

I have a fascination with words. Maybe it's because I served as a church curriculum editor for several years and paid close attention to the words my writers selected. Or maybe it's because I enjoy a good pun, that spontaneous play on words that brings laughter to a conversation. Or maybe it's because I have always enjoyed reading, and the words an author selects can send my imagination soaring to a distant galaxy or to a time hundreds of years ago. Whatever the reason, I love words.

Every year *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* adds new words to their list, and this year they added *shrinkflation*.¹ I have noticed the meaning of this word when I go to the store to buy the same bag of frozen fruit that I always buy, only to discover that even though the price remains the same, the bag is smaller. Shrinkflation: reducing the product's volume while continuing to charge the same price.

Here's a new word that many of us have used for a long time: *dumbphone*. In contrast to a smartphone, a dumbphone only makes phone calls but can't play music or videos, check your calendar, or tell you the weather. I think Alexandar Graham

Bell might disagree with this term, for in the mid-1800s he would *not* have considered his invention a dumbphone, for it was the very first phone to make a call. Years ago I even considered my cordless push-button phone a pretty smart phone, but not so much anymore.

Here's another word that's been added: How many of you enjoy pumpkin spice, either as a flavor added to your baking or as the smell of a candle? Although we have enjoyed that smell and word for a long time, the dictionary just added it this year.

In addition to using new words, sometimes we stop using a word, as in the case of the Old English word *wit*, which means "we two."² Today we say, "We both went to the store," but using the old pronoun, one would have said, "Wit went to the store."

When my children were teenagers, they often used words in a way that didn't make sense to me. I remember my daughter saying "cool beans," which didn't mean she wanted uncooked beans. The phrase meant that something was totally awesome.

So how do we decide which words to use?

Timothy may have wondered that question as he

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traveled with the early church leader, Paul. I imagine Timothy complaining to Paul as they traveled to cities, striving to start new churches. “What if the people in this city don’t like what we have to say? You sat in jail in Philippi, and that’s not the only time people didn’t like your words. When you face such difficulties, Paul, how do you decide what words to live by?”

Even if Paul answered Timothy’s question right away, he wrote Timothy a letter years later, encouraging him to trust God’s words. Paul reminded Timothy that since his childhood Timothy has trusted in the Hebrew scriptures, what we often call the Old Testament, for the writings about Jesus had not yet been collected as scripture. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.”³

Some have used this scripture to debate the inerrancy of the Bible, saying that all the words in the Bible are written by God and must be followed

literally, but I don’t think that’s what Paul was trying to convey. The Greek word we translated as “inspired” comes from two Greek words *Theos*, meaning God, and *pneuma*, meaning spirit or breath. The word literally means “God-breathed.” To be inspired means to be filled with God’s Spirit, to be creative, to sense God’s presence.

Think of times you have been inspired—a feeling of being filled, visioning a creative idea, feeling led to help someone, having an ah-ha moment when you discern a direction in life. That’s being inspired. Filled with the breath of God. Moved by the Spirit. When we read God’s inspired words in scripture, we may find them connecting to our lives, helping us understand how the world of thousands of years ago connects to our lives today. Think of your favorite scripture in the Bible, words that inspire you.... I’ll invite you to share them in just a bit.

How we use the Bible may vary from one church to another, and sometimes religious folks may disagree on how to use scripture. I recall years ago in another congregation that someone explained

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why he didn't come to church. He said to an Elder, "I don't attend church because the preacher doesn't use the Bible while preaching." When the Elder mentioned this during a meeting, everyone had a blank stare, unsure what this comment meant. One Elder objected, "Our pastor uses the Bible every Sunday. He not only reads it, but he refers to it in every sermon. What did that guy mean?"

I replied, "I wonder if he has in mind the preaching style of using a line-by-line analysis of every word or phrase of a Bible text, which we often do in a Bible study. Although I use the scripture as the foundation of my preaching and study the original language, I also strive to find stories that relate to the meaning of the text rather than explaining every phrase." I saw several heads nodding at that meeting, suggesting they agreed that we use the Bible in a different way than others might use it.

¹ www.npr.org/2022/09/07/1121471518/merriam-webster-new-words

Even though styles of reading the Bible might differ, I do believe the Bible has words to live by, and I imagine you do too. I'm sure you have your favorite words in the Bible, passages that speak to you and inspire you. Maybe you connect to

- John 3:16: God so loved world...
- Psalm 46: Be still and know...that I am God
- Psalm 23: God is my shepherd...I shall not want
- Matthew 19: With God all things...are possible
- Romans 8: Nothing can separate us...from the love of God

What are some of your favorite words from the Bible—words that you live by? ...

Although our language may change, with new words added to the dictionary and old words disappearing, God's Word continues to live among us. May you continue to find inspiration from these words—words from God, words of hope, words to live by.

² www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/12/31/why-words-in-english-die-out/

³ 2 Timothy 3:16-17, CEB.