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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Why I Continue to Use A Good Old-Fashioned Bible

I finally figured out how to say what I’ve felt. At the risk of being misunderstood (again) let me take a crack at explaining why I will continue to use a good old-fashioned printed Bible, and why I encourage others to do so as well.

I am not saying that there is anything wrong with using a Bible app on a cell phone or a tablet. In fact, there are certain advantages:

- You have your Bible with you all the time.
- It’s free.
- You can very easily keep up with the preacher.
- You can access, at the same time and at the touch of a button, several handy study helps, such as Bible dictionaries in English and Greek, concordances, multiple translations, and maps.
- You can copy, paste, and send your references with the greatest of ease.
- It’s way cool, and everybody’s got one.

I admit that the inspired words of life have value because of what they say, not because of what they

are written on. In fact, the technology for sheets of paper sewn together and bound between two covers of a book hadn't been invented yet when the New Testament was recorded—instead, each book was handwritten separately on scrolls of parchment or vellum. We could easily argue that taking the same words off the printed page and projecting them onto the lighted screen is simply the next advancement in technology. If you have the words of the Spirit, faithfully recorded and translated, you have the power of God for salvation. And in fact, I use YouVersion on my cell phone from time to time, if I am caught without a Bible and need to look something up. As you know, I often project on PowerPoint the verses I am discussing in the sermon.

Still, I think it is important to use a real paper-and-ink Bible. At least to own one, and maybe even to use it for daily Bible reading, or to use it in worship services. I don't have a book, chapter, and verse admonition for this. It's just an opinion. Yet, it is an opinion that makes more and more sense to me, and not just because I'm some kind of old-fashioned, techno-phobic curmudgeon. Hey, I haven't read a paper in years (I use my phone). I haven't used the Yellow Pages in years (I let Siri do the work for me). I am so dependent upon my smartphone, that if I lost it, I would have to curl up into a fetal position and whimper in the corner until someone found it and returned it to me.

When I pick up a bound Bible, I am filled with a sense of reverence, awe, and permanence, that I simply do not get when I pull up an app on screen. That has nothing to do with my age, and everything to do with the nature of apps. When I click on my Bible app—surrounded there by Google Maps, iHeartRadio, MyFitnessPal, Angry Birds, and Scramble with Friends—it feels more transitory, more ordinary than I believe it should. When I decide to read God's word, I don't want to just call up a verse or swipe through the text. I want to settle down and engage with the Holy Scriptures. I want to take notes in the margin and underline important verses. I don't want to fill up a few moments of boredom in a train station or doctor's office (at least, I don't want that to be the *only* time I access God's word)—I want to purposefully contemplate and meditate on the revelation of God.

I don't want reading the Bible to have the same feelings associated with it as checking a news update, a stock quote, or taking a crack at the next level of a video game. I want to be reminded that the Bible is a document handed from God to man through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a divine love letter, containing eternal and unchangeable rules for living. When I heft a tome containing the word of God, I get the sense that it is,

living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart
(Heb. 4:12)

in a way that I just don't get, on an emotional level, when I click on an app. All the apps on my phone are quick and convenient—they are designed that way on purpose. I don't think it's a good idea to reduce my relationship with God's word to a few handy glances.

I have also found that it's very tempting to switch between apps while “studying” and not focus on the word of God. I see it happen all the time in worship services, and I find myself doing it when “reading” the Bible on my phone. I tend to get bored and have no incentive to finish reading to the end of the chapter, and instead flick over to something more exciting. A paragraph on a page, a chapter in a book, is not so easily dismissed.

A real Bible helps me be familiar with the God's message as an organic whole, rather than as a collection of snippets. Not simply to know the order of the books (a skill easily lost as apps make it less important). But to know them in their greater context and historical setting. To know that Joshua has a historical place between the Exodus and the Kings, to know that there was a whole book devoted to worship songs, to grasp that the letters of Paul are situated within the action of Acts. To be able to see in my mind's eye God's plan of salvation—completed in His mind from before the foundation of the world but revealed successively throughout the ages—the scheme of redemption,

the whole theme of the whole Bible, worked out from start to finish, from Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 22:12.

A real Bible helps me to evangelize. Let me ask: have you ever tried to conduct a personal kneecap-to-kneecap Bible study with your phone? I'm telling you, it just feels less authoritative to scroll down to the correct passage and hand over the phone, than it does to invite the prospect to turn to the appropriate page in the appropriate letter, to feel the weight of the cover, to hear the pages turn, to slide the finger down the text-on-paper, and watch God's word do its work while the person reads. I'm not saying the gospel *can't* work via a tiny lighted screen—not at all. But in my experience it works *better* when presented on the printed page. The same thing is true in a small group Bible study, in a teen class, in a worship service. I think we could all agree that the experience of watching *Return of the Jedi* would be different on a three-inch smartphone screen than in a gigantic movie theater with surround sound. For different reasons, I believe the experience of studying the Bible is different on a smartphone than in a tangible Bible.

Finally, I seem to treasure the Bible more when it's a real object than when it's an app. I don't want to sound sappy, but I love my Bible. I am familiar with the way it feels, where the colored-pencil underlines are, the position of favorite verses on the page, the cadence of the translation. I don't love an app. Maybe I do want to sound sappy. Maybe there is value in getting attached to a Bible. At least, I know some people who are way more attached to their golf clubs than their Bibles! And sure enough, they seem to spend a lot of time caring for, bragging about, and walking around with the things they treasure.

So, in conclusion, do as you like. Please don't say that "John said it was wrong to use a Bible on our phones." As for me, I'll stick with what reminds me that what I'm holding is important! —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

"Satan now is wiser than of yore,
He tempts by making rich, not by making poor." —*Alexander Pope*