



## HE OPENED TO US THE SCRIPTURES BY FRANCES SWAGGART

**Proverbs 30:5-6—“Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”**

*“I find fiction writers some of the best spiritual writers whether they are Christians or not, religious or not...”*

—EUGENE PETERSON

**ONE OF THE MOST** frequent questions we receive on *Frances & Friends* has to do with Bible translations—their accuracy, credibility, and their use by preachers in the local church.

The translation (as it is known) that seems to stir the most controversy is *The Message*, which is neither a Bible nor a translation.

Yet for more than 13 years, modern churches embracing a feel-good-about-yourself doctrine have been encouraging their congregations to trade in the Word of God for a book about the Bible that reads like a secular novel.

The reason this thought-for-thought interpretation is so popular is because many Christians know so little of the Bible that it’s hard for them to discern if what they are hearing from the pulpit is, in fact, Scripture.

That’s what makes a book like *The Message* so dangerous to the saved and to the unsaved. It may have a biblical sound, but it is not the Bible. It was written by an educated man, but it was not inspired by the Holy Spirit.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*The Message: The Bible In Contemporary Language* is one of more than 30 books written by Eugene Peterson—a retired Presbyterian minister and former professor of spiritual theology.

As a lover of storytelling, Peterson often quotes and references writers of fiction in his own books and sermons.

In 2007 at a writers symposium, Peterson gave a rare interview to Dr. Dean Nelson, the founder and director of the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene.

Nelson questioned the influence and quotations by fiction writers in Peterson’s work, including authors Wendell Berry, Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy, Wallace Stegner, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Anne Tyler, and James Joyce.

In response to Nelson’s interview question, Peterson said that as a young pastor, he experienced an “imagination conversion” while reading *Ulysses*—a famously modernist novel by James Joyce—which revealed to him a clear comparison between the ordinary individuals in his congregation and the fictional book’s main character.

“I find fiction writers some of the best spiritual writers whether they are Christians or not, religious or not, they’re probing the ordinary world of our lives,” Peterson said. “They’re great. I think pastors should read fiction a lot more than they do.”

This is concerning since fiction is defined as written stories about people and events that are not real and literature that tells stories that are imagined by the writer.

Peterson thinks so highly of imagination and fiction that he confirmed to Nelson his belief that all seminary students should spend their first two years in literature training.

This point about Peterson’s love of storytelling and fiction is important because a storyteller’s main

goal is to captivate and entertain an audience, not necessarily relay a truth to them.

It was reaction from his audience—his congregation—that led Peterson to write *The Message*. The book’s publisher, NavPress, quotes Peterson’s reason for the project:

While I was teaching a class on Galatians, I began to realize that the adults in my class weren’t feeling the vitality and directness that I sensed as I read and studied the New Testament in its original Greek .... I hoped to bring the New Testament to life for two different types of people: those who hadn’t read the Bible because it seemed too distant and irrelevant and those who had read the Bible so much that it had become ‘old hat.’

So Peterson rewrote his own version of Galatians, shared it with his congregation, and later included portions of it in another one of his other books, *Traveling Light*, which was read by a NavPress editor.

The editor liked what he read and asked Peterson if he would be interested in “translating” the entire New Testament. Peterson left his pastorate and started writing full-time.

Ladies and gentlemen, I point this out because this is how book deals are made.

Editors and publishers know what books will sell, and they know how to market them; that’s their business.

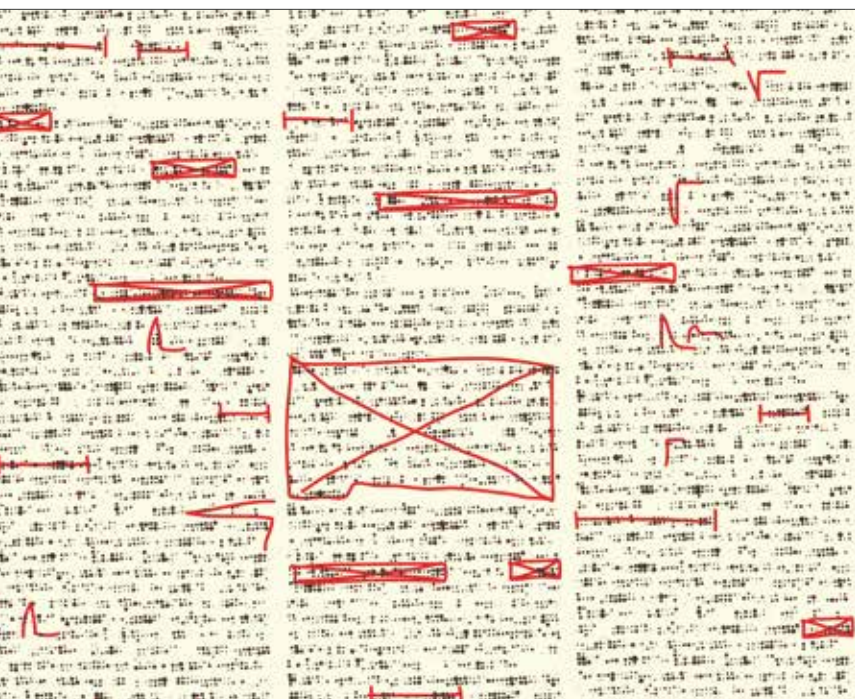
It’s the publisher who called *The Message* a “version of the Bible,” not Peterson, although he does not argue the point.

In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Peterson said, “When I’m in a congregation where somebody uses [*The Message*] in the Scripture reading, it makes me a little uneasy. I would never recommend it be used as saying, ‘Hear the Word of God from *The Message*.’ But it surprises me how many do.”

Unfortunately, with the endorsement of high-profile ministers, authors, secular and Christian rock stars, and politicians, *The Message* has been marketed and pushed onto pulpits and into the hands of pastors who are willing to compromise and into the ears of undiscerning Christians. It’s concerning that 10 million copies of this book have been sold.

As Carl Brown pointed out on *Frances & Friends*: “Professing Christians have no desire for the Word of God, and that’s a problem because if you don’t know what the Bible says, then anything goes, and that’s what we see happening in this country—there lies that vacuum because preachers are not preaching the Word of God to people, and preachers who do that are going to give a heavy account.”

*In reality, The Message includes disrespectful, New Age, occult-related, and racy street language.”*



## WORDS IN THE MESSAGE

According to its publisher, *The Message* is a “reading Bible” written in the same type of conversational language that we use to speak with friends.

It’s been stripped of “formal terms” (i.e., Lord Jesus) and verse numbers to make it read like “one of your favorite novels.”

In reality, *The Message* includes disrespectful, New Age, occult-related, and racy street language.

How can these types of words bless, encourage, and strengthen the child of God whose mind has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit?

## THE MESSAGE

Our Father in heaven,  
 Reveal who you are.  
 Set the world right;  
 Do what's best—  
 as above, so below.  
 Keep us alive with three square meals.  
 Keep us forgiven with you  
 and forgiving others.  
 Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.  
 You're in charge!  
 You can do anything you want!  
 You're ablaze in beauty!  
 Yes. Yes. Yes.

## KING JAMES VERSION

Our Father which art in heaven,  
 Hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy kingdom come.  
 Thy will be done in earth,  
 as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our debts,  
 as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from evil:  
 For Thine is the kingdom,  
 and the power, and the glory, for ever.  
 Amen.

With the cut  
 of just four  
 words—"Hallowed  
 be Thy name"—  
 Peterson removed  
 the believer's  
 acknowledgement  
 of God's holiness  
 and reverence for  
 His name. ”

The comparison of the Lord's Prayer between the King James Version of the Bible and *The Message* book should be enough to make any Christian shudder:

With the cut of just four words—"Hallowed be Thy name"—Peterson removed the believer's acknowledgement of God's holiness and reverence for His name.

With the addition of four words—"as above, so below"—Peterson replaced God's all-important will being done with a well-known occult term.

The author of *The Message* decided that the curse word *damn* should be used frequently as well as these crude and sexually explicit terms throughout his book: Scent of sex, sex orgies, slut, spreading your legs, and hell-raisers.

These are words used by secular novelists, not by someone inspired by the Spirit of the living God.

Much more could be said about this book that is believed by so many to be an actual translation of the Bible.

Again, *The Message* is not a translation of Scripture; it is just a book that has gained popularity by being endorsed by ministers of seeker-sensitive churches, who are aligned with the same type of agenda as outlined in the *Purpose-Driven Life*.

In my husband's book, *Brother Swaggart, How Can I Understand The Bible?*, he explains the meaning of true translation:

Our present society is being flooded with so-called translations that are really interpretations or thought-for-thought translations, such as the Message Bible. Actually, these types of efforts cannot even be construed as Bibles. At best they are religious books.

The only translation that can be concluded as the Word of God is a word-for-word translation, such as the King James. There are one or two other word-for-word translations; however, with these I am not familiar. But yet, there are several other things that need to be said about the King James translation.

As we have already mentioned, the King James translation, despite being edited several times, still contains a fairly liberal usage of Elizabethan English. To all King James devotees, and I am one, it must be understood that the prophets and the apostles who were used by the Spirit of God to write the sacred text did not speak Elizabethan English. As well, when Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were originally written, the Words of Christ were not in red. These particular words in red are actually a marketing tool that was not used until the 20th century.

And again we emphasize that while the original manuscripts were most

definitely inspired by the Holy Spirit and, thereby, error-free, doesn't mean that the translation is error-free.

No translation was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and none to my knowledge were claimed to be.

While there have been other translations from then until now, the King James is concluded by many scholars to be closer to the original text than any other effort. Down through the last several centuries, it, by far, has been the most widely used and widely known.

In this same book, my husband also offers a comprehensive chronology that tells the dramatic story of how the Bible was actually translated. The timeline stretches from 1500 B.C. when the Old Testament was put into writing to 1611 when the King James Version was completed—the version that has stood the test of time for more than 400 years.

Compare these centuries of translation work to Peterson's so-called translation efforts where he brags, "I did the Beatitudes in about 10 minutes."

When asked if Peterson actually uses *The Message* for his own personal devotions, he told *Christianity Today* no, he does not. What does that tell you?

## BIBLE STUDY

Church, the best way to avoid the danger of a book like *The Message* is to read and study the Bible.

The Word of God tells us, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

Sometime back, my husband put together a list of ways for believers to best interpret the Bible. He said that anyone who will study these rules and use them as a basis for Bible study will find the Word of God opening up to him in a greater way.

The Lord will help you learn the Scriptures. As you consider the following study helps, let me close my portion of this article with a verse from the book of Luke:

"And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Lk. 24:32).

## TWELVE RULES FOR INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

1. Improve your ability in the tongue in which you read the Bible. For example, master the English language if the English Bible is to be used.

2. Accept the literal meanings of words. Apply to the Bible the same rules (grammar, figures of speech, types, symbols, allegories, parables, poetry, prophecy, history) that you would to any form of human expression found outside the Bible.

3. Learn the manners, customs, and peculiar idioms of the periods during which the Bible was written.

4. Get acquainted with the geography of all Bible lands.

5. Acquire a general knowledge of the history of the Bible peoples and kingdoms so that you can understand Bible history as a whole.

6. Recognize the overall plan of the Bible: the ages and dispensations; the ultimate purpose of God to defeat Satan and restore man's dominion, rid the world of rebellion, and establish an eternal kingdom on earth ruled by God, Christ, and the resurrected saints.

7. Recognize the three classes of people dealt with in Scripture—the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Compare these centuries of translation work to Peterson's so-called translation efforts where he brags, 'I did the Beatitudes in about 10 minutes.'”



8. Keep in mind the historical background of each book and the circumstances under which it was written.

9. Never change the literal meaning of Scripture to a spiritual, mystical, symbolic, or figurative meaning unless this is done by God Himself. Take everything in the Bible literally unless this could not possibly be the meaning. When the language used is symbolic, dig out the literal truth conveyed by it.

10. When studying the Bible, keep a complete concordance to look up any subject that confuses or compels you, and to unearth the true definition of any Greek or Hebrew word where there is a question of proper translation.

11. Be as analytical and honest with the Bible as with any other book. Study it not to disprove it, but to master its secret contents and to conform to its teaching. When approached in this manner, you will find it to be in unity.

12. It must be settled once and for all that the Bible does not contradict itself, and all Scriptures on a subject are in harmony. It has a way of confusing its enemies and blessing its friends. The only thing difficult about the Bible is that it is a very large book, and it will take time to master its contents to the point where you get a general understanding of it. Read it over, and over! Practice its teachings, and it will soon become a simple and practical book. ✎

## SOURCES

*Frances & Friends*. SonLife Broadcasting Network, Oct. 13.

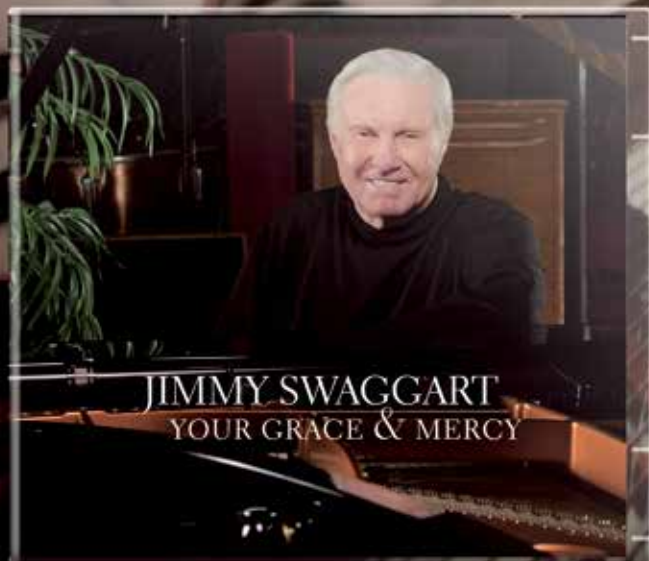
*A Conversation With Eugene Peterson, Author*, 12th Annual Writer's Symposium By The Sea, Feb. 23, 2007. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Faalui7cESs>  
NavPress <https://web.archive.org/web/20080819201637/http://navpress.com/Message/HistoryAndFaqs/#11>

Bible Research, Internet Resources for Students of Scripture  
<http://www.bible-researcher.com/themessage.html>

Doug LeBlanc, "I Didn't Want to Be Cute," *Christianity Today*, 46/11 (October 7, 2002), p. 15.

Jimmy Swaggart. *Brother Swaggart, How Can I Understand The Bible?* (World Evangelism Press, 2009) 7-9.

Jimmy Swaggart. *25 Great Years...25 Anointed Sermons*, (Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, 1981) 187-188.



JIMMY SWAGGART - YOUR GRACE & MERCY (02-203)

## YOUR GRACE & MERCY

NO SUBSTITUTIONS

### INCLUDES THE SONGS:

Your Grace And Mercy  
There Is Power In The Blood  
Battle Hymn Of The Republic  
Mansion Over The Hilltop  
The King And I  
Victory Ahead  
It's Real  
Your Blessing Is Coming Through  
There's Something About That Name  
Won't It Be Wonderful There

CATALOG  
PRICE

~~\$19~~

YOUR PRICE

\$15

Plus Regular Postage, Shipping, and Handling. | All prices in The Evangelist are valid through January 31, 2016.

For Fast & Easy Ordering Call Toll Free: **1.800.288.8350 (US)** | **1.866.269.0109 (CN)** or Visit Our Website at **www.jsm.org**