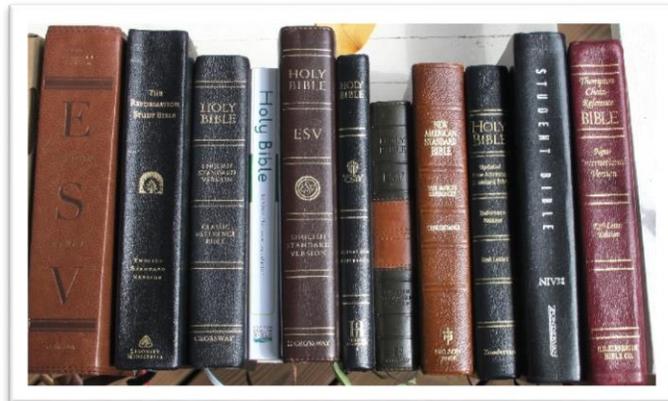


Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

June 27, 2017

We in the English-speaking West are extraordinarily blessed when it comes to having God's Word available to us in a form that we can understand. There are many, many versions and translations available to us, and research indicates that reading the Bible thoughtfully is absolutely essential to spiritual growth . . . but we don't read it all that much.



A recent survey by LifeWay Research found that Americans tend to view the Bible positively, with 52% saying it is a good source for morals. More than a third say it is helpful today (37%), true (36%) or life-changing (35%). And far fewer say it is outdated (14%), bigoted (8%) or harmful (7%).

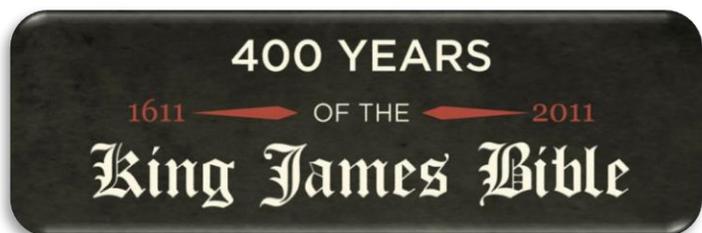
At the same time, while 20% of Americans have read the entire Bible at least once, just over half (53%) have read relatively little of it, and ten percent haven't read it at all. So why don't people read the Bible?

According to this survey, we don't prioritize reading the Bible (27%). We say we don't have time to read it (15%). We think we have read it "enough already" (13%). We don't read it because we disagree with it (10%), because we don't like to read books (9%), because we don't see how it relates to us (9%), or we don't have a Bible in the first place (6%).

Because we learn what we live, the Bible has been central to my journey as far back as I can remember, largely due to my Mom's influence. While my Dad took his faith and his Bible reading seriously, it was Mom who required Dan and me to participate in intensive Bible training and memorization from childhood through middle school. We spent hours every week in that pursuit.

I wasn't entirely grateful for this exposure at the time, but because both of my parents obviously regarded Bible study as essential and central to family and personal life, and because I learned my way around in the biblical text early on, I have regarded the Bible as a friend and companion as far back as I can remember. (Thanks, Mom.)

I've quit counting how many times I've read the Bible from start to finish. I've done it every year for probably forty years, but my relationship with the text has changed somewhat over time.



All that childhood scripture memory was in the King James Version, so much of that beautiful text is deep within my soul. My very first leather Bible was a KJV, and it is on the shelf in my office even at this moment (nearly all the Bibles I am about to mention are on that same shelf).

I still remember the emotional crisis at some point in my teen years when I finally decided that it might be possible that something besides the King James could actually be the Word of God.

Once that bridge was crossed, though, the field on the other side was/is broad and extensive. I think my first foray beyond KJV was to the *Amplified Bible*—good for study, but not so good for reading. Then there was the *Living Bible*—good for reading, but not so good for study.

For much of college, I used the *New English Bible* (NEB), but finally gave it up because of the liberties its liberal translators took with the text. I also used the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), which is to this day considered one of the very best word-for-word translations in English, but it is not very good for reading, since Greek and Hebrew syntax are significantly different from that of modern English.

During my days at Southwestern Seminary in the late 70's, the *New International Version* was brand-new, and my Hebrew professor, Dr. Larry Walker, was one of the chief translators of that version. Unlike the NEB, whose translators “stood over” the text, it was very clear that Dr. Walker and his colleagues “stood under” the text, and I was so impressed by his spirit and scholarship that I've used the NIV (in every edition) continually since those days.

When Anna graduated from high school nearly twenty years ago, a friend gave her a copy of the *New Living Translation New Testament*, and I enjoyed reading that so much that I have kept reading it (both 1996 and 2007) ever since. The NLT is extremely readable and I am still very fond of it; but since it is a thought-for-thought translation rather than a word-for-word translation, it's not particularly useful for careful study.

The *English Standard Version* also made its debut in 2007, and I've worked with it, but not extensively. The translators of the ESV did indeed “stand under” the text, but they also worked from a very clearly Reformed (essentially Presbyterian) theology, which makes it, in my opinion, unsuitable for general use among Baptists. The ESV is, however, extremely popular in Reformed circles.

Since 2011, I've used the latest update to the NIV for nearly everything, and I've now used the NIV for so long that it is largely replacing the KJV in my memory storage areas. At the same time, I've begun to be a little less satisfied with some of the changes that came to the NIV in 2011 (although Dr. Walker is still on the Central Committee for Translation).

Back in 2005, Holman Bible Publishers (the oldest Bible publisher in the nation, and now an imprint of LifeWay, the Southern Baptist press in Nashville) began publishing the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), which has been the version printed in all SBC literature since that time . . . until this year.

For various reasons, I was not interested in the HCSB; but earlier this year, the HCSB was updated to what is now known as the *Christian Standard Bible* (CSB), still published by Holman. The change from HCSB to CSB is as significant as the change from KJV to NKJV and from the RSV to the NRSV, and so when the CSB appeared on my “Bible Radar” not long ago, I began to pay attention.

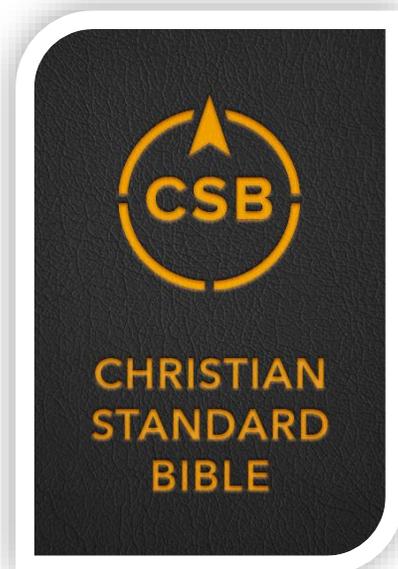
LifeWay was kind enough to send me a desk copy, and I've been reading it now for a couple of weeks. I'm impressed so far. The text is familiar, similar to and sometimes identical to the NIV, but different enough to “sparkle” and surprise. It's better than I thought it would be.



Every translation team thinks theirs is the best (of course), and the CSB team calls what they've done "optimal equivalence." By this they mean that they (along with the NIV and others) have tried to balance faithfulness to the original languages with readability in modern English.

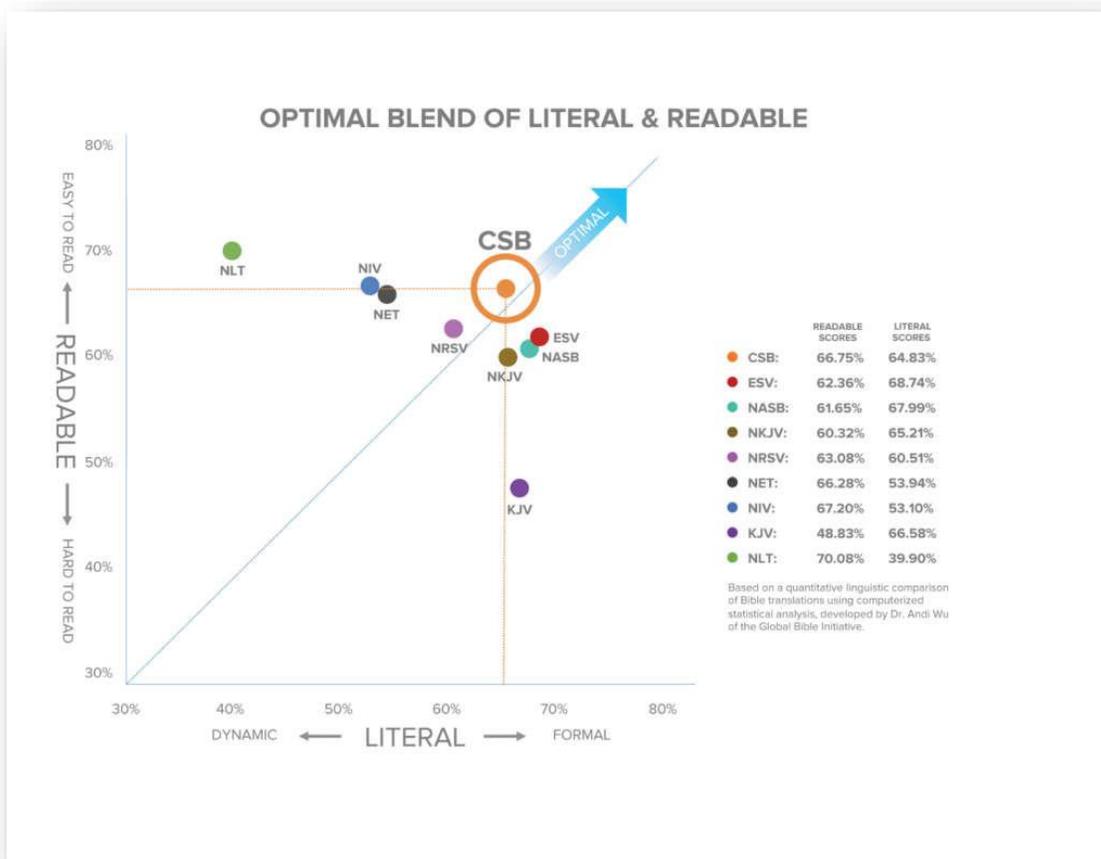
I have been especially interested in their report of extensive quantitative analysis comparing the CSB with eight other popular English translations.¹ Unsurprisingly, I suppose, the CSB is demonstrated by this research to be the "optimal" translation of the major English translations in use today. The chart below presents those results.

All of this meandering brings me to the point of recommending that you consider the CSB as a candidate for becoming one of the English Bibles you read, study and memorize. It's worth a look. You can let me know what you think.



Standing Under the Word,

Dave



¹ This report is attached, if you want to read it.