

# Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 2, Learning to Read Bible Versions Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 2, Learning to Read Bible Versions, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture focuses on understanding English Bible translations for the purpose of knowing God's will. He emphasizes the importance of being informed about different versions, categorizing them as **formally equivalent (word-for-word)** and **functionally equivalent (thought-for-thought)**. The lecture provides a brief history of Bible translation into English, highlighting key versions like the King James Version and subsequent revisions. **Meadors stresses the need to compare translations, especially formal and functional ones, to gain a deeper understanding of scripture** and avoid misinterpretations that can arise from relying on a single version. He advises readers to **study translation philosophies outlined in Bible introductions** and to be wary of paraphrases and study Bibles that can introduce interpretive biases.

**2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Knowing the Will of God).**



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### **3. Briefing Document: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 2, Learning to Read Bible Versions**

#### **Briefing Document: Understanding Bible Translations**

##### **Overview:**

This lecture by Dr. Gary Meadors focuses on the importance of understanding English Bible translations for the purpose of knowing God's will and developing a transformed mind. Meadors emphasizes that since most people rely on translated Bibles, it is crucial to be aware of the different translation philosophies and how they can influence interpretation. He outlines the historical development of English Bibles and introduces the two primary translation procedures: formal equivalence and functional equivalence. The lecture encourages listeners to become informed and discerning readers of the Bible by comparing different versions and understanding their underlying principles.

##### **Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:**

#### **1. The Importance of Understanding Bible Versions:**

- Our worldview and value system are based on Scripture, making it essential to learn to read the Bible effectively.
- The proliferation of numerous English Bible translations in the United States can be confusing for readers who don't understand the differences in translation approaches.
- "If you're going to use the Bible as your guide for your worldview and values, you've got to have a Bible in translation because you're not working. Most of you would not be working in Greek and Hebrew. You're working on your translated Bibles."
- It is crucial to know what kind of translation one is using to avoid naive interpretations and to better understand the nuances of Scripture.

#### **2. A Brief History of the Bible in the Western World (Focus on English Translations):**

- The Old Testament was originally in Hebrew (with some Aramaic), and the New Testament in Greek.
- The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the Dead Sea Scrolls are important historical texts.

- The Masoretic Text became the standardized Hebrew Bible in the 9th century CE.
- Jerome's Latin Vulgate was a major Bible in the Roman Church.
- The Greek New Testament was first printed in its entirety by Erasmus in 1516, which later became the base for the King James Version (KJV).
- The Roman Church initially resisted translating the Bible into English.
- Key figures in early English Bible translations include John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, who faced significant opposition and even death for their efforts.
- Significant early English Bibles preceding the KJV include Coverdale, the Great Bible, Geneva Bible, and the Bishop's Bible. The Geneva Bible was particularly influential.
- The King James Version (1611) held significant sway in the English-speaking world for centuries.
- Later formal equivalent translations built upon the KJV tradition include the English Revised Version (ERV), American Standard Version (ASV) (notable for paragraph formatting), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the English Standard Version (ESV). The Legacy Bible is a recent revision of the NASB.
- "The English Revised Version was dependent on the King James Bible. It didn't give a new translation, but it revised the King James Bible to new knowledge that we might have had. That one goes down to the Revised Standard Version, and it also goes down to the New American Standard Bible..."
- The ESV is based on the 1971 RSV.

### 3. Defining English Bible Translation Procedures:

- The primary purpose of Bible translations is to put the Bible into the language of the people so they can understand it.
- **Formal Equivalence (Word-for-Word):** Aims to be as literal as possible to the original Greek and Hebrew text.
- Examples include KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, and ESV.
- Bruce Metzger's dictum: "as literal as possible, as free as necessary." This acknowledges that a completely wooden, literal translation is often unreadable

and doesn't convey the intended meaning in English due to differences in language structure (e.g., word order).

- **Functional Equivalence (Thought-for-Thought/Dynamic):** Focuses on conveying the meaning and intent of the original text in a way that is easily understandable by modern readers.
- More interpretive in nature.
- Examples include the New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT).
- Functional translations aim to be explanatory to help the reader grasp the passage's message.
- Modern readers are often at a sixth-grade reading level, influencing the language used in functional translations (compared to the KJV's higher reading level).

#### 4. Recommendations for Choosing and Using Bible Versions:

- **Use a Paragraph Bible:** Paragraph formatting helps to identify units of thought and context, unlike verse-by-verse formats.
- **Choose a Continuum of Bibles:** Utilize a range of translations from formal to functional equivalence for comprehensive study. Meadors suggests KJV/NRSV (formal) and NIV/NLT (functional).
- **Be Cautious with Study Bibles:** While helpful as commentary, they can impose a pre-determined structure and interpretation on the text. Use them as a supplement, not a primary source.
- **Avoid Expanded Translations (Paraphrases):** Examples like "The Message" are often personal renditions or sermons and may not accurately reflect the original text. Phillips is mentioned as a more controlled paraphrase, but still not ideal for in-depth study.
- **Be a Student of the Bible:** Engage actively with the text and its translations, being alert and not passive.
- **Read Introductions:** Bible introductions often explicitly state the translation philosophy and methodology used, providing crucial context for understanding the version. The introductions to the NRSV and NLT are particularly recommended.

- **Compare Translations:** Comparing formal and functional equivalents helps to tease out meaning and identify potential interpretive nuances. Differences in translation can highlight areas requiring further study.

## 5. Illustrations of Translation Differences and Their Implications:

- **John 3:16 ("only begotten son"):**KJV: "only begotten son"
- NRSV, NLT: "only son"
- NIV (84 & 2011): "one and only son"
- Meadors explains that the Greek word "monogenes" means "one and only" or "unique," and the functional translations help clarify this meaning, avoiding potential misunderstandings related to the concept of "begotten."
- **Acts 26:28 (Agrippa's response to Paul):**KJV: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (Often interpreted as Agrippa being near conversion)
- NRSV: "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?"
- NIV (84 & 2011): "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" / "Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?"
- Meadors argues that the functional translations capture a more sarcastic tone in the Greek, suggesting Agrippa was dismissive rather than on the verge of conversion.
- **Galatians 5:4 (justification by law):**KJV: "Christ has become of no effect to you, whoever of you who are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Can be misinterpreted regarding loss of salvation)
- NRSV: "You who want to be justified by law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."
- NIV (84 & 2011), NLT: use phrasing like "trying to be justified by the law" or "trying to make yourself right with God by keeping the law."
- Meadors points out that the functional translations better reflect the Greek grammar, indicating an attempt or desire to be justified by law, rather than a statement of actual justification.
- **1 Thessalonians 1:3 (work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope):**KJV, RSV: "work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope" (RSV uses "steadfastness" for patience)

- NIV (84 & 2011): "work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope."
- NLT: "your faithful work, your loving deeds, and your continual anticipation of the return of the Lord Jesus."
- Meadors highlights how the NIV expands the translation to explain the genitive case in Greek, showing that faith produces work, love prompts labor, and hope inspires endurance. The NLT offers a slightly different rendering.
- **1 Timothy 3:11 (qualifications for deacons/deaconesses):**KJV: "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderous..." (Interprets "gunaikas" as "wives")
- NRSV: "Women, likewise, must be serious..." (Interprets "gunaikas" as "women")
- NIV 84: "their wives"
- NIV 2011: "the women"
- NLT: "their wives"
- Meadors notes that the Greek word "gune" can mean both "woman" and "wife," and translations differ in their interpretation, highlighting the presence of interpretive decisions even in seemingly straightforward passages.

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Meadors' lecture underscores the vital role of understanding Bible translations in the pursuit of knowing God's will and cultivating a transformed mind. By familiarizing themselves with the history of English Bibles and the principles of formal and functional equivalence, readers can approach Scripture with greater discernment and avoid simplistic or misinformed interpretations. Comparing different translations and engaging with resources that explain translation choices are crucial steps in becoming a more informed and effective student of the Bible. The lecture encourages active engagement and a spirit of inquiry to deepen one's understanding of God's Word through the various available translations.

## 4. Study Guide: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 2, Learning to Read Bible Versions

### Knowing God's Will: Understanding Bible Versions

#### Quiz

1. According to the lecture, why is understanding Bible versions important for Christians in a culture like the United States?
2. Briefly describe the difference between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint in terms of the Old Testament.
3. Why was Erasmus' Greek New Testament significant for the King James Version? What limitation did Erasmus face in compiling his text?
4. Explain the historical context behind the resistance to translating the Bible into English, as highlighted by the examples of Wycliffe and Tyndale.
5. What was a significant innovation introduced by the American Standard Version (ASV) in the presentation of the biblical text? Why is this important for understanding Scripture?
6. Define formal equivalence in Bible translation. List two examples of Bible versions that are considered primarily formal.
7. Explain Bruce Metzger's dictum regarding formal equivalent translations: "as literal as possible, as free as necessary." What does this imply about the translation process?
8. Define functional equivalence (also known as dynamic equivalence) in Bible translation. How does its approach differ from formal equivalence? Provide an example of a Bible version that leans towards functional equivalence.
9. Why does the lecturer recommend using a "continuum" of Bible versions (from formal to functional) for Bible study?
10. What caution does the lecturer give regarding the use of Study Bibles and expanded translations like "The Message"?

#### Answer Key

1. In the United States, there is a proliferation of Bible translations driven by publishers, leading to confusion about translation methodologies and source

texts. Since Christians base their worldview and values on Scripture, understanding these differences is crucial for accurately interpreting and applying God's Word in their lives.

2. The Masoretic Text is the standardized Hebrew Bible that was codified around the 9th century CE. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (including some Aramaic portions) produced in the 3rd to 2nd century BCE, making it an older witness to the Old Testament text.
3. Erasmus' Greek New Testament, printed in 1516, became the base Greek text used by the translators of the King James Version in 1611. However, Erasmus had access to only a limited number of relatively late manuscripts, some of which were fragmentary, and he reportedly even used the Latin Vulgate in some instances to fill gaps.
4. The Roman Church in the past resisted translating the Bible into English, preferring to keep it in the Latin Vulgate, which they considered more holy. Wycliffe and Tyndale sought to make the Bible accessible to the common people in their own language, facing persecution, including the posthumous burning of Wycliffe's remains and Tyndale's execution.
5. A significant innovation of the American Standard Version (ASV) was the presentation of the entire Bible in paragraph form rather than verse by verse. This is important because it helps readers to see the larger units of thought and the flow of ideas within the biblical text, rather than treating each verse in isolation.
6. Formal equivalence is a translation philosophy that aims to stay as close as possible to the exact wording and grammatical structure of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Examples of primarily formal equivalent Bible versions include the King James Version (KJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB/Legacy Standard Bible), and the Revised Standard Version (RSV/New Revised Standard Version - NRSV).
7. Metzger's dictum, "as literal as possible, as free as necessary," acknowledges that a completely woodenly literal translation is often unreadable and does not effectively communicate the meaning in English. Translators must sometimes make adjustments to grammar and word order to ensure clarity and naturalness in the target language while remaining as faithful as possible to the original text.
8. Functional equivalence (or dynamic equivalence) is a translation philosophy that prioritizes conveying the meaning and intent of the original text in a way that is



easily understandable to modern readers, even if it requires more significant departures from the original wording and grammatical structure. The New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT) are examples of Bible versions that lean towards functional equivalence.

9. Using a continuum of Bible versions, ranging from more formal to more functional, allows for a richer and more nuanced understanding of the biblical text. Comparing how different translations render the same passage can help to tease out various shades of meaning, understand potential interpretive choices made by translators, and provide a more well-rounded perspective when studying Scripture.
10. The lecturer cautions against relying heavily on Study Bibles as a primary text because their outlines and notes represent someone else's interpretation of the biblical books, potentially limiting the reader's own engagement with the text. He also advises avoiding expanded translations like "The Message" for serious study, as they are often more akin to paraphrases or personal renditions rather than rigorous translations from the original languages.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the historical development of English Bible translations, highlighting the key figures and the major motivations behind producing new versions. How has the history of translation influenced the variety of Bibles available today?
2. Compare and contrast the translation philosophies of formal equivalence and functional equivalence. What are the strengths and potential weaknesses of each approach when it comes to understanding and applying biblical texts?
3. Explain the practical implications of using different types of Bible translations (formal vs. functional) for personal Bible study and for teaching or preaching. Provide specific examples of how translation choices can affect the understanding of particular verses or passages.
4. Critically evaluate the lecturer's recommendations for choosing and using English Bible versions. Do you agree with his emphasis on using a continuum of translations and his cautions regarding Study Bibles and paraphrases? Why or why not?
5. Based on the lecture, discuss the importance of understanding the translation theory behind a particular Bible version. How can reading the introduction to a Bible inform a reader's interpretation and use of that translation?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Formal Equivalence:** A translation philosophy that aims to stay as close as possible to the exact wording and grammatical structure of the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Often described as "word-for-word" but more accurately "as literal as possible."
- **Functional Equivalence (Dynamic Equivalence):** A translation philosophy that prioritizes conveying the meaning and intent of the original text in a way that is easily understandable to modern readers, even if it requires more significant departures from the original wording and grammatical structure. Often described as "thought-for-thought."
- **Masoretic Text:** The authoritative Hebrew text of the Old Testament, standardized primarily between the 7th and 10th centuries CE by Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes. It is the primary text used for most modern Old Testament translations.
- **Septuagint (LXX):** The earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally said to have been produced in Alexandria, Egypt, between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. It was widely used in the time of Jesus and is quoted in the New Testament.
- **Vulgate:** The Latin translation of the entire Bible that became the standard Bible of the Western Church for over a thousand years. It was largely the work of Jerome in the late 4th century CE.
- **Manuscript:** A handwritten copy of a text, especially of a literary work or of part of the Bible before the invention of printing. The New Testament, in particular, has a vast number of ancient Greek manuscripts.
- **Textual Criticism:** The scholarly discipline that seeks to reconstruct the original wording of ancient texts, such as the Bible, by comparing and analyzing the variations found in different manuscripts.
- **Paraphrase:** A restatement of a text or passage in one's own words, often aiming for clarity or contemporary expression, but not necessarily a direct translation from the original languages.
- **Continuum of Translations:** The idea of using a range of Bible translations that represent different points on the spectrum between formal and functional equivalence to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the original text.

## 5. FAQs on Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 2, Learning to Read Bible Versions, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions About Bible Versions

**1. Why is it important to understand different English Bible versions?** Our worldview and value system are largely based on Scripture. Since most people rely on English translations rather than the original Greek and Hebrew, it's crucial to understand how different translation philosophies can present the same original text in varying ways. These differences can impact our interpretation and application of the Bible in our lives and decision-making.

**2. What are the two main approaches to English Bible translation, and how do they differ?** The two primary translation approaches are formal equivalence and functional equivalence. Formal equivalence (sometimes called word-for-word) aims to stay as close as possible to the original wording and grammatical structures, while still being readable. Functional equivalence (sometimes called thought-for-thought or dynamic equivalence) prioritizes conveying the meaning and intent of the original text in a way that is easily understandable for modern readers, even if it means using different words or phrasing.

**3. Can you provide examples of Bible versions that fall under each of these translation approaches?** Formal equivalent translations include the King James Version (KJV), English Revised Version (ERV), American Standard Version (ASV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), Legacy Standard Bible, Revised Standard Version (RSV), English Standard Version (ESV), and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Functional equivalent translations include the New International Version (NIV), New Living Translation (NLT), and Jerusalem Bible.

**4. What is the significance of reading the introductions to different Bible translations?** The introductions to Bible translations typically explain the translation philosophy adopted by the translators. This is vital for understanding why certain translation choices were made and what the intended approach of that particular version is (formal, functional, or somewhere in between). Reading the introduction provides context and helps readers interpret the translation more accurately.

**5. Why is it recommended to use a "continuum" of Bible versions for study?** Using a range of Bible versions, spanning from more formal to more functional, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the original text. Comparing how different translations render a passage can highlight nuances in meaning, clarify potentially ambiguous phrases, and prevent relying too heavily on a single interpretation influenced by one specific translation philosophy.

**6. What are the potential pitfalls of relying solely on Study Bibles or expanded paraphrases like "The Message"?** Study Bibles often include outlines and notes that represent a particular interpretive viewpoint, which can inadvertently shape a reader's understanding and potentially limit their own independent study of the text. Expanded paraphrases, while sometimes making the text more accessible, can deviate significantly from the original wording and may reflect the translator's personal interpretations or even sermons rather than a direct rendering of Scripture.

**7. How can comparing formal and functional equivalent translations enhance Bible study, even without knowing Greek or Hebrew?** By comparing a more literal (formal) translation with a more meaning-based (functional) translation, readers can gain insights into the potential range of meaning in the original text. Differences in wording can prompt further investigation into the underlying Greek or Hebrew concepts, leading to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the passage. For example, a functional translation might expand on a phrase to clarify its implied meaning, which can then be compared to the more concise rendering in a formal translation.

**8. What are some practical recommendations for choosing and using English Bible versions for personal growth and understanding God's will?** It is recommended to have at least one paragraph Bible (where verses are grouped into paragraphs to reflect the flow of thought). Choose a "control Bible" that is a formal equivalent translation. Supplement this with one or two functional equivalent translations. Read the introductions to understand the translation philosophies. Be cautious with relying solely on Study Bibles or expanded paraphrases for in-depth study. Actively compare different versions of the same passage to tease out meaning and be a thoughtful and engaged student of the Bible.