Bibles on the buses right now. The ads came down in July. Although TTC's marketing department approved the messages before they went on the buses, the commission has a policy of taking ads before an ad review committee if it receives five complaints. The committee rejected the ads.

Although David does not know how many complaints prompted the review, he does know that one rider found a reference to Jairus's daughter anti-Semitic; another accused the studies of pushing their own beliefs. Bus Stop Bible Studies appealed the rejection and expects a verdict in mid-September.

"What we need now is prayer," says David. "Pray for a favourable ruling from the TTC and direction for the whole ministry."

"God is quite capable of putting the right person in front of the right Scripture at the right time," says David. "Our job is to get the Scripture up there and make it attractive."

*Esther Barnes is writing a series of columns on her encounters with mission in Toronto. She is the former editor of the Link & Visitor.*