CHOOSING A BIBLE TRANSLATION

When the documents that make up the Bible were first written, they captured exactly what God wanted to say in the languages that ordinary people spoke. There was no friction between preserving the form or conveying the meaning of the text.

The original audience experienced a unique combination of both ingredients—represented by the red dot in the top right corner of the diagram.

But Bible readers today can’t experience this combination any more. The Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic tests still show us the form and structure of the original but most of us can’t understand what they mean. As English speakers, we need translations, and we’ve privileged to have access to a wide variety of options that fall into three broad groups.

Tending to the upper left corner of the diagram, the first group—represented by the green oval and known to scholars as formal equivalent translations—places a particularly high priority on reproducing the form and structure of the original. This approach allows modern Bible readers to perceive many of the important details and subtleties in the text. Ease of understanding varies from verse to verse and from book to book, but all verses and all books achieve a high standard of transparency to the original languages.

Tending to the lower right corner of the diagram, the second group—represented by the brown oval and known to scholars as functional equivalent translations—places a particularly high priority on reproducing the meaning of the original. This approach helps modern Bible readers understand the impact and implications of God’s message in words that they can relate to and grasp quickly. Transparency to the form and structure of the original documents varies from verse to verse and from book to book, but all verses and all books achieve ease of understanding.

Tending to the upper right corner of the diagram, the third group of translations—represented by the white circle—seeks to recover the priorities of the original documents themselves, allowing readers to perceive the form of the original and the meaning of the original at the same time. Striving for the optimum blend of authenticity and accessibility in every verse, these translations allow modern-day readers to experience—as far as possible—what it would have felt like to be part of the Bible’s original audience.

TRANSLATION
NIV
New International Version

NA
New American Bible

HCSB
Holman Christian Standard Bible

NASB
New American Standard Bible

KJV
King James Version

NKJV
New King James Version

NRSV
New Revised Standard Version

ESV
English Standard Version

NIRV
New International Reader’s Version

NLT
New Living Translation

CEV
Contemporary English Version

NCV
New Century Version

The Message
A paraphrase

AMP
Amplified Bible

TRANSLATION PHILOSOPHY

DISTINCTIVES

Retrieving—as closely as possible—the reading experience of the original audience

"Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." Created directly from the best-attested manuscripts, the NIV is the world’s bestselling modern English Bible translation. It seeks to provide a high level of transparency to the form and structure of the original documents and comprehensibility of the original meaning in every verse.

Seeking to combine transparency to the source documents with a good level of comprehensibility in modern English

"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not envious; it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." Published under the direction of Pope Pius XII, this Catholic version of the Bible represents more than six decades of effort by the Catholic Biblical Association of America. All revisions include the Deuterocanonical Apocryphal books.

Blending transparency to the original documents with accessibility for the contemporary audience

"Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, it is not boastful; it is not conceited; it is not rude; it is not irritable; it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury." Prokredit under the sponsorship of the Eastern Rite Catholic Community, the HCSB seeks to combine transparency to the original documents with comprehensibility in modern English.

An uncompromising effort to maximize transparency to the original documents

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous, love does not brag and is not arrogant, love does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, it is not easily provoked, it does not keep account of wrongs." An update of the American Standard Version, which was published in 1901. The NASB seeks the highest possible level of transparency to the original documents that can be achieved while still retaining comprehensibility in English.

Building transparency to the form and structure of the Bible documents that were available at the time with elegant 17th-century English

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not, chariteth not evil, is not puffed up, looketh not on itself, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." A landmark in the history of English Literature. Published in 1611, the translation’s purpose was “to deliver God’s book into God’s people in a tongue which they can understand.”

Prioritizing transparency to the same source documents as the original KJV but with updated English

"Love suffereth long and is kind, love doth not envy, love doth not boast, is not puffed up, doth not seek its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." A modern update of the King James Version. The purpose was to refresh and modernize the original KJV without losing its distinctive flavor.

Maintaining the formal equivalence philosophy of the RSV while seeking to reflect contemporary English usage

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;" An ecclesiastical revision of the Revised Standard Version (1951) with a new focus on ease of understanding.

Building on the foundation of the RSV, prioritizing transparency to the original documents

"Love is patient and kind, love does not envy or boast; it does not act improperly or rude; it does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;" An Evangelical update of the Revised Standard Version (1951). The ESV prioritizes transparency to the form and structure of the original documents.

Working from the NIV as a base to maximize accessibility for younger readers

"Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not want what belongs to others. It does not brag. It is not proud. It is not rude. It does not look out for its own interests. It does not easily become angry. It does not keep track of other people’s wrongs;" A thorough, scholarly simplification of the NIV, the NIrV was specifically designed to help young children and new readers understand the Bible for themselves and create an essential stepping-stone from a children’s Bible to an adult Bible.

Building on the legacy of the original Living Bible, while prioritizing accessibility for a broad audience

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged;" Created by a team of Bible scholars and English stylists seeking—whenever possible—to preserve the language of the original, the NIrV is a completely new and thoroughly modern equivalent of the original documents executed in natural, contemporary English.

Prioritizing accessibility for a broad audience

"Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. Love isn’t self-seeking or quick-tempered. It doesn’t count wrongs that others do;" Written at an elementary-school reading level, the NIRV is readable and understandable for the modern reader. It features a large number of footnotes that explain cultural and technical terms.

Prioritizing accessibility for a broad audience

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful, it does not brag, and it is not rude. Love is not self-seeking, and it does not get upset with others. Love does not count wrongs that have been done;" Based on the ICB (International Children’s Bible), the NIrV is a simple, readable translation that places the priority on communicating the original meaning as much as possible.

A contemporary rendering of the message of the Bible in everyday idioms

"Love never gives up. Love does not make rude remarks for others than for self. Love does not want what it doesn’t have. Love doesn’t think it’s mean; doesn’t have a Godly heart, doesn’t live too much on itself; it’s always ‘first, doesn’t fly off the handle, doesn’t keep score of the sins of others;" The Message uses informal modern English to help contemporary Bible readers feel the vitality and directness with which God’s word originally communicated.

A broadly formal equivalent translation with explanatory alternate readings and amplifications

"Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love does not want what it doesn’t have. Love doesn’t think it’s mean; doesn’t have a Godly heart, doesn’t live too much on itself; it’s always ‘first, doesn’t fly off the handle, doesn’t keep score of the sins of others;" A popular resource that was created to add color to the Bible reading experience through explanatory alternate readings and amplifications.

The original documents

reflecting the original reading experience

effectively conveys the meaning of the original

effectively conveys the form of the original