

Bible Translation

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Text: Luke 4:43; John 18:37; John 1:1

NOTES:

(Danny Foster gave us a report on the state of Bible translation generally, in Africa, and in Peru. He quoted statistics and showed slides that were detailed. These notes are a general overview of his talk. Please watch the video rebroadcast of his message to get the details.)

A. A passion for Bible translation.

1. Danny F. said he was passionate about everyone having the word of God in their own language because our own language is our love language and the Bible is God's love letter to us.
2. **Danny F.:** *"I start my day in this book and end my day in this book. If I don't, I feel like I haven't taken a breath."*

B. Languages slice up the world differently.

1. E.g. in Swahili the word for "hand" and "arm" is the same, as is the word for "fingers" and "toes" the latter distinguished "hand fingers" and "foot fingers."
2. Language slices us out of our world—identifies me as separate from you.
3. Languages create "linguistic relativity" i.e. different ways of understanding reality.
4. Language translators must figure out ways to navigate these differences. **Danny F.:** *"If humans don't conceptualize hand, palm and fingers the same way, what does it look like for looser abstract concepts of love, hope, forgiveness, truth, etc.?"*
5. There are 7,099 different languages spoken on earth, i.e. 7,099 different ways of understanding the physical and metaphysical world.
6. Bible translators are on the lookout for concepts / words familiar to the people group (perhaps through their own practices) that would explain unfamiliar Bible concepts. E.g. in a remote African project, the missionary observed a ritual that embodied repentance and forgiveness. He could then use the word that named that practice in his Bible translation of "forgiveness" and "repentance."
7. Reassuring thoughts from a Bible translation professor:
 - a. We worry about what gets lost in translation but don't celebrate what's gained.
 - b. We have over 7,000 languages because just one can't contain God.

C. Some Bible translation current realities:

1. Though the world has 7,099 languages, not all need a Bible translation because;
 - a. Some languages are dying—not many people speak them today.
 - b. People are adequate in another language.
2. For the first time in history the scales are tipped i.e. there are more Bible translation projects underway than need to be started.

D. Bible translation in Africa:

1. Unique challenges:
 - a. Africa is huge with many language groups.
 - b. Education and literacy levels are the lowest in the world and the Bible is not an easy read.
 - c. Lack of many words / concepts in Africa common in the Bible (e.g. harps, tambourines, grapes, winepress, nautical terms).
 - d. Sometimes there are too many words (e.g. many African word for "demon," "spirit," "tribe.")
2. Unique assets:
 - a. Some Bible customs are practiced and familiar to Africans, e.g. Kinsmen Redeemer from Ruth.
 - b. Hebrew is similar to many African languages, e.g. the poetry structures are alike.
 - c. God as creator is never questioned.
 - d. Bible books are published as soon as translation is complete.

E. Bible translation project in Peru (which CLA has helped to fund):

1. Today the project is in Isaiah 20 (progressing consecutively through the OT books).
2. The project which was scheduled to be done by 2022 will now probably be finished by 2020.

F. Conclusion and challenge:

1. A new Bible translation project is begun every 4.5 days.
2. We are on track to being the generation that ends Bible poverty, but demands all hands-on-deck.
3. God's truth to every person is the heart of Jesus Christ, for in Christ we have the revelation of reality: Luke 4:43; John 18:37; John 1:1.

DISCUSSION:

1. Do people in your group know more than one language? Discuss the challenge of learning a new language. What is your experience of different languages revealing different ways of viewing the physical and metaphysical world.
2. Imagine you were with people who spoke an unfamiliar language which wasn't written down. What steps would it take to go from that to translating the Bible? Why is Bible translation such a long and laborious task?
3. If there are multilingual people in your group, have them compare a familiar verse (e.g. John 3:16) in English with the other language(s) they know.

PRAYER:

Dear Father, we thank You for the Bible—the Old Testament history, law and prophets, the Word which became flesh and was captured in visible symbols from which we interpret, through the help of the Holy Spirit, who You are. Please help us catch the vision of everyone on earth having access to the Bible and thus ending Bible poverty on earth. Amen.