

In 2022, Make God's Word Your Priority

How many copies of the Bible do you own? I have a shelf in my home office with different translations that I use for personal study. I'll admit it's easier to access these versions online, using the Blue Letter Bible or the YouVersion app, but I still prefer to hold a physical Bible in my hand when I read.

Whether you prefer to do Bible study using your phone, computer or tablet, or with a physical copy made of paper and ink, I hope you'll make more time for God's Word in 2022. Whenever I need motivation to prioritize the Bible in my life, I think about the price that was paid so we could have the Scriptures. Consider history:

- Christians in the first century only had portions of the New Testament, written on parchment or animal skins. God's Word was read publicly in church meetings because the Scriptures were rare and many people were illiterate. Nobody had Bibles sitting on nightstands. What we call "books" didn't even appear until around A.D. 320.
- In A.D. 405, a man named Jerome finished translating the New Testament into Latin (it took him 23 years), but copies of this Latin Vulgate Bible were only circulated among church leaders. By A.D. 600, the New Testament had been translated into eight languages. But common people didn't own them.
- During the Middle Ages, monks were viewed as the guardians of the Bible and they made meticulous, hand-written copies of the Scriptures. But these were very expensive so they were kept only in churches or monasteries. In fact, priests taught that ordinary people shouldn't study the Bible for themselves. Then in 1229, a church council ruled that only priests could

own Bibles.

– Finally, John Wycliffe made the first English translation of the Bible in 1384. He risked his life when he declared: “Every Christian ought to study this book because it is the whole truth!” After Wycliffe died from a stroke in 1384, church officials declared that anyone who translated the Bible into the language of the common people was a heretic. Church leaders even exhumed Wycliffe’s body from his grave and burned it to send a strong message that they would not tolerate such “crimes” as Bible translation. The English Bible went underground for 130 years.

– Jon Hus, a Czech reformer who was inspired by Wycliffe, believed people should be allowed to read the Bible in their own language. For this he was excommunicated by the Catholic Church in 1411 and in 1415, he was burned at the stake by church leaders. They used manuscripts of Wycliffe’s Bible as kindling for the fire. Many followers of Wycliffe were martyred in similar fashion and, in some cases, their Bibles were hung around their necks as they burned.

But the spread of the gospel couldn’t be stopped. The biggest breakthrough came in 1455, when German inventor Johannes Gutenberg printed the Bible on the first moveable type printing press. This machine fueled the Renaissance in Europe, made books widely available, sparked a rise in literacy and spread Christianity far and wide.

As the gospel spread, many hostile governments tried to ban the Bible or, in some cases, burn it. This happened in the former Soviet Union under communism, as well as in China under Mao Zedong. Even today, it is illegal to own a Bible in North Korea, Maldives, Saudi Arabia and several other countries.

Yet in spite of all this hostility, the full Bible has been translated into 704 languages and the New Testament has been translated into an additional 1,551 languages. Never has the

Bible and its message of hope been more accessible.

I hope the sacrifices made by our spiritual ancestors will motivate you to cherish God's Word rather than neglect it. Don't let your Bible collect dust in 2022. Read it daily, study it carefully and apply it to your life.

We don't know for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews in the New Testament but these words from Hebrews 4:12 (NASB1995) have incredible power: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division between soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The Bible is so much more than words on a page. The words are supernatural because the Holy Spirit inspired them. God's Word has the power to cut us deeply like a surgeon's knife: it can comfort us, encourage us, heal us, warn us, convict us of sin and transform our lives as well as our culture. In this New Year, I pray you will study God's Word as if your life depends on it. {eo}

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