# Answers *for a* Changing Culture

## 11 Which Bible Should I Use?

*God has given His Word to be understood, believed, and obeyed. Faithful translations may differ in wording and style, but trustworthy translations communicate the same biblical message and can be used with confidence.*

## EMBARK

Walk into a Christian bookstore or browse online and you'll find an overwhelming selection of English Bibles: KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, CSB, NIV, NLT, and more. They all claim to communicate God's Word, yet they don't always sound alike. How should a Christian decide which one to use?

1. What Bible translation do you normally use, and why?
2. If a new believer asked you which Bible to buy, what would you recommend?
3. What makes one translation more useful for a particular reader or purpose?



## EXAMINE

**READ Nehemiah 8:1–8**

4. What was Ezra reading to the people?
5. What did the Levites do to help the people understand?
6. Why was understanding God's Word so important?
7. What does this suggest we should value in a Bible translation?

**READ James 1:22–25**

8. What distinction does James make between hearing God's Word and putting it into practice?
9. What happens when someone encounters Scripture but fails to respond to it?
10. How should this passage shape our priorities when choosing and using a Bible translation?

## EXPOSE

**We assume "literal" always means "most accurate"**

Languages do not match word for word in every expression. A very literal rendering can preserve the original wording while obscuring its meaning. **Good translation seeks to communicate what the text means in understandable language.** Formal equivalence emphasizes original wording and structure; functional equivalence emphasizes communicating meaning naturally.

**We assume readable means watered down**

Accessible language does not necessarily compromise accuracy. Some translations follow the wording and structure of the original languages more closely; others use more natural English**. Clarity is not compromise, but readability alone does not guarantee faithfulness.** Paraphrases should also be distinguished from standard Bible translations.

**We confuse familiarity with superiority**

Christians often love the translation they've read, heard, and memorized for years. That is understandable. But familiarity does not prove that one version is uniquely faithful or that others are untrustworthy. **Personal preference is not the same as biblical authority**.

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**We expect one translation to do everything equally well**
A translation especially useful for detailed study may not be the easiest for a child or new English reader. Different translations make different decisions about vocabulary, sentence structure, and how explicitly to express meaning. **A trustworthy primary translation can be complemented by other faithful translations.**

**We mistake differences in wording for differences in doctrine**
When reliable translations render a passage differently, it does not automatically mean one is corrupt. Translators sometimes make different judgments about how best to express the same underlying meaning. **Comparison should encourage careful study, not suspicion.**

# ENGAGE

**Step 1: Choose a trustworthy translation.**
Look for a Bible translated responsibly from the biblical languages by qualified translators who seek to communicate Scripture faithfully. Consider its translation philosophy and the accountability of its translation process.

**Step 2: Match the translation to the reader and purpose.**
Consider age, reading ability, familiarity with church language, and whether the goal is devotional reading, careful study, memorization, or public use.

**Step 3: Use one primary translation consistently.**
Consistency helps with reading, memorization, and recognizing connections throughout Scripture. A shared translation can also benefit congregational teaching and reading.

**Step 4: Compare translations wisely.**
When translations differ, examine the context and consider why translators may have chosen different wording. Comparing versions can illuminate interpretation, but it does not replace careful study.

**Step 5: Don't let the search for the "perfect" translation keep you from reading the Bible you already have.**
The value of Scripture is not merely in possessing it but in understanding, believing, and obeying it.

**Step 6: Show charity toward others.**
Faithful Christians may prefer different translations for thoughtful reasons. We should not make personal translation preferences a test of orthodoxy or Christian fellowship.

**Step 7: Let Scripture accomplish its purpose.**
The goal is not to own a Bible, defend a Bible, or compare Bibles, but to know God through His Word and be equipped to live faithfully.

**MEMORIZE** **2 Timothy 3:16 (CSB)** "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness."

***Remember...*** *No English translation perfectly captures every nuance of the original languages, but several faithfully communicate God's Word. Choose a trustworthy Bible that you can understand, use it consistently, and compare translations thoughtfully when questions arise. Above all, remember that God's Word was given not merely to be possessed or debated, but to be read, believed, and obeyed.*

**CHOOSING A PRIMARY TRANSLATION** *Recommended for regular reading, study, and church use*

**ESV (English Standard Version):** Emphasizes close correspondence to the original wording while maintaining readable, dignified English. Well suited for preaching, study, and memorization.

**CSB (Christian Standard Bible):** Balances accuracy and readability, communicating biblical meaning in clear contemporary English. Well suited for personal reading, teaching, and public ministry.

**Other trustworthy choices**

**KJV:** Historically influential and beloved for its literary beauty, though its older English can present challenges for modern readers.

**NKJV:** Preserves much of the KJV's familiar style while updating its language. Follows the traditional Greek textual tradition.

**NASB:** Closely reflects original-language wording and structure. Particularly useful for careful study.

**NIV:** Emphasizes clear, natural English while maintaining faithfulness to the biblical message.

**Additional translations and resources worth knowing**

**NLT:** A genuine translation emphasizing natural, accessible English. Especially helpful for newer readers and supplementary comparison.

**NET Bible:** Particularly valuable for its extensive translators' notes explaining textual and translation decisions.

**LSB:** A highly literal revision of the NASB 1995, emphasizing consistency in translating original-language terms. Useful for detailed study.

**The Living Bible:** A paraphrase of an English Bible, rather than a direct translation from the original languages. Useful for devotional reading, but not ideal as a primary study Bible.

**Amplified Bible:** Expands wording with explanatory alternatives and nuances. May stimulate further study, but its expansions should not all be treated as the meaning intended in a particular passage.

**My recommendation:** For someone choosing a new primary Bible, the ESV and CSB are excellent starting points. Both are trustworthy, readable, and well suited for regular use. But Christians who already read and understand another faithful translation need not replace it simply for the sake of changing version

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