

What is the Best Bible Translation?

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I want to begin this morning by introducing you to a passionate 21 year old sophomore in college. His name was William 'Cam' Townsend. As a young confident believer in Jesus, Cam has dreams to change the world through missions work. So in 1917 he would head to Guatemala with extreme passion and a suitcase, full of dozens of Bibles that had been translated into Spanish to go and reach people for Jesus

As Cam was beginning his mission work, and meeting people in this new country, he started to have some problem. Has he offered these Bibles to people? He was discovering most of the people he was meeting didn't speak Spanish.

As Cam interacted with more and more people from different tribes, it was a question from one of the members of the Cakchiquel Indian tribe that changed the trajectory of Cam's life... *"If God knows everything, why can't he speak my language?"*

This rocked Cam, because he was convinced that EVERYONE — every man, woman and child — should be able to read God's Word in the language of their heart. SO Cam would spend 10 years learning the Cakchiquel language, and developing an alphabet. It was in the year 1929, Cam completed a Cakchiquel language translation of the New Testament.

Throughout his life, it would be this soul disturbing question that would lead Cam to found three organizations that promote Bible translation among minority-language groups including Wycliffe Bible Translators

So here we are... over a century later, and Cam's legacy lives on. Because of the work of Cam and many like him there more than 550 language groups have the entire Bible and more than 1,300 have the New Testament in the language they understand best which is incredible...

But as we sit here today.... It's believed that up to 1,800 languages likely still need a Bible translation to begin. So as we approach today's question, "What is the best Bible translation?" I want to approach this conversation with a posture of great humility, gratitude and sobriety today... to know that us having this conversation is one that is had out of privilege.

Let's Pray

As I mentioned, with great humility we are going to answer the question "What is the Best Bible translation?" today.

I want to be up front and let you know that we will land with a clear answer, but before that we will wade through some of the complexity and nuance of Bible translations. We must remember that the Bible is written in several languages over a span of centuries. So as translation work happens, it is complex for any language...

But on top of that most linguists would let you know that our beloved English language is quite complex and even confusing at times. We find out that words can be spelled the same and have different meanings in different contexts... and then punctuation plays a significant role in how we understand a sentence

(a couple slides for example)

And let's remember that language is not static. It evolves over time and with different cultures and regions within a given country even. So now that we understand that it's not always the easiest to understand... let talk specifically about English Bible translations there a couple of categories on a spectrum that help us understand the goal of the translators.

There is a chart that represents what the goal and intentions that translation committees may have.

WORD-FOR-WORD – Formal Equivalence – On one end we have word for word – they do their best to take a word and translate it as literally as possible to the English equivalent. Which sometimes can leave things confusing when a language is structured a bit differently than English... or a cultural meaning has changed.

For example... the word Honey is found often in the Bible... when I was in Israel, I learned that when most people in Israel the words Honey is a dynamic word... my mind instantly goes to bees and hives... but there, the majority of honey is actually date honey...

So if I ask for honey for my toast, I may get something completely different than I asked for.... Yet I would be getting, exactly what I asked for.

THOUGHT-FOR-THOUGHT – Functional Equivalence

Tries to be as clear and understandable as possible in translating the original languages... but may sacrifice original structure or language

In addition to what we would consider “translations” there are paraphrases that are out there as well. – A paraphrase is a Bible that was translated from another English translation, and not from the original languages – a few of those would include

The Living Bible – which was written by a dad named Kenneth Taylor – who found himself rephrasing many verses during their family devotions when his kids would ask questions like “what does that mean?” – so he decided to paraphrase it. Interestingly, it would be this idea that inspired Zondervan to put together a team of translators and create the New Living Translation – which is on the list.

The Passion – Written and released the New Testament by Brian Simmons in 2017 – was designed to “recapture the emotion of God’s Word”

The Street Bible - Dr. Wendell Nelson’s favorite (not true)... “Using MTV-style dialogue, Rob Lacey lends fresh perspective to familiar stories and sayings. For new and seasoned readers alike, the street bible takes the message of the Scriptures into the 21st century to create the impact it had in the 1st century.”

And with all of these translation, and paraphrases out there – there is bound to be some stereotypes from Translation Tribalism that our middle school team researched and put together a scholarly video for you to help understand this. –

From time to time, you will likely find a passionate person about a specific translation that is convinced of their perfection and superiority... there certainly are the “ONLY PEOPLE”

- KJV Only
- NIV Only
- ESV Only

But at the end of the day, there really is not a perfect translation. It comes down to a matter of preference.

And as I mentioned earlier, I think it is critical for us to be honest about the reality that we are having this conversation from a point of immense privilege. Honestly for me, I typically choose to utilize a few different Bible for a variety of applications and uses in my Spiritual disciplines.

And I do think that it can be a very big advantage for is to know how to best utilize different versions for different purposes.

When I study the Bible – typically I am using multiple versions and using a Study Bible – A couple of my favorites are the ESV and NIV study Bibles, which are filled with a lot of great notes and cultural background – Mark addresses this a few weeks ago – the caution in the study notes is remembering that they are not divinely inspired.

When I memorize the Bible – I have found myself using the New Living Translation more and more. Especially when working with Students for a decade. – For some, it is the King James Version, which was actually written to be spoken

When I help a new Believer – I typically will recommend the Quest Study Bible – which is designed to both have study notes and anticipate questions that someone new in the faith may be asking, and providing answers.

For Someone who learns visually – I may recommend the Action Bible or the Beautiful Word Coloring Bible – that you can color in while you read.

Maybe to those with reading problems & a runner – There are incredible resources like Audio Bibles like the Street Light Bible App which is a reading with Emotion & music backtracks or the YouVersion Bible App which comes equipped with many different version... ASL Bible, the Kids Bible by Life.church - cccomaha.info

But here is the bottom line answer to the question at hand “What is the best Bible translation?”
– **The one you will read!**

Even if we were stuck with your least favorite translation, it would still be the Word of God.

Hundreds of times when I worked with students I would be asked that question by parents and that is the answer I would give them. And I would also rarely encourage anyone to ever just give someone a Bible. I worked at a church for several years that had a whole ceremony where they would give kids their first Bible in third grade... and then I would meet these kids in 8th grade and the pages were still stuck together... they had never been opened.

So I insisted that we not give Bibles away anymore, but we gift parents with an opportunity to take their kids shopping for a Bible. Where they could open it, read it, look at the cover, get a feel for it, see which translation they understood... and then buy it... and guess what! The ownership level of those Bibles increased significantly.

Kids were now proud of the Bible, it felt like it was theirs. They picked it out, they had a reason for picking it out.. and they READ THEM!

It is amazing how the small investment of time into thumbing through the Bible and trying it on will increase the level of ownership and excitement to read it.

So a little SOAP BOX for parents... and really for anyone. We think this book can change peoples lives and the time that it takes to go and help pick one out, make it something special, it may be one of the biggest discipleship things you can do... and yes, it may be expensive for some of them – but I can promise the ROI is much better than anything else you can provide for someone you love!

That is why we have dozens in the Atrium today for you to choose from and thumb through.

We cannot fail acknowledge that our debates within the American evangelical church regarding which version of the Bible holds the ultimate authority stem from a position of privilege.

Put another way...

We're blessed with a Bible buffet,
That we can access any moment, any day,
But what's the saddest and most alarming,
Is how our often souls are left starving.

We know this has been a bit of a different message series that has been a lot of information ABOUT THE BIBLE – and like Josh said last week, we believe this book is ALIVE it is ACTIVE...

My hope today is to land in Scripture and remind us of the beauty of this Book.
Let's turn to 2 Timothy 3:14-17

A little context while you are turning there. Paul has written a couple of letters to his beloved friend and protégée Timothy with instructions on how to live a Godly life and lead well.

And this section is from Paul's final words to his dear friend as these letters are wrapping up.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,
¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

But as for you... continue on in what he has been taught and what you have caught.. and been convinced of through the witness of those who had been teaching him. – We know Timothy's mom and grandmother were some of his main teachers... and they had modeled the truth of Scripture through their lifestyle his whole life.

And back to verse 15... Paul calls the Scriptures... – Holy --- this is likely the verse that those two words on the front of your Bible "HOLY BIBLE" came from

It is these words which will point you to Jesus as the source of Salvation... the entirety of the Old Testament, and historically we know the early church is beginning to accept some of the Gospels as authoritative as well. Which is a whole other conversation...

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God ^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul tells Timothy and us... that All Scripture – the very words on these pages are God Breathed – the word Paul uses there is (theopneustos) - some scholars think it's a word that Paul made up because it's not found elsewhere in Ancient Greek..

Which to us can bring back images of God creating humans in Genesis 2 – and it was the very breath of God that gave humans life.

In a world plagued by brokenness, sin, and death, these are the words that bring life to our souls. Jesus fully grasped this truth when He faced temptation in the desert.

Satan who seeks to kill, steal & destroy - tried to do this to Jesus' ministry before it even began, but Jesus countered these temptations with the words of life - the Scriptures.

Jesus met every attempt to kill his mission with the WORDS OF SCRIPTURE like when Jesus says in Matthew 4:4 – “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ – which Jesus took of Deuteronomy 8:3

It is the Word of God, the BREATH of God that equips us to do good works.

We have access to the very words that give us life. Every time we open the Bible, there an invitation waiting for you...

These words are the very essence of life! Jesus' victory over death proved the life-giving power of Scripture once and for all.

As believers, if we accept that Jesus is alive, then we must also acknowledge that His Word is alive!

We sometimes sing this song around here called “Rattle” – I hear the sound of dry bones rattling...

In Ezekiel 37 we see with prophetic imagery of a valley of dead dry bones, and the breath of God brings them to life.

As we read these words on the pages of the Bible – it becomes clear that The Bible is not God's plan A for revelation to the world it is the church... but it is these words that give us life!

I cannot help but picture what we could be... who we could be... the impact we could have if each of us individually, but then collectively had the very BREATH of GOD breathed into our souls each day.