

## **Studying the Bible—for non-Native Speakers**

Pentecost, which we observed on May 24, 2015, reminds us that from its very beginnings, the church was meant to be, would become, and is, in our present day—global. There are congregations and gatherings of Christians worshiping as churches—large and small, formal and informal—throughout the world. God hears prayers as well as songs of praise in every language—no translator needed.

We might think of studying the Bible as similar to learning a different language. I'm not thinking here about the original languages of the various books of the Bible. Of course, it is helpful to know and study Scripture in its original languages as many pastors do. I do recall a worship service when I sat next to a Bible translator who was following along in his Greek New Testament as the Gospel lesson was being read in English from the lectern. Most of us, however, have callings other than to become linguists and we are grateful for the multiple English translations of the Bible that are available to read and to study.

What I am thinking about is that for each of us at some point studying the Bible was like stepping into a new and very different world. It is much like learning a new language. We were also once “non-native speakers,” newcomers to this collection of books we call the Bible. Think about those who first heard the words of Jesus and were drawn to him. Like them, we have some sense that in following him, life would not, and will not, be the same. Because of faith in Christ, we are in a different place and speak in different terms.

We might remember studying the Bible as children—which was much like learning a new vocabulary. We heard specific stories, learned about people of the Old and New Testaments, and probably had to memorize a passage or two. As adults, we approach the study of the Bible with a greater interest in knowing not just the facts, names and addresses, but in discovering the meaning that it contains for us. What do the multiple books of the Bible have to say to us— both for the difficult and the joyous times in our lives, for the many decisions we must make, and for distinguishing what is important from that which isn't, what is worthy of our worship and what is not.

“Fluency” in understanding the Bible then becomes the ability to read or to hear passages from Scripture, to understand where they fit within the overall narrative, to appreciate what these passages meant to the original hearers so that we might better understand how they speak to us in our present time and circumstances. The Bible is the recorded narrative, or story, of God revealing himself to us, and who we are in light of who God is. In studying the Bible, we come to understand how we are part of that story and to learn how we may help others to know that this is their story, too.

***COME GROW WITH US!***