

Why Journey Christian Church is Choosing to Use the English Standard Version as the Primary Version for Preaching and Teaching

by Pastor Steve Matson

This paper is designed to explain why we are making the switch to the English Standard Version. In this paper you will find Mark Driscoll quoted frequently. His church, Mars Hill Church (Seattle, Washington) is among a number of churches that are making this change. His quotes are from the church's website – www.marshillchurch.org. John Piper is also quoted. The church that he pastors has transitioned to the ESV, and he provides us with his insights for this change.

A FUNDAMENTAL REASON

Fundamentally, we believe that the bible is God's word and that he speaks through it.

II Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

II Peter 1:19-20 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit

If this is true, then we want to have the most accurate translation possible so that we can hear God most accurately.

PROCESS FROM REVELATION TO APPLICATION

To understand the place of translations, it helps to understand the process that leads from revelation to application. The process basically looks like this: God --> Revelation/Inspiration --> Transmission --> Translation --> Interpretation --> Application --> Your Life

1 – “**Revelation** is the miraculous event whereby God revealed Himself and His Truth to someone and inspired them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to write down what He had to say—perfectly. This original copy is called the autograph.” (Mark Driscoll)

2 – “**Transmission** occurred when the autograph was carefully copied by trained scribes so that other copies could be made available for people to read. While these handwritten copies have the occasional minor error (e.g., spelling or punctuation), they were accepted as accurate and authoritative by God’s people (e.g., Deuteronomy 17:18 cf. 1 Kings 2:3; Ezra 7:14; Nehemiah 8:8). For example, the apostles, who were the senior leaders in the early church, taught from copies of the books of the Bible (Acts 17:2; 18:8), and the early church tested all teachings against the existing scrolls (Acts 17:11). Furthermore, Jesus Himself taught from copies of the

books, not the autograph, and treated them as authoritative (e.g., Matthew 12:3–5; 21:16, 42; Luke 4:16–21; 10:26). In conclusion, God’s people have always relied on manuscripts, and these writings have proven to be accurate and trustworthy. Jesus’ own perfect example assures us of their trustworthiness. Tragically, opponents of Scripture have attacked its trustworthiness by falsely stating that our current English translations are built upon poorly transmitted copies. However, the bibliographical test of Scripture flatly refutes this false argument. The bibliographical test seeks to determine the historicity of an ancient text by analyzing the quantity and quality of copied manuscripts, as well as how far removed they are from the time of the originals. The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature. There are more than five thousand Greek manuscripts, about eight thousand Latin manuscripts, and another one thousand manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, etc.). As the following chart illustrates, both the number of transmitted manuscripts we possess of Scripture and their proximity in date to the autographs are astounding and unparalleled in the canon of Western literature.

AUTHOR	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY	TIME SPAN	NUMBER OF COPIES	ACCURACY*
Homer	ca.850 BC			643	95%
Herodotus	ca. 450 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,350	8	Not
Euripides	ca. 440 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,500 years	9	enough
Thucydides	ca. 420 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	8	copies
Plato	ca. 380 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	7	to
Aristotle	ca. 350 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,400 years	5	reconstruct
Caesar	ca. 60 BC	ca. AD 900	About 950 years	10	original
Catullus	ca. 50 BC	ca. AD 1500	About 1,600 years	3	
Livy	ca. 10 BC	-----	-----	20	
Tacitus	ca. AD 100	ca. AD 1100	About 1,000 years		
New Test.	ca. AD 60	ca. AD 130	About 100 years	About 14,000	

**Taken directly from Ken Boa’s I’m Glad You Asked, page 78*

Possibly the oldest manuscript is a scrap of papyrus (p52) containing John 18:31–33 and 37–38, dating from AD 125–130, no more than forty years after John’s gospel was likely written. Bible scholar and papyrologist Carsten Peter Thiede even claims that he has dated a fragment of Matthew to about AD 60. By comparing the ancient manuscripts, we find that the vast majority of variations are minor elements of spelling, grammar, and style, or accidental omissions or duplications of words or phrases. Only about four hundred (less than one page of an English translation) have any significant bearing on the meaning of a passage, and most are footnoted in modern English translations. Overall, 97 to 99 percent of the New Testament can be

reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt, and no Christian doctrine is founded solely or even primarily on textually disputed passages. Moreover, the Scripture quoted in the works of the early Christian writers (mostly AD 95–150) are so extensive that virtually the entire New Testament can be reconstructed, except for eleven verses, mostly from 2 and 3 John. Critics of the accuracy of the Bible routinely claim that it is in fact a series of fables and legends that have developed over hundreds of years because there are not enough copies of ancient manuscripts to alleviate their skepticism. However, a simple shepherd boy dealt a death blow to their criticisms in 1947. He wandered into a cave in the Middle East and discovered large pottery jars filled with leather scrolls that had been wrapped in linen cloth. Amazingly, the ancient copies of the books of the Bible were in good condition despite their age and the harsh climate because they had been well sealed for nearly nineteen hundred years. What are now known as The Dead Sea Scrolls are made up of some forty thousand inscribed ancient fragments. From these fragments, more than five hundred books have been reconstructed, including some Old Testament books such as a complete copy of Isaiah. Simply, if someone seeks to eliminate the trustworthiness of the New Testament, then to be consistent they would also have to dismiss virtually the entire canon of Western literature and pull everything from Homer to Plato to Aristotle off of bookstore shelves and out of classroom discussions. The transmission process of Scripture is, by God’s providential grace, without peer.” (Mark Driscoll)

3 – “**Translation** occurs in service to people who want to read the books of the Bible but are not familiar with the original language in which they were written (Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic). Teams of language theory scholars carefully undertake the painstaking process of translating the original languages into the languages of other peoples. Today, the Bible has been carefully translated into nearly three thousand languages. While the thought of a translation may concern some people, the fact remains that most of the canon of Western literature has also been translated because we do not use their original languages either. The first translation of the English Bible was initiated by John Wycliffe and completed by John Purvey in AD 1388.” (Mark Driscoll)

4 – “**Interpretation** occurs when someone reads the Bible in a language they can understand and determines the meaning of the verses they read by the enablement of God the Holy Spirit who also inspired the writing of Scripture. Each text of the Bible has only one true interpretation and so we must be careful to read the truth out of the Bible (exegesis) rather than reading our beliefs and desires into it (eisegesis) A common question arises at this point: is the Bible to be interpreted literally? The answer is yes. There are plain-literal and figurative-literal portions of the Bible. We begin by assuming the plain-literal meaning and if that seems absurd then we go with a figurative-literal interpretation. A figurative-literal Scripture teaches a truth in a poetic way and often uses the words “like” or “as” to tip us off that figurative language is being used. But even when figurative language is being used, it is still communicating a literal truth. For example, in the poetic Song of Songs, the man says to his beloved, “your eyes are doves” (1:15). In this figurative language, the man is communicating a very literal truth. He likens her eyes to doves, which come in pairs, and when their tail-feathers flutter they appear like eyelashes. Doves have just one faithful mate throughout their lives, possibly indicating that her eyes are focused on him alone. The dove is also a symbol of peace and purity, alluding to her virginity.” (Mark Driscoll)

5 – “**Application** is the result of taking what we learn from the principles in the Bible and making changes in our thoughts and actions by God the Holy Spirit’s empowering grace so that our life is congruent with the Bible. There are a seemingly infinite number of applications for a text of the Bible. For example, when the Bible says that we should love people, the applications for that principle are endless.” (Mark Driscoll)

“In this five-step process (Revelation/Inspiration --> Transmission --> Translation --> Interpretation --> Application), we see how God speaks to us and cares deeply about our lives. We also see how the chasm between God and us is graciously filled by God’s revelation, which is more accurate and true than our human speculation (e.g., religion and philosophy). While the first step (Revelation/Inspiration of the autographa) is the only one that is guaranteed to be perfect, the other steps are indeed accurate. We must be increasingly careful as we move through the steps, however, because the opportunity for error increases at each step. Lastly, the third step of translation is incredibly important because that is what we depend on for the learning and living of our Christian faith. On this point, noted theologian J. I. Packer said, ‘I find myself suspecting very strongly that my work on the translation of the ESV Bible was the most important thing that I have done for the Kingdom, and that the product of our labors is perhaps the biggest milestone in Bible translation in the past fifty years or more.’” (Mark Driscoll)

TYPES OF TRANSLATIONS

There are various types of translations. To understand our choice of the English Standard Version for preaching, it is helpful to understand what these types are. There are basically 3 types of translations of the bible - word-for-word, thought-for-thought, and paraphrases

1 – **Word-for-Word** - “Word-for-word translations (also known as literal translations) make a special effort to carefully interpret each word from their original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic into English. Word-for-word translations emphasize God, the divine author of Scripture, over the human reader of Scripture. The result is a striving for the precision of what the Bible says, much like one would expect in other important communications, such as legal documents, marriage vows, or contracts. Word-for-word translations are generally a high school reading level. Word-for-word translations tend to be the best for studying because of their accuracy, though they sometimes lose the poetic nuances of the original languages. Probably the best word-for-word translations are the English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New King James Version (NKJV). The King James Version (KJV) is also a word-for-word translation, but because of its use of old English, it is very difficult for some people to read. The NASB was widely regarded as the most scholarly word-for-word translation until the arrival of the ESV. It did not become widely popular, however, because of its tight copyright and sometimes stiff translation of poetry that lost some of the beauty of the original writings. Thankfully, the ESV has preserved the degree of accuracy present in the NASB while also doing a better job of translating the poetic parts of Scripture in a more fluid manner. The philosophy of word-for-word translation guided virtually every English Bible translation until the middle of the twentieth century. At that time, thought-for-thought translation became popular.” (Mark Driscoll)

2 – **Thought-for-Thought** - “Thought-for-thought translations (also known as dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence) attempt to convey the full nuance of each passage by interpreting the Scripture’s entire meaning and not just the individual words. Thought-for-thought translations may include words that were not included in the original text in an effort to give the same meaning that the reader of the original languages would have had. The best and most widely read thought-for-thought English translation is the New International Version (NIV). Other thought-for-thought translations include Today’s New International Version (TNIV), New Living Translation (NLT), Contemporary English Version (CEV), and the Good News Bible (GNB). The benefit of thought-for-thought translations in general, and the NIV, my favorite thought-for-thought translation, in particular, is that they are easy to understand and make the Bible accessible to a wide number of people. Going one step further than thought-for-thought translations are paraphrases, which combine both Scripture and interpretive commentary into the translation method.” (Mark Driscoll)

At Journey we are not saying that there is no place for Thought-for-Thought translations. But we see incredible value in knowing what the original Greek and Hebrew says and then, dealing with interpretation, and coming to application. An example of this came up at Journey as we recently went through James on Sunday mornings. In the NIV, James 1:26 says,

[Jam 1:26](#) If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

In the ESV the translation is,

[James 1:26](#) If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Notice that the ESV says “heart” and the NIV says “himself. The word “heart” is in the original Greek and does give us insight into the level and type of deception. It makes a difference in our studying to know the words of the text. At other times the original may be a bit confusing, and a “Thought-for-Thought” translation can provide a clearer understanding, but this is done at the expense of us studying and weighing optional interpretations. We believe that this studying and weighing is a valuable part of approaching scripture in preaching and teaching.

3 – **Paraphrase** - “Paraphrased translations pay even less attention to specific word meanings than thought-for-thought translations in an attempt to capture the poetic or narrative essence of a passage. For this reason, many paraphrased translations do not even have verses divisions in them. Examples of paraphrased translations include The Message (TM), The Living Bible (TLB), and The Amplified Bible (TAB). (Mark Driscoll)

Below is what John Piper has to say about a rationale for using the English Standard Version.

1. A more literal translation respects the original author's way of writing. It is a way of honoring the inspired writers.

2. Translators are fallible and they may mislead the English reader if they use unnecessary paraphrases to bring out one possible meaning and conceal others.
3. A more literal translation gives preachers more confidence that they can preach what the English text says with authority that it reflects what the original Greek or Hebrew text says.
4. A more literal translation which preserves ambiguities that are really there in the original keeps open the possibility of new insight by future Bible readers.

I do not claim that the ESV is without its own level of "paraphrasing." Some will always be necessary. And there will always be disagreements about how much is necessary. I am simply arguing that the ESV is the best balance available of readability and literalness. I hope that it becomes the standard for the church." (John Piper from "Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV", which can be found on www.desiringgod.org)

TRANSLATIONS

CEV – Contemporary English Version
ESV – English Standard Version
GNB – Good News Bible
HCSB – Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV – King James Version
NASB – New American Standard Bible
NCV – New Century Version
NIV – New International Version
NLT – New Living Translation
NKJV – New King James Version
NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
NTME – New Testament in Modern English (Phillips)
REB – Revised English Bible
RSV – Revised Standard Version
TAB – The Amplified Bible
TLB – The Living Bible
TM – The Message
TNIV – Today's New International Version
TSB – The Street Bible

Word-for-Word Translations

ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, RSV

Thought-for-Thought Translations

NCV, NIV, TNIV, NLT, CEV, GNB, REB

Paraphrases

NTME, TAB, TLB, TM, TSB

BOTTOM LINE – We want to hear from God.

We believe that a Word-for-Word translation like the English Standard Version is best for preaching and teaching at Journey Christian Church because it presents well the words of scripture and not just the thoughts. Words have meaning and we desire to struggle with that meaning, and we desire to seek meaning and application of the scripture. There are other good Word-for-Word translations (such as the NASB and KJV), and we have chosen the ESV as a very accurate and readable translation in this type of translation. You may choose to continue to use other translations, and there are certainly reasons for using a variety of translations. It is simply our hope that we at Journey have a clear understanding of the differences in translations, that we would value highly the revelation of our God, and that we would receive that wonderful revelation of God into our lives.

TRANSLATORS AND ENDORSERS OF THE ESV (The following information is taken from Mark Driscoll's paper.)

Some of the scholars who helped to translate the ESV include:

- Dr. Clinton E. Arnold — Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Talbot School of Theology
- Dr. Craig L. Blomberg — Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary
- Dr. Darrell L. Bock — Research Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary
- Dr. Wayne A. Grudem — Professor and Chairman, Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
- Dr. Paul R. House — Professor of Old Testament Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry
- Dr. Andreas J. Köstenberger — Associate Professor of New Testament, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Dr. Leon Morris — Former Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia
- Dr. Raymond Ortlund, Jr. — Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Augusta, Georgia
- Dr. J. I. Packer — ESV General Editor, Board of Governors and Professor of Theology Regent College, Vancouver, BC
- Dr. Vern Sheridan Poythress — Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Westminster Theological Seminary
- Dr. Leland Ryken — Professor of English, Wheaton College
- Dr. Gordon Wenham — Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, The College of St. Paul and St. Mary, Cheltenham, England

Some of the people who have endorsed the ESV include:

- Jerry Bridges — Author
- Dr. Bryan Chapell — President, Covenant Theological Seminary
- Roy Christians — National Director, Campus Crusade for Christ Russia
- Edmund P. Clowney — Resident Theologian, Trinity Presbyterian Church
- Dr. Jack Cottrell — Professor of Theology, Cincinnati Bible Seminary
- Nancy Leigh DeMoss — Author, Host of Revive Our Hearts radio
- Ajith Fernando — National Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka; Bible Teacher and Author

Susan Hunt — Author and Teacher
Dr. Kenneth S. Kantzer — Dean Emeritus, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
John Lindell — Senior Pastor, James River Assembly, Ozark, Missouri
Max Lucado — Minister, Oak Hills Church of Christ
Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer — Pastor, Moody Church, Chicago, Illinois
Mrs. Susan Schaeffer Macaulay — L'Abri Fellowship
James MacDonald — Senior Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel, Rolling Meadows, Illinois
Carolyn Mahaney — Author and Speaker, Covenant Life Church
Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. — President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Dr. Grant R. Osborne — Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois
Dorothy Kelley Patterson — Author and Professor
Dr. Paige Patterson — President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Dr. John Piper — Preaching Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Dr. Philip Graham Ryken — Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner — Professor of New Testament, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Dr. R. C. Sproul — Chairman, Ligonier Ministries
Dr. Joseph M. Stowell — Former President, Moody Bible Institute
Joni Eareckson Tada — Founder and President, Joni and Friends
Dr. John F. Walvoord — Chancellor, Dallas Theological Seminary
Dr. Ravi Zacharias — Author and Speaker