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THE BIBLE



Seventy-Five Years of Connections

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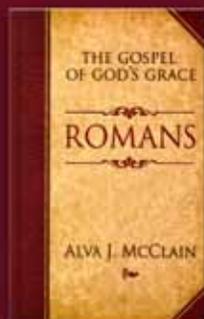
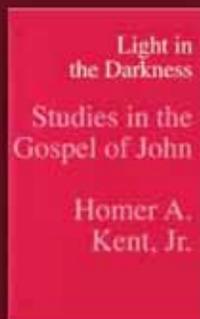
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THE BIBLE, THE WHOLE BIBLE, AND NOTHING BUT THE BIBLE.

In this issue, you'll hear from some of the top writers in the Grace Brethren community as they tackle the topics of Bible study and sermon preparation.



For many years, the catch phrase, *The Bible, The Whole Bible, and Nothing But the Bible*, was used by many Grace Brethren congregations in North America. And while many churches may have moved on to more contemporary slogans, the reality remains. God's Word is vitally important to the pastors and people of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

In 2013-2014, each of the five Focus Retreats for ministry leaders in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) focused on the values that are important to the people of the Fellowship. As each participant wrote a letter to their "Timothy," they were to outline what they valued most. In every retreat, the Bible was at the top of the list. (See the Timothy Letters at graceconnect.us/timothy-letters-1/)

It should go without saying that God's Word is important in an evangelical, Anabaptist group of churches like the Grace Brethren. After all, isn't all Scripture inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that we may be equipped for every good work (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17)?

It seemed only natural that we take a look at some of those themes in the pages of *GraceConnect*, starting with the Bible. In this issue, you'll hear from some of the top writers in the Grace Brethren community as they tackle the topics of Bible study and sermon preparation. We asked people their favorite version of the Scriptures—for preaching, for personal study, or to recommend. Read some of their comments throughout the magazine and learn more about the results on graceconnect.us.

Over the next year, we'll explore some of the other values that the Grace Brethren hold dear – our mission-mindedness, relationships, and grace. What we can't fit in the magazine, we'll post to graceconnect.us, so be sure to follow us there.

At *GraceConnect* we are intentional about helping you connect with others in the FGBC. It's something we've been doing for 75 years. To help you, we've created a variety of tools, including this magazine and the *GraceConnect eNews*, which will encourage you to grow in your faith and to connect with others.

Check out the other platforms of *GraceConnect*, where you'll see some of the same themes addressed. Subscribe to the eNews at <http://graceconnect.us/subscribe/>. "Like" us on Facebook at facebook.com/graceconnectus, where you'll find images and prayer requests from Grace Brethren churches and ministries shared on a regular basis. Find us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/graceconnectus> and on Instagram at instagram.com/graceconnect/.

Whatever platform you choose, you'll find we're still about the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.



Liz Cutler Gates, lcutler@bmbhbooks.com, is the editor of Grace Connect. Since 2010, she has served as executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. She and her husband, Doug, live in Warsaw, Ind.



THE LONG VIEW OF SERMON-CRAFTING

by Tim Sprinkle

Good preachers think bigger than a Big Idea or a book of the Bible; they chart a course for making a decade of Sundays cascade into a lifetime of worship.

Good preaching is a touchstone in Grace Brethren churches. Our movement has historically valued biblical truth – its proper interpretation and progressive application—and the sermon is shibboleth for how a church views the Word of God.

Of course, not all sermons are created equal. Far more goes into a Sunday morning message than pithy statements and a few anecdotal stories. The best biblical exposition blends a mixture of creativity, clarity, candor, charisma, cultural relevance, and Christian insight. Alliteration is negotiable; application of the Scriptures is mandatory.

Moreover, no sermon stands alone. Sermon-crafting thinks diachronically, building on the past, striving toward the future. The best preachers do not think week to week or series to series. Sermon-crafting fits the biblical text to the body of Christ to form the congregation over the long string of Sundays. Good preachers think bigger than a Big Idea or a book of the Bible; they chart a course for making a decade of Sundays cascade into a lifetime of worship.

Sermon-crafting requires a long view.

I grew up under the preaching ministry of Pastor Jim Custer at the Grace Brethren Church in Columbus, Ohio.

I've also sat beneath Dan Gregory, John Teevan, Ed Waken, and various other Grace Brethren leaders. Now I mostly listen to day-old recordings of myself and podcasts of celebrity pastors. I hate to make comparisons, but Andy Stanley might want to listen to me once in a while.

The reality is this: There's no shortage of good sermons out there. Our Fellowship comprises preachers who start fires from the pulpit with veins protruding; preachers who dissect the biblical text with surgical care and grammatical precision; preachers who weave personal stories and biblical motifs together like Rumpelstiltskin's gold.

But I sometimes wonder if our preaching methods betray our value of Biblical Truth.

It used to be one pastor picked one book of the Bible and slogged through four or five verses one Sunday at a time. "When I first started preaching, I spent two-and-half years in John," reflects Pastor Bob Fetterhoff of Grace Church (Wooster, Ohio).

The new normal in sermon-crafting is topical preaching, spun out in rapid fashion. "Now, six weeks would be considered a long series at our church," says Fetterhoff. Their sermon series are born



WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED

What version of the Bible do you use for personal study? Why?



ESV (English Standard Version – Reformation Study Bible) I believe we need use up-to-date translations.

I like the literal accuracy of the ESV. I also like the fact that it is becoming popular in conservative circles.

Doug Gray, Pastor
Grace Brethren Church,
Millersburg, Ohio



New American Standard (NASB) because I like the focus it has on word-by-word translation.

Phil Sparling, Pastor
Grace Community Church,
Auburn, Calif.



NASB (New American Standard Bible). I teach from it, so it is readily accessible for my study. The text has been

consistently more accurate than my other choices, particularly in verb forms, etc.

Randy Smith, Senior Pastor
Grace Church, Sebring, Fla.



NASB - word order and grammar is closest to Greek and Hebrew and the language is close to how we talk and think.

Rick Hartley, Senior Pastor
Grace Brethren Church,
Brookville, Ohio

out prayer, formed in team discussions, based on key topics (e.g., family, stewardship, evangelism), and booked six months in advance. For good measure, they tackle one theological topic (e.g., Angels and Demons) a year.

Fetterhoff describes this shift from his formal education at Grace Theological Seminary: “Years ago I took a long look at how I was preaching. Jesus never sat down and taught through a whole book of the Old Testament. His style of teaching was oriented around things going on in life. His whole teaching approach was not just ‘life-related,’ but ‘drawn-out-of-life’. We want to speak to what’s banging on the hearts and minds of people, and what God’s Word says about it.”

Topical preaching has stormed the pulpits throughout our Fellowship of churches. We should take note. The largest and fastest growing FGBC congregations prefer topical preaching, which makes a case for its effectiveness. It certainly addresses current needs, provides real helps, points to Scripture, and stretches the preacher. “Topical studies are much more difficult,” confesses Pastor Jim Brown of Grace Community Church (Goshen, Ind.).

(For more on Sermon-crafting from Pastor Jim Brown, Pastor Jeff Bogue, and Knute Larson, go to the first issue of CE National’s Pastorpedia, “Oh, and about

that Sermon: cenational.org/ministries/pastorpedia/oh-sermon/)

Fetterhoff concurs, “It’s much harder to incorporate the whole counsel of God when you’re topical. It forces you to think. All Scripture is profitable, but not all Scripture is preachable in the same setting every week.”

But there may be an unintended consequence of topical preaching. It may teach people a way of reading the Bible that picks and chooses passages, cuts and pastes propositions, and submits the text to the preachers whim (i.e. Pastor Tim) more than the original author’s intent (i.e. Apostle Paul). What links one Sunday morning message to the previous one is a topic, not the Text. If this defines our long view of sermon-crafting, we may be slowly reducing the whole counsel of God to a collection of practical answers and advice.

This concept of the whole counsel of God (i.e., Canon) is central to our understanding of Biblical Truth. God gave His Church 66 inspired, authoritative books. The Canon provides diverse forms of literature— history, poetry, wisdom, oracle, parable, sermon, song, and apocalypse, to name a few—which encourage variety in sermon-crafting. But our stylistic preferences should not

(Continued on page 7)

In-tuition



As much as we often esteem rocket science as the "Everest" of all intelligence, you don't have to be a summa cum laude, astro-physicist to understand that **families just can't afford to pay any more.** In fact, they passed that threshold a generation ago. Our "intuition about your tuition" is that, not only do we need to halt the growing cost of college, but we also need to back track a bit and put some money back in your pocket. No gimmicks, no sleight of hand – just a more affordable solution to higher education. Period. So, outrageously, in an act of sheer determination and a measure of true grace, we decided to do both.

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The Long View of Sermon-Crafting

Continued from page 5

shrink the Canon beyond its received status. We should preach what we received: lines set in paragraphs organized in books laid out in Testaments.

Pastor Adam Copenhaver of Grace Brethren Church, Mabton, Wash., hopes spending two years in Luke-Acts will provide his church “a natural hermeneutic for how to read their Bibles.” He explains, “Few people are equipped to do the complicated work of surveying the Bible and gathering together scattered texts related to a topic, and interpreting those texts to build a coherent, balanced, and faithful perspective of that topic. People read their Bibles in the same manner as the sermons they hear.”

At Grace Church, Ashland, Ohio, Pastor Dan Allan has not abandoned preaching through the Canon of Scriptures. “When I started this 25 years ago, I thought: If I’m supposed to preach the Bible, the whole counsel of God, let’s shoot to do that. I’ve been on course to do that. What I mean by that is I want to get to the place where I’ve done a books study on every book. All but ten.” Allan is saving the best for last: only Deuteronomy, some minor prophets, and Ezekiel remain.

Key topical and seasonal series appear in Allan’s lineup, but he prefers book studies for a variety of reasons. “It’s easier. You don’t have to come up with an outline; the author of the book has provided it. It forces you to cover touchy topics that you might otherwise avoid. And it keeps you from getting stuck on hobby horses.”

I’ll admit: exegetical preachers are guilty of hobby horses, too. Whether I’m preaching James or Haggai, I can typically find a link to the goodness of Buckeyes’ football or the evils of fast food. Moreover, I’m not foolish enough to preach a forty-eight week series in Leviticus. I can predict the fallout: boredom reigns, blood sacrifice returns, and the congregation raise stones to throw at me.

Nevertheless, I prefer a 20-week journey through a book of the Bible to a four-week sprint through a theme. I’m in it for the long haul. Ten years and more than five hundred sermons into my career, this preference shapes my long view of sermon-crafting. Book by book. Sunday by Sunday.

Editor’s Note: Tim Sprankle is pastor of the Grace Brethren Church, Leesburg, Ind. He blogs at sprainedankle.blogspot.com.

Grace Church, Ashland	GBC, Leesburg	GBC, Mabton	Grace Church, Wooster
Faith that Works: James (12) Open Mic (1) Wanting: Ps 23 (1) Israel: A Love Affair (1) Spiritual Drifting (1) When Two Worlds Collide (3) Leading & Following: Numbers (9) P.E.W. Time (1) People around the Cross (4) The Battle for Our Lives (1) Family Matters (6) Grace Essentials (4) Life in Christ (1)	Better: Hebrews (27) To Maturity & Beyond (4) ProVERBS (12)	Luke (all year)	Angels & Demons (3) Five (4) I Love My Church (4) Fully Alive (5) Storyteller: Parables (7) Vision Sunday (1) Big & Little (3) I Am Jesus (4) Are You Ready (1) Joy (4) You Drive Me Crazy (4) Baptism (1) Overwhelmed (4)

**as interpreted from each church’s website*

WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED

What version of the Bible do you use when you preach? If it is different from what you use for personal study, why?



New Living Translation or NLT. It’s a version that I know everyone in the room can understand.

Mark Artrip, Lead Pastor
Movement Church, Hilliard, Ohio



NASB – tried studying NASB and preaching from NIV (New International Version) for two years – drove me crazy!!

Roy Halberg, Pastor
Grace Fellowship, Alta Loma, Calif.



1984 NIV- however since it is now out of print and I do not want to use the latest NIV version, I am strongly considering changing to the ESV. My hesitancy in the ESV is it leaves the reader more freedom to their own interpretation, in difference to a narrower understanding rendered by the 1984 NIV

Larry Edwards, Senior Pastor
Grace Brethren Church of West Kittanning, Kittanning, Pa.



PASSION FOR THE WORD OF GOD

by Lois Shirk

Most of the books available that were labeled “Bible Study” suggested that we read a chapter in the book and then answer questions about the chapter. Those books may all be helpful, but how can we call it Bible study if we don’t open the Bible and read it?

It was fall, time to reactivate the women’s ministry at Ripon Grace Church.

Our pattern was to have a monthly meeting with a devotional given by one of the older ladies in the church and then refreshments while we chatted. That year the current leader of the ministry, asked me, the wife of their new pastor, to take over the work.

I have a passion for the Bible. I love to read it and I love to teach it so of course I said yes. Off I went to the local Bible book store to find a Bible study for our women.

What did I find? Most of the books available that were labeled “Bible Study” suggested that we read a chapter in the book and then answer questions about the chapter. Much of the discussion was about “how I feel about what the author has written.” Few of the studies required the student to actually open her Bible and interact with the text. Most of it was what I would call “fluff.” I was stunned. Those books may all be helpful, but how can we call it Bible study if we don’t open the Bible and read it? I decided our study at Ripon was going to change. It was going to be different because it was going to center on the Bible. Let me tell you how it changed.

1. We started meeting weekly rather than monthly. I just didn’t think a monthly look into God’s Word was enough to grow and mature God’s women. My goal was to get every woman who attended into God’s Word on a daily basis.
2. We focused on the role of the Holy Spirit as our teacher. After all, who better than the author to guide us in our journey through God’s written Word?
3. I began to write studies that focused on the Bible text and its importance in our daily lives. Every day there was a Bible passage to read and discuss. The women at Ripon Grace began to

come alive. They were excited to learn that they could read and understand the Bible on their own. They were amazed at the way the Holy Spirit Himself taught them truth that applied to their daily lives. They came to class each week eager to share what they had learned. We began to learn from each other and encourage each other.

4. We began to pray for each other and we began to see God answer in amazing ways. We began to bond in ways that were closer and more intimate as we walked together through times of struggle, illness, and loss. For many years a faithful class member kept a book in which she not only recorded prayers but also followed up by recording answers. Every year at our final luncheon she would share what we had prayed for and seen answered that year.
5. As we met each Tuesday morning, I often had the joy of watching the excitement of young believers as the light went on and God's Word came alive in their hearts. There is no greater high than watching the Bible change people.
6. Our women are spoiled. They don't want to read a book about the Bible or a book about someone else's journey with God and call it a Bible study. They insist that our study be directly focused on God's Word.

I am convinced that one of the key needs of God's people, both men and women, is to get back to the Bible. We have great opportunities in our world to be well taught. We can go to conferences and seminars and we can listen to great Bible teaching in our churches, through TV and radio ministry and on the internet. We can read books written by great men and women of God. We are fortunate to have those resources and we need to take advantage of them. How-

I am convinced that one of the key needs of God's people is to get back to the Bible.

ever, if we put our Bibles on the shelf and fail to make real Bible study part of our daily lives, all the resources in the world will not be enough to grow us into the intimate friends of God we want to be.

May I make a few suggestions for those of you who are responsible for Bible study ministries in your churches?

1. Pray carefully about what you are presenting to your group for Bible study. Be sure it is something that will drive them to open their Bibles and dig into God's Word. There are more good studies available now than there were when I first started teaching but we need to be very careful what we choose.
2. As much as possible, design your study in such a way that the students will need to open their Bibles every day. Encourage them to avoid the "night before" syndrome. Studies with daily readings and daily questions to answer are my favorites.
3. Don't assume that your students are well taught. Understand that many of the men and women in our churches are not familiar with God's Word. Many in our culture have very little idea what the Bible is about and very little understanding of the God of the Bible. If you have new Christians or even not yet saved people in your group, go back to the basics, avoiding "Christianese" and big theological words that will be meaningless to them.
4. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach and celebrate the things your students learn as they study. The things that excite a new believer may seem pretty simple and obvious to you but they're big to someone who is just beginning to experience God. Let them share

what they have learned and take time to celebrate their excitement. This kind of an attitude will encourage your students to share with each other and honor the work of God in each other's lives.

5. Use social media, texting, etc. to stay in touch with your students through the week. A private group on Facebook is one way class members can discuss what they are studying, ask questions, and share prayer requests through the week.
6. Don't forget to pray for your class members and let them know you are doing that.

Do you have a passion for the Word of God? If you do, you can make a difference by helping others to experience the joy of actually reading and studying the words of Scripture. No more fluff, and no more "what do you think?" It's time to open God's Word in our churches and in our small groups and ask, "What does God say and what can I learn from listening to Him?"

God has written each of us a personal letter. How many of the men and women in your sphere of influence have heard His voice and come to know His heart through solid Bible study? Maybe you can be the one who infects them with the Bible study bug. Maybe you can be the catalyst that drives them to intimacy with the author of the greatest book ever written. Believe me when I say that watching the Bible come alive to God's people is the greatest joy ever.

Editor's Note: Lois Shirk's Bible study books are available on Amazon.com and she writes at loisshirksbooks.com. Her husband, Glen, recently retired after 33 years as pastor of the Grace Brethren Church, Ripon, Calif.

14 bricks have fallen down,
But we will rebuild with smooth stones;
The sycamores have been cut down,
But we will replace them with cedars.*

21 Manasseh devours Ephraim, and
Ephraim Manasseh,
And together they are against Judah.

3 PRINCIPLES EVERY JESUS FOLLOWER SHOULD KNOW BEFORE OPENING GOD'S BOOK

by Melissa Spoelstra



As we lead and disciple others, our approach to God's Word must be one of humility, curiosity, and a desire to know God so that we can set an example for others to follow.

Recently, my family hosted a game night at our home. As I played cards in the living room, I overheard the group at the kitchen table using words like: "Shire, Rivendell, Helm's Deep, Mordor, and Legolas." It seemed to me they were speaking another language. Clearly, I am not part of *The Lord of the Rings* culture like my family and friends who were playing the Trivial Pursuit game focusing on both the book and the movie.

It reminded me of my first year in Bible college. I discovered a lingo through my classes I had not previously spoken. The letters written by Paul in the Bible became the "Pauline Epistles." When a professor said the word "Pentateuch," he was referring to the first five books of the Old Testament. Some other examples of terms I quickly became adept in speaking include:

- Soteriology – the study of salvation
- Eschatology – the study of end times
- Homiletics – the art of preaching
- Hermeneutics - the study of interpretation of the Bible

It's this last term that, while hard to spell, doesn't have to be a lofty practice for only clergy and theologians. We are called to help equip those we shepherd in the principles of interpretation. As we lead and disciple others, our approach to God's Word must be one of humility, curiosity, and a desire to know God so that we can set an example for others to follow. A Christ-follower's methods of interpreting the Bible greatly influence his or her ability to understand and apply God's Word appropriately. Hermeneutics have great value so we don't become Scripture bullies who wield God's Word like a weapon to fight others rather than our common enemies of sin, Satan, and our pride.

Throughout Scripture we find warnings against false teaching. When Jesus was tempted in the desert, Satan attempted



to twist God's promises to distort their meaning. So we must learn and teach good principles of interpretation. 2 Timothy 2:15 suggests we should learn to handle God's Word. "Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth (NLT)."

This verse implies that there is a wrong way to handle God's Word. Paul instructs Timothy about how important it is to correctly explain the Bible to others. As we fulfill the great commission to make disciples, we should be clear about some principles to teach them as they learn to study and share God's Word. After referring to some great books, I asked several people I respect about their best hermeneutic practices. The following are the top three principles I want to be careful to teach my children as well as those I am seeking to disciple.

1. Consider each verse in its context.

In this world of social media, people often isolate verses without considering the rest of the chapter and book that goes before and after that verse. In college, someone made a poster for our dorm that had pictures of male models and this verse: "Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me." (Psalm 56:1a NIV) Although this was a joke, it illustrates how we can twist Scripture because this Psalm was written by King David when Saul's men chased him relentlessly, and he was forced to hide out in caves. Do you see how it was taken out of context to skew its original intent?

When we know something about the author, the original audience, the historical backdrop, and the cultural norms, it helps us unwrap the underlying truth. We then take the correctly interpreted principle

given from God and then reapply it in our own cultural context. Here are some good questions we can share with those who are seeking to get to know God through His Word:

- How did the author intend this to be understood and why?
- Why does God include and preserve this?
- What biblical principle is found here?
- How does this fit in with the whole of Scripture?
- What application does this truth have in our modern culture?

These questions will help ascertain context. When I asked the five people I most respect about important interpretation principles when reading Scripture, all five included the word "context" in their top two. Context helps us understand God's heart. The Bible contains timeless truths, but sometimes our modern mindset can trip us up when reading ancient texts. "We need to become familiar with the argument the writer was making or the flow of the message he was conveying," says Dale McCleskey, an editor at Lifeway.

For example, the book of Ephesians ends with Paul's challenge to wear the full armor of God. As we understand Paul's circumstances while writing from a Roman prison to a church at Ephesus struggling with many attacks internally and externally, it gives us greater context for his ending his letter explaining God's protective gear. In order to correctly interpret God's Word so that we can fight against Satan in battle, we need to begin to ask questions about the cultural contexts that lead us to hear God's redemptive voice.

2. Let the text speak.

We must be careful not to read our own ideas into it. As believers we guard against starting with our minds made

WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED

Has your church leadership identified a particular version of the Bible to use in worship settings? What is that version?



No. In Adult Bible Study, when students are reading verses aloud, it is interesting to hear the different interpretations.

Phyllis Smith, *Pastor's Wife*
Grace Brethren Church,
Brookville, Fla.



Yes. We use NASB in all elements of our service so that the Bibles we pass out are the same translation that is used in services.

Danny Wright, *Teaching Pastor*
Grace Brethren Church,
Greenville, Ohio

Why was that particular version chosen?



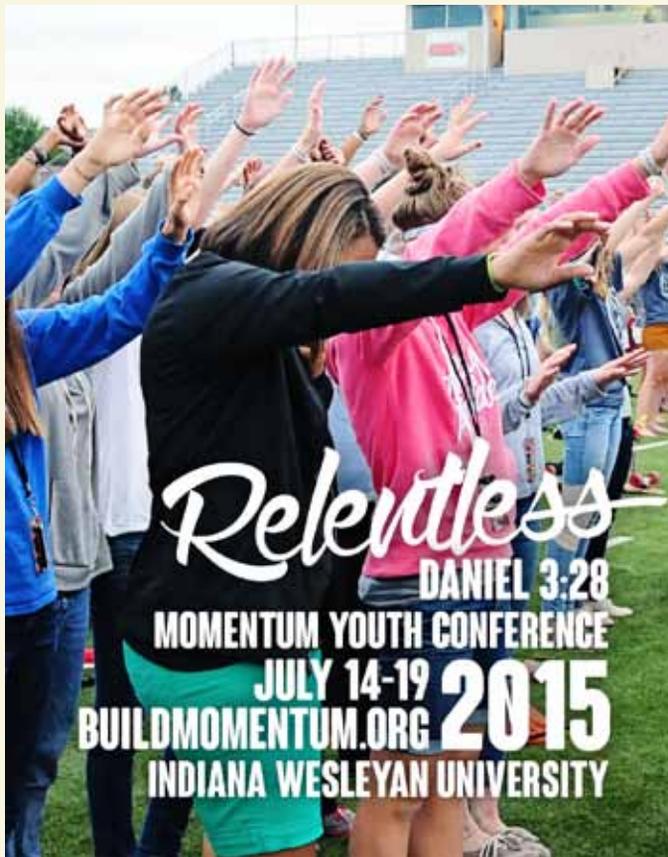
The New American Standard is used most of the time. We use this Bible because it is primarily the way we speak today and it is easy to understand.

W. Ray Miller, *Senior Pastor*
Total Grace Church, Toledo, Ohio



(Uses New International Version.) Readability, more fluent than NASB and ESV (one scholar calls the ESV a translation into "Biblish," not English. We would agree).

Bob Foote, *Pastor*
Grace Brethren Church,
Huber Heights, Ohio



Our childhood religious traditions, preconceived notions, and Americanized thoughts must all take a backseat to the clearest reading of the text.

up and then going to the Bible to support what we have already concluded. That's called proof texting. If we aren't careful, we can twist the Bible to say anything we want it to say when we're looking to prove a point. We must lay aside our baggage when we open God's Word. Our childhood religious traditions, preconceived notions, and Americanized thoughts must all take a backseat to the clearest reading of the text.

While some passages may contain poetry, allegory, or metaphors, we only implore that interpretation when the text itself does. By this I mean, we know when Jesus said, "I am the gate," it's obvious He was speaking of a spiritual gate, not a literal one. Other times we shouldn't read too much into a straightforward passage unless it's clear that the author is imploring the use of literary allegory, figures of speech, or some other technique. We shouldn't read into the text what we want it to say, instead we should look for God's heart and ask His Spirit to give us wisdom in discerning His message.

Once we've asked the questions from our first principle about the context, we then let God's Word speak for itself without adding to, changing, or making something up so it makes more sense in our finite brain. We don't need to humanize miracles or add details from the time period that sound good but couldn't be known. In other words, does an interpretation pass the smell test?

If an idea seems unrealistic, chances are we aren't letting the text speak for itself. We are adding human ideas to try to help God out. We need to check our baggage at the door (or the cover I guess) and dig in curiously while simply letting the very words of our God speak to our hearts and minds. Moses sums it up in Deuteronomy 4:2 pretty well when he says, "Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you. Just obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you (NLT)."

3. Don't think you have to have all the answers, but keep asking questions.

My Bible's margins are filled with question marks. I often struggle to understand why God said things in His Word. When I asked why the book of Jeremiah was so disorganized, I found in my reading that day Ecclesiastes 7:13, "Accept the way God does things, for who can straighten what he has made crooked?" When I am puzzled about

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As we seek to learn the meaning of a passage from the Bible that seems unclear, we must also be okay with some measure of ambiguity.

prophecies I don't understand in Revelation, or wonder what it means that women are saved through child-bearing, I also find 1 Corinthians 13:12 confirming that our current understanding is incomplete. "Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely (NLT)."

Although our picture isn't complete, we need to ask good questions and seek answers diligently. We can introduce new students of God's Word to consider consulting commentaries from authors with varying viewpoints or ask a pastor or spiritual mentor to help them understand a passage of Scripture that seems confusing. In Acts 17:11 the people of Berea heard the message of the gospel and: "They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth (NLT)."

We could implore the people we shepherd to do a little more searching, digging, and asking questions. As we seek to learn the meaning of a passage from the Bible that seems unclear, we must also be okay with some measure of ambiguity.

Trying to tack everything down can lead us to dangerous places where we hold all the right answers on every verse of the Bible. Some things are clear and we never back down (the gospel), other grey areas we hold loosely realizing that we see in a mirror dimly right now (worship styles, men and women's' roles, end times, etc.) If we aren't careful, we might find ourselves trying to do what Solomon warned us about in Ecclesiastes – trying to straighten God out when He doesn't need us to. Something inside us often wants to force everything into black and white categories. We must learn to live with leaving a few things in the grey areas when Scripture does.

As we seek to equip the body of Christ and as we open our own Bibles, let's remember to consider context, let the text speak, and keep asking questions that lead us into deep relationship with the Author of the living Word.

Editor's Note: A popular women's conference speaker and Bible teacher, Melissa Spoelstra is the author of Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World (Abingdon Press, 2014). Her husband, Sean, is pastor of Encounter Church, a Grace Brethren congregation in Dublin, Ohio, where they live with their four children.

WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED

What advice do you give when someone asks you about what version of the Bible to use for personal study?



I still find the NIV to have the best combination of accuracy, faithfulness to meaning of the original text, and understandability. Also, in my studies, I not only have NOT found any problems with the 2011 version, I agree with their translational approach and believe that it handles the so-called "gender controversy" very well and accurately translates intended meaning.

Mark "Cappy" Lingenfelter, Senior Pastor
Grace Brethren Church, Hopewell, Pa.



Read the Bible you have (no matter what translation)! I read from different translations to see more of the thought of the passage with the NLT and then read ESV to understand the words used.

Matt Ruppel, Pastor
Grace Brethren Church, Lexington, Ohio



I encourage a Bible that is up to date in it's language and is true to the original text.

Daniel Pierce, Church Planting Pastor
Grace Brethren Church, Greensboro, N.C.



The Message or The Living Bible represent reasonable paraphrases, while the KJV expresses poetry beautifully. The NIV is easy reading, but NASB scores highest for accuracy of translation.

Randy Smith, Senior Pastor
Grace Church, Sebring, Fla.



I point most people to the NIV because I believe it's the closest to how our culture thinks and speaks while still being true to the Text.

Rick Hartley, Senior Pastor
Grace Brethren Church, Brookville, Ohio

TRANSLATIONS WHICH ONE IS BEST FOR YOU?



A reader who understands the landscape of Bible versions will benefit from the diversity of available translations and choose a version wisely based on his or her intended scriptural use.

Having many Bible translations from which to choose is a blessing, but it can also present a challenge.

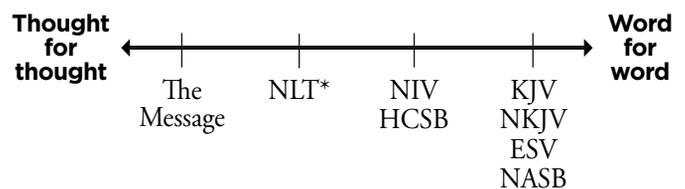
A reader who understands the landscape of Bible versions will benefit from the diversity of available translations and choose a version wisely based on his or her intended scriptural use.

Basic Types of Translations

- **Essentially literal:** These translations seek to preserve the specific words of the Greek and Hebrew text in their translations. Essentially literal translations introduce the least amount of translational interpretation, but they can be hard to read. The King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), English Standard Version (ESV), and New American Standard Version (NASB) are all essentially literal translations.
- **Dynamically equivalent:** The term dynamic equivalence indicates resemblance to the Greek and Hebrew originals in impact or meaning. Dynamically equivalent translations can be easier to read than essentially literal translations. They do, however, introduce more translational interpretation, as they render the original texts according to the translators' understanding of a biblical author's intended meaning, even if this requires a moderate deviation from the original wording. Within this category are the New International Version (NIV) and Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).
- **Paraphrase:** Paraphrases are most aggressive in representing a biblical author's basic thoughts in contemporary language. They are the easiest to read but deviate the most from the words of the original texts and introduce significant interpretation. *The Message* is a popular contemporary paraphrase.

The Translation Spectrum

As the descriptions above indicate, the Bible reader can place the various translations on a spectrum, with the more thought-for-thought translations on one end and the more word-for-word translations on the other:



As a general rule, the more in-depth the study, the more word-for-word the translation should be. Additionally, those less familiar with the Bible will benefit from translations on the middle and left side of the spectrum, and as they become more familiar with the Bible, they will find translations on the right side more accessible and useful.

* *The New Living Translation (NLT) is a popular version that is neither a true paraphrase nor a dynamically equivalent translation; it falls between the two types on the translation spectrum.*

Sample Wording in Various Translations

One can grasp the feel of the various translations by comparing how they render a complex verse such as Hebrews 10:1:

KJV *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.*

NKJV *For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.*

ESV *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.*

NASB *For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.*

NIV *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.*

HCSB *Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the actual form of those realities, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year.*

NLT *The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship.*

The Message *The old plan was only a hint of the good things in the new plan. Since that old "law plan" wasn't complete in itself, it couldn't complete those who followed it. No matter how many sacrifices were offered year after year, they never added up to a complete solution.*

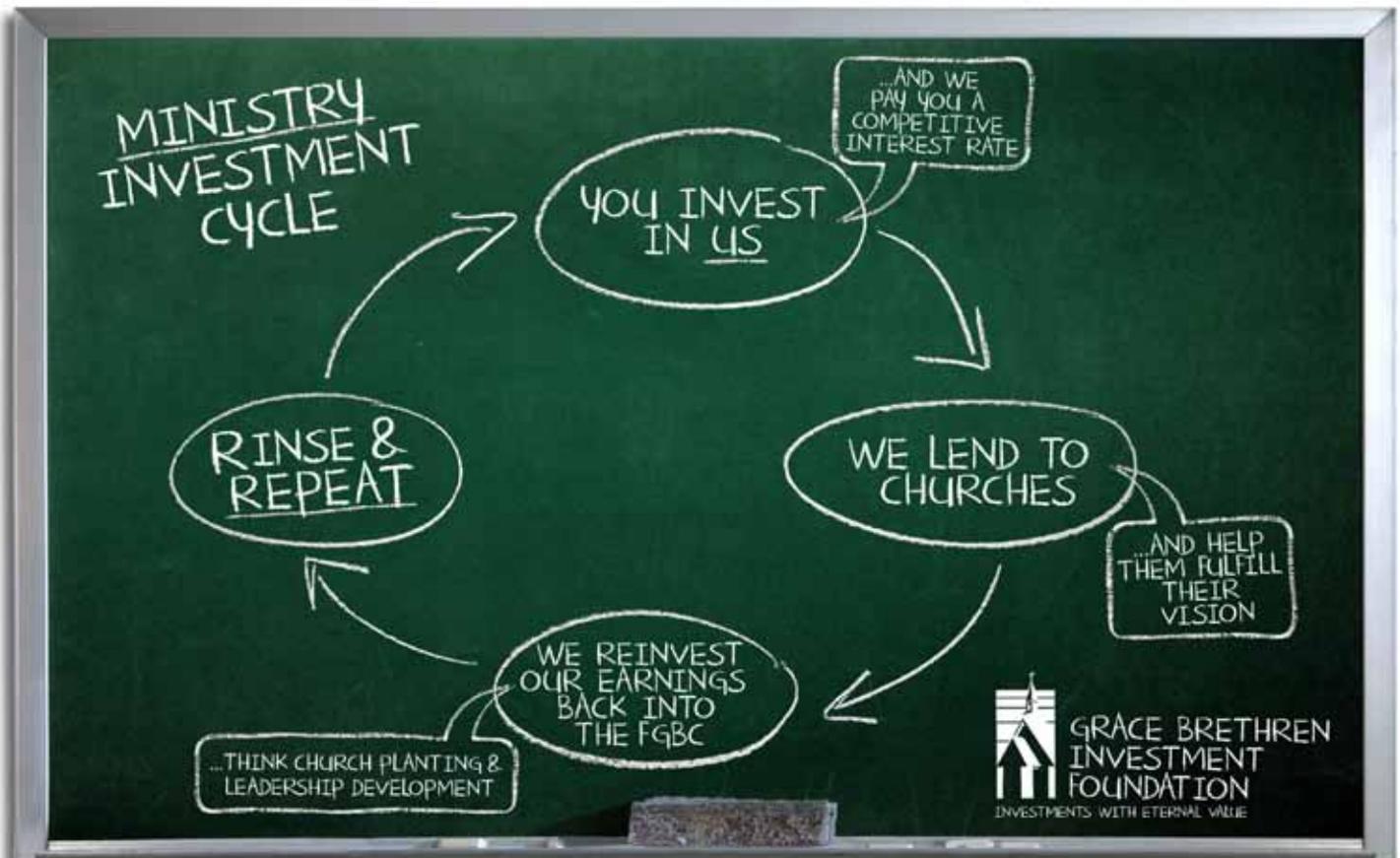
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