

STAFF DEVOTIONS

DEVOTION 1 BOOK OF BOOKS

"I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings and will not be ashamed." Psalm 119:46

During the early spring of 1524, a young priest slipped away from London and, without the king's leave, made his way to the European continent. He was never to see his homeland again, and for the next eleven years his life was an elaborate hide-and-seek as he was pursued, at one time, by four government agents. His crime and his life's ambition were one and the same: to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek and present it, printed and bound, so that even the boy who drove the plough could understand God's Word.

By the constitutions of Oxford of 1408, it was illegal—on pain of death—to read the scriptures in English without a bishop's license. To reinforce this, in April 1519, one woman and six men were burned to death at Coventry for teaching their children the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed in English.

William Tyndale was born in Gloucestershire, England, studied at Oxford, and later Cambridge, and spent two years teaching the children of Sir John and Lady Walsh in their small manor house at Little Sodbury. Here he began to translate the New Testament, and by the time he arrived on the continent it was complete. The first ever printed New Testaments in English were smuggled back into England early in 1526. Though the bishops burned the Bibles and often their owners, the Word of God became an unstoppable force across the land—England had the Bible in the vernacular at last.

(Excerpted with permission from *Travel with William Tyndale* [Day One Publications] by Brian H. Edwards. See answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v2/n4/tyndale-and-english-bible.)

What drove William Tyndale to risk life and limb so that his fellow Englishmen could read the Bible in their own language? He knew the Bible was the "Book of books." No other book—or person—held the keys to eternal life. No other book laid out the prescription for godly living. No other book contained the true history of the universe and explained why the world is the way it is. No other book was God's written revelation to mankind.

Sadly, however, the English-speakers of Tyndale's time lacked even a rudimentary knowledge of what the Scriptures actually said. Investigations by a reforming bishop in Tyndale's hometown

of Gloucestershire revealed the following about the ignorance of the ministers in the area.

Of the unsatisfactory clergy in 1551, nine did not know how many commandments there were, 33 did not know where they appeared in the Bible (the gospel of St Matthew was a favourite guess) and 168 could not repeat them. Concerning the [Apostles'] Creed, 10 could not repeat it and 216 were unable to prove it; a large number of these said that they were perfectly satisfied that it was right because the king and Mother Church said so. Most extraordinary of all, perhaps, were the results of the Lord's Prayer part of the examination: 39 did not know where it appeared in the Bible, 34 did not know who was its author, and 10 actually proved unable to recite it. (David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* [Yale University Press, 1994], p. 78.)

Lest we come down too harshly on these clergymen of 400 years ago, let's ask ourselves how well we know the Book of books. Are we ardent students of the Word of God, mining jewels from its depths, or do we have a more casual relationship with the life-giving book, merely admiring the sparkle from afar? Consider this: how much are you willing to risk to bring the Word of God to the children in your care?

Today, as we study the uniqueness of this God-breathed collection of books, let's meditate on the words of the psalmist who realized that the Bible was set apart from all other books—it is the Word of God.

Forever, O LORD,
Your word is settled in heaven.
Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
You established the earth, and it abides.
They continue this day according to Your ordinances,
For all are Your servants.
Unless Your law had been my delight,
I would then have perished in my affliction.
I will never forget Your precepts,
For by them You have given me life.
I am Yours, save me;
For I have sought Your precepts.
The wicked wait for me to destroy me,
But I will consider Your testimonies.
I have seen the consummation of all perfection,
But Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

Psalm 119:89–96

DEVOTION 2

INCREDIBLE IMPACT

“Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.” Psalm 119:165

Biographer David Daniell writes of the incredible impact William Tyndale’s translation of the Bible into English has had even until today.

William Tyndale gave us our English Bible. The sages assembled by King James to prepare the Authorised Version of 1611, so often praised for unlikely corporate inspiration, took over Tyndale’s work. Nine-tenths of the Authorised Version’s New Testament is Tyndale’s. The same is true of the first half of the Old Testament, which is as far as he was able to get before he was executed outside Brussels in 1536. (David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* [Yale University Press, 1994], p. 1.)

William Tyndale was a most remarkable scholar and linguist, whose eight languages included skill in Greek and Hebrew far above the ordinary for an Englishman of the time—indeed, Hebrew was virtually unknown in England. His unsurpassed ability was to work as a translator with the sounds and rhythms as well as the senses of English, to create unforgettable words, phrases, paragraphs and chapters, and to do so in a way that, again unusually for the time, is still, even today, direct and living: newspaper headlines still quote Tyndale, though unknowingly, and he has reached more people than even Shakespeare. (Daniell, p. 2.)

Some of the more common Tyndalian phrases that continue today include *let there be light, my brother’s keeper, in the land [of] Nod, men of renown, the imagination of man’s heart, every man’s hand against him, old and well stricken in age, turned into a pillar of salt, the fat of the land, unstable as water.*

In doing all this, he made a language for England. As used to be said with pride, the English rapidly became

a People of the Book. To try to understand the literature, philosophy, art, politics and society of the centuries from the sixteenth to the early twentieth without knowledge of the Bible is to be crippled. (Daniell, p. 3.)

Today, as we teach the children about the Bible’s incredible impact on people of every tongue and nation, let’s look for ways to show them how living and powerful the Word of God is (Hebrews 4:12) and how it connects to real life. Rather than a dusty book that has no relevance to today, the Bible’s true account of history provides us with the foundation for understanding our world today. Rocks, fossils, people groups—the origin of it all is explained by the Bible. As we understand that we can trust it to tell us the truth about earthly things, we are able to understand and trust its teachings about heavenly things (John 3:12).

With David, let’s meditate on the impact Scripture has in our lives.

Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently.
Oh, that my ways were directed
To keep Your statutes!
Then I would not be ashamed,
When I look into all Your commandments.
I will praise You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

Psalm 119:1–8

DEVOTION 3

BEDROCK BASE

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” John 17:17

By the time of William Tyndale (c.1494–1536), the Reformation was in full swing. The reformers were concerned that the church had fallen away from the authority on which it was built. In place of the Word of God, the words of men had been substituted.

To say that the Church in which Tyndale was brought up was corrupt and disgraceful is not a statement of blind prejudice but one of sad historical fact. The Church of Rome by the time of Tyndale was, and had been for centuries, rotten from the head downwards. Certainly this was admitted by some of the most influential men of the day, but they were voices crying in the wilderness and were themselves caught in the very trap of which they bitterly complained. Unlike the evangelical reformers, they had not effective answer to the sickness. (Brian H. Edwards, *God's Outlaw* [England: Evangelical Press, 1998], p. 36.)

The effective answer by the evangelical reformers was their encouragement to recognize and submit to the absolute authority of Scripture. Their battle cry was “*Sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone.”

Tyndale, in addition to translating the New Testament from the original Greek into English, and parts of the Old Testament from Hebrew into English, wrote several books challenging church leaders to examine their teachings. In each case, he used Scripture alone to point out their error and remind them of the truth. The most important and significant of these was *Obedience of a Christian Man*. Throughout this powerful book, Tyndale made it clear that Scripture was the ultimate authority.

Let God's word try every man's doctrine and whomsoever God's word proveth unclean let him be taken for a leper. One scripture will help to declare another. And the circumstances, that is to say, the places that go before and after, will give light unto the middle

text. And the open and manifest scriptures will ever improve the false and wrong exposition of the darker sentences. (*Works by Tyndale*, edited by Henry Walter for the Parker Society [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], p. 250.)

What about you? Is Scripture your bedrock base in every area it teaches? Or are you easily swayed by the opinions of men? Does Scripture reign supreme in forming the foundation of your thinking in all areas? Or do you delight in airing your own opinions?

As we focus on the bedrock base of God's Word today, let's be sure that we're pointing kids toward the Bible and not toward ourselves. God has magnified His Word above everything (Psalm 138:2), and who are we to usurp that position?

David understood the unique position occupied by the Word of God. Let's meditate with him on the importance of the Bible.

Oh, how I love Your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies;

For they are ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers,

For Your testimonies are my meditation.

I understand more than the ancients,

Because I keep Your precepts.

I have restrained my feet from every evil way,

That I may keep Your word.

I have not departed from Your judgments,

For You Yourself have taught me.

How sweet are Your words to my taste,

Sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Through Your precepts I get understanding;

Therefore I hate every false way.

Psalm 119:97–104

DEVOTION 4

LETTER OF LOVE

"From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:15

William Tyndale, along with the other reformers, was convinced that the Bible alone held the words of eternal life. He made this clear in his preface to the New Testament:

Give diligence dear Reder (I exhorte the) that thou come with a pure mynde and as the Scripture sayth with a syngle eye unto the wordes of health and of eternal lyfe: by the which (if we repent and beleve them) we are borne a newe created a fresshe and enjoye the frutes off the bloud of Christ.

The reformers' views on salvation, which were contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's, are summarized by the five solas.

- **Sola scriptura** (By Scripture alone)

The Bible is the supreme authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice and in every area it touches on. We learn about salvation only through the pages of the Bible.

- **Sola gratia** (Grace alone)

Salvation comes by the free grace of God. Man cannot—and need not—do any work to earn God's favor. Salvation is not based in any way upon human merit.

- **Solus Christus** (Christ alone)

Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Thus an individual can go directly to God through Christ.

- **Sola fide** (Faith alone)

Faith in the Person of Christ is the instrumental means of salvation. The Roman Catholic Church taught that, while initial grace was infused at baptism, the person had to cooperate with that grace until God accepted him as righteous.

- **Soli Deo Gloria** (For God's glory alone)

Salvation is exclusively God's work, and so He alone is worthy to receive praise and thanksgiving. This sola

expresses the highest motive for all the Christian's deeds—the glory of God alone.

Only the Bible gives the complete way of salvation—from the need for it (Adam's disobedience and subsequent punishment was passed to all men because all have sinned) to the provision for it (the Last Adam came to redeem mankind from the curse of sin given in Genesis 3). Apart from the Bible, how can we determine what sin is? How can we determine that we need to be saved from it?

As we discuss the true account of salvation with the children today, let's be careful to show them that we rely on Scripture to tell us the truth about the condition we're in (Romans 3:23) and how we can be rescued from it (Ephesians 2:8–9).

We'll close this devotional by meditating on the God-breathed words of David concerning the salvation of the Lord.

Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD—

Your salvation according to Your word.

So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me,

For I trust in Your word.

And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,

For I have hoped in Your ordinances.

So shall I keep Your law continually,

Forever and ever.

And I will walk at liberty,

For I seek Your precepts.

I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings,

And will not be ashamed.

And I will delight myself in Your commandments, Which I love.

My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments,

Which I love,

And I will meditate on Your statutes.

Psalm 119:41–48

DEVOTION 5

EXCITING TO EXPLORE

“The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” Psalm 19:9–10

William Tyndale was not only a student of the original languages in which the Bible was written, but he was also a student of the message those languages conveyed. To Tyndale, the words on the pages of Scripture were not just legible black squiggles on a white background—they were the very words of God, breathed out to give us all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). He not only translated the Scriptures into the common language of the English people, he also lived them.

During his last days as a free man, before his capture and imprisonment, he stayed with Thomas Poytnz and his family.

Tyndale’s time was still well disciplined. He reserved two days in the week which he called his pasttime. On Monday he visited all the English exiles, who had been forced out of their homeland for the sake of conscience. He enquired after their welfare, encouraged them and supplied some of their needs out of his generous allowance [from the Poytnz’s]. On Saturday he wandered the town, poking in every hovel and alley to discover the poor and diseased and, wherever he found genuine cases of hardship, would supply their needs also. (Brian H. Edwards, *God’s Outlaw* [England: Evangelical Press, 1998], p. 142.)

John Foxe writes of Tyndale during his imprisonment:

Such was the power of his doctrine, and the sincerity of his life, that during the time of his imprisonment, (which endured a year and a half), it is said, he converted his keeper, the keeper’s daughter, and others of his household. Also the rest that were with Tyndale conversant in the castle, reported of him, that if he were not a good Christian man, they could not tell whom to trust. (Josiah Pratt and John Stoughton, eds., *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, vol. 5, p. 127.)

Even after his death, his archenemy Sir Thomas More could only say good things about how Tyndale lived his life. According to More, Tyndale was

... a man of right good living, studious and well learned in Scripture, and in divers places in England was very well liked and did great good with preaching. (*The Complete Works of St Thomas More*, VI, i [New Haven and London, 1969], p. 28.)

William Tyndale not only learned the Word of God, he loved it, and he lived it.

What about you? Do you love to study the Bible? Does your life exemplify the message God has given to us? Do you delight in learning more of God’s revealed truth? Although Tyndale was not perfect and he was a sinner just as you and I are, God mightily used him to bring about reformation and to call people back to His Word as their authority. We needn’t be knowledgeable in Hebrew and Greek to bring the Word of God to our students. Tyndale has given us the Bible in our language—how will we carry on his legacy?

How can a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed according to Your word.

With my whole heart I have sought You;

Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

Your word I have hidden in my heart,

That I might not sin against You.

Blessed are You, O LORD!

Teach me Your statutes.

With my lips I have declared

All the judgments of Your mouth.

I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies,

As much as in all riches.

I will meditate on Your precepts,

And contemplate Your ways.

I will delight myself in Your statutes;

I will not forget Your word.

Psalm 119:9–16