

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

May 3, 2016

I read somewhere that 97% of the world has *heard* of Coca-Cola. 74% of the world has *seen* a can of Coca-Cola. 51% of the world has *tasted* a Coca-Cola . . . and Coca-Cola has been around only since 1886. The sidebar concluded that “If God had given the task of world evangelization to the Coca-Cola Company, it would probably be done by now.”



That sidebar was tongue-in-cheek, of course, but it does give one cause for pause, does it not? What might happen if the approximately one-third of humanity that *claims* to follow Jesus actually *did*? *What might happen?*

Some very interesting research sponsored by the Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago has given us some new insight into how secular and nominally Christian people become transformed into fully-devoted, world-changing followers of Jesus Christ, and that insight has a tiny connection with Coca-Cola.



I suspect that most of us have had a “Coke float,” and what you need to make one is Coke and ice cream, usually vanilla. The Willow Creek folk noted that “If your local ice cream parlor could sell only one flavor, it would sell vanilla. This isn’t just because vanilla ice cream is the most popular flavor, although that is true. It’s because vanilla ice cream is *hugely* popular; in fact, it’s twice as popular as the second favorite flavor, which is chocolate. In turn, chocolate is twice as popular as any other ice cream flavor available. So your ice cream parlor would choose vanilla. Hands down. No contest.

“Church pastors have an equally compelling option. If they could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice would be equally clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives.

“Reflection on Scripture is the spiritual equivalent of vanilla ice cream because its influence on spiritual growth far exceeds the potential impact of other catalysts. . . . When we consider the most significant spiritual catalysts across the entire continuum, the Bible’s influence transcends all the other catalysts, much like vanilla ice cream’s popularity dwarfs all other flavors. Hands down. No contest. **When it comes to spiritual growth, nothing beats the Bible.**”¹



As each of us considers how to consolidate and develop the learning, change, and transformation that God began in us during our *40-Day Journey* during Lent, I want to review a few general points about Bible study to encourage you to take your Bible study “to the next level” as we move toward the “slower” pace of summer.

¹ Greg Hawkins & Cally Parkinson, *MOVE: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), p. 167.

As I'm sure you know, for most of sacred history, people have had very limited access to God's written Word, and even if they had access to it, they weren't able to read it, either because it wasn't available in their language or because they simply didn't know how to read. You and I are incredibly fortunate to have access not only to literacy, and not only to the Bible in our language, but also in literally dozens of English translations.

I have more than twenty translations and versions of the Bible in my office, and I think I have more than that on my iPhone! There are so many translations, in fact, that it's often quite confusing to try to settle on one, so here's a quick review with some recommendations



You may know that there is a continuum of approaches to Bible translation, the ends of which are called “formal equivalence” and “dynamic equivalence.” **Formal equivalence** attempts to represent the words of the original text as accurately as possible in more or less the same order as they appear in the original. While this approach is very helpful for serious study, it sometimes results in translations that are difficult to read, because the syntax of different languages is different, and word order therefore means different things in different languages.

Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, attempts to represent the thought the original text intended to convey as accurately as possible in the syntax of the target language. The focus of dynamic equivalence is readability and comprehension, and that's often very helpful, but it sometimes results in translations that are farther from the source language.

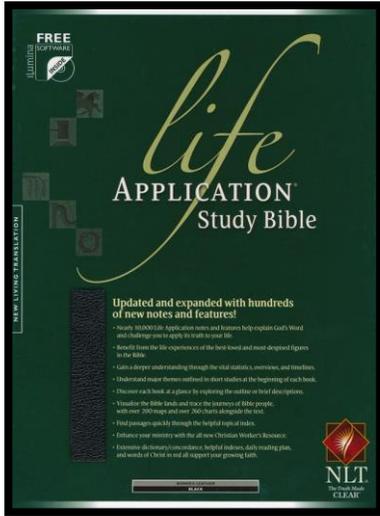
“Balanced” translations attempt to strike a balance between these poles, doing their best to stay close to the source text while also being idiomatic in the target language. And of course, various degrees of interpretation are required for any translation between languages at all.

I've used translations of each of these types rather extensively over the years. My favorite on the formal equivalence end is the *English Standard Version* (ESV). On the dynamic equivalence end, my favorite is the *New Living Translation* (NLT). For the balanced approach, my favorite is the *New International Version* (NIV). While I use all three regularly for study, what you'll generally hear me using in worship is the NIV (please see the chart at the end of this *Laptop*).²

All three translations can be found in hardback, paperback, leather, and various digital editions. And all three can also be found in “study Bible” format. While study Bibles include many resources for study that can really make your reading “come alive,” they're also significantly larger and heavier than just the Bible itself. And there's the additional hazard that many study Bibles are written to promote a particular theological agenda or viewpoint, so all of their notes and helps will be slanted in that direction.³

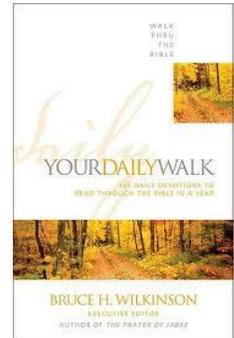
² What I look for in a “worship Bible” is a version that has a fairly familiar sound and cadence and that is also fairly easy to understand. The King James Version, beautiful as it is, is essentially a “foreign language” to most people today, and unfortunately conveys the impression that the Bible is both magical and unintelligible. Thus using the KJV in worship tends to discourage Bible study rather than increasing it.

³ The *ESV Study Bible*, for example, while truly excellent, promotes reformed or Calvinistic theology. The *Scofield Study Bible* promotes dispensational premillennialism, etc,



Happily, the most “agenda-free” study Bible of which I’m aware is also the most popular one. It’s called *The Life Application Study Bible*, and those notes can be found “wrapped around” both the NIV and the NLT.

Another aid to study is Bruce Wilkinson’s *Your Daily Walk*, published by *Walk Thru the Bible* and available at Amazon.com and similar places.⁴ This study guide has some of the best overview materials I’ve ever seen that help to get the “big picture” of what’s going on in the text.



If you have a computer, wonderful software is available that can take your Bible study to yet another level. While there are a number of options available, I’ve used *WORDsearch* for years, and it is very powerful.

LifeWay has actually purchased *WORDsearch*, so there’s a sense in which it is a “Baptist” product. You can find it at www.wordsearchbible.com. There are both free and more extensive paid versions.

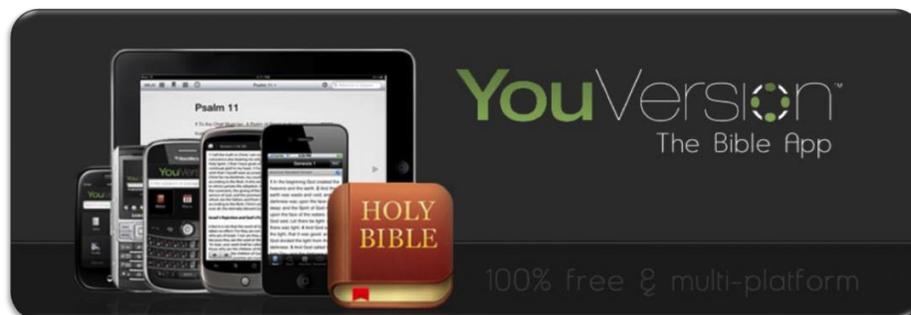


If you have a smart phone, one of the best Bible apps is *YouVersion*, with many versions of the Bible available. And one of the most unusual digital offerings is called *GloBible*. Available for smartphones, iPads, Macs and PCs, *GloBible* offers multimedia content linked to nearly every verse in the Bible. It’s a lot of fun.

Listed on the next page are some other websites that are worth checking out as you do your Bible study. *Happy reading!!!*



Dave



⁴ Here’s the link: <http://www.amazon.com/Your-Daily-Walk-Thru-Bible/dp/0310536510>

www.biblos.com
<http://globible.com/>
<http://www.biblegateway.com/>
<http://about.esvbible.org/resources/reading/>
<http://www.biblica.com/bibles/daily-reading/> NIV
<http://www.newlivingtranslation.com/04exploringchristianity/readingplan.asp>

<p>“Word-for-Word” (not always as easy to read)</p>	<p>Intends to find middle-ground between “Word-for-Word” and “Thought-for-Thought”</p>	<p>“Thought-for-Thought” (not always as close to the original text)</p>
<p>FORMAL EQUIVALENCE</p>	<p>BALANCED</p>	<p>DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE</p>
<p><i>English Standard Version</i> (ESV)</p> 	<p><i>New International Version</i> (NIV)</p> 	<p><i>New Living Translation</i> (NLT)</p> 

