



“...welcome the Word planted deep inside you—the very Word that is able to save you. You must be doers of the word and not only hearers” -James 1:21-22, CEB

To the Church Gathered at 9300 Nels Nelson Rd,

Grace to you, and peace!

I want to let you know about the update to our sanctuary Bibles. Many of you have pointed out (for a few years now!) that our pew Bibles are quite worn and tattered, and our Worship Committee has been exploring the possibility of replacing them for some time now. A natural question that emerged in that discussion was whether to go with a different translation or not. Both the Worship Committee and Session explored this question, and the primary translations that ended up being considered were the NIV, NRSV, and CEB. Several months ago we consulted with many of our retired-pastor (and other Greek reader) attendees about their preferred translation(s). Here is a summation of what they thought:

- The NIV is still a good translation, but has fallen under some significant criticism from academics in the last decade or so, criticism that seems to hold some validity and weight.¹
- The NRSV is the preferred translation in academia at the moment. It’s a good translation, but because of its academic focus, it can be a bit stiff, strained, and wooden (this is also true of the ESV, another popular translation).
- The CEB is also academic (like the NIV and NRSV, it had a very impressive and scholarly translation team), but its team also really focused on using language that is idiomatic and accessible to the 21st-century reader. I was familiar with (and indoctrinated to!) this translation at Fuller because many of my professors were on the translation team, but I was also surprised that several of our retired pastors said this is their preferred translation, too. Ultimately, after reading side-by-side comparisons, Session voted to adopt the CEB translation in our sanctuary Bibles.

So, what comes next?

- We will have the old pew Bibles available for several weeks at a table in the Fellowship Hall. If you donated one in honor or memory of someone, you are welcome, of course to claim it and take it home as yours. Any unclaimed Bibles will be donated to Children of the Nations and will be used by the children, staff, and others in the African communities where they serve.
- Our elders also noticed that many of our pew Bibles go unused every week. This is because many of us bring our own Bibles, use a Bible app on our phone or tablet, look at the words projected on the screen, or simply like to just **hear** the Word of God read aloud

¹ I won’t rehash all of those here, but if you’re curious, shoot me an email and we can get in to the nitty gritty of those details!



(which, in fact, is probably how most books of the Bible were first meant to be heard). They also discovered (and really liked!) that some churches have Bibles available in the back of the sanctuary for anyone to grab at the beginning of the service, and if that person doesn't have a Bible of their own, they are free to take it home with them as a gift. So, rather than embarking on the major expense of replacing 150+ Bibles, Session voted to *begin* by purchasing a smaller number that would be available for use (and, again, for people to take with them if they do not own a Bible). If the demand is greater than the current supply, more will be purchased.

To some of us, all of this discussion might seem like a lot of minutia and superfluous details. I think there's a lot of wisdom in that sentiment. At the end of the day, my leaning as a pastor when people ask which translation they should be using is to simply say: *usually* the best translation to use is the one that *you* like. At the same time, not every translation is created equal, so Session wanted to do their due diligence in guiding us as a congregation to hear the Word of God.

Even more than that, of course, is the reality that no translation is perfect. As Christians we do not believe that our most sacred text just dropped out of heaven one day. It was written by humans, copied and disseminated by humans, and translated by humans. It is a human text, and reminds us that we worship a Lord who is fully human. That means Jesus probably stubbed his toe on occasion when he got up in the night to go to the bathroom, or had days when he felt under-the-weather. At the same time, our Lord is fully divine, which means in the person of Jesus Christ we find the very fullness and wonders and mysteries of God. So, too, we believe that the Bible—this *human* text—is also divinely inspired—that is, it is the Word of God—the means by which God has revealed Godself to us and is still speaking to us in new and unexpected ways.

God is able to speak *through* the hard work done by translation teams. And God is also able to speak *in spite* of their shortcomings or failures. I am personally excited to begin reading a different translation together as a congregation, not because I have anything fundamentally against the translation we've been using, but because I think it will help us to hear texts we know really well in a different way, and hopefully lead us to ask new or different questions.

In Christ's service together,

Tyler Kirkpatrick

“All may hear the living Word by coming to the Bible
humbly and persistently, with burning desire
to find God and live in peace with him.”

Dallas Willard