When the documents that make up the Bible were first written, they captured exactly what God wanted to say in the languages that ordinary people spoke. There was no friction between perceiving the form or structure of the text and perceiving the meaning of the text. The original audience experienced a unique combination of both ingredients—represented by the red dot in the top right corner of the diagram.

But Bible readers today can’t experience this combination any more. The Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic texts still show us the form and structure of the original text most of us can understand what they mean. As English speakers, we need translations, and we’re privileged to have access to a wide variety of options that fall into three broad groups.

Tending to the upper left corner of the diagram, the first group—represented by the green oval and known to scholars as formal equivalence translations—place a particular high priority on reproducing the form and structure of the original. The approach allows modern Bible readers to perceive many of the important details and subtleties in the text. Ease of understanding varies from verse to verse and from book to book, but all verses and all books achieve a high standard of transparency to the original.

Tending to the upper right corner of the diagram, the second group—represented by the brown oval and known to scholars as functional or dynamic equivalence translations—place a particularly high priority on reproducing the form and structure of the original. This approach helps modern Bible readers understand the story lines and implications of the text that they can relate to and grasp quickly. Transparency to the form and structure of the original documents varies from verse to verse and from book to book, but all verses and all books achieve an ease of understanding.

Tending to the lower left corner of the diagram, the third group of translations—represented by the white circle—seeks to recover the original languages. All editions include the Deuterocanonical/ Apocryphal books. Published under the direction of Peter Dias XII, this Catholic Version of the Bible represents more than 25 years of study by the Catholic Church. All editions include the Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal books.

Transparency to the form and structure of the text and perceiving the meaning of the text can be achieved while still retaining comprehensibility in contemporary English.

An uncompromising effort to maximize transparency to the original documents.

NAB New American Bible

Seeking to combine transparency to the source documents with a good level of comprehensibility in modern English.

HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible

Blending transparency to the original documents with accessibility for the contemporary audience.

NRSV Revised Standard Version

Maintaining the formal equivalence philosophy of the RSV while seeking to reflect contemporary English usage.

ESV English Standard Version

Building on the foundation of the RSV, prioritizing transparency to the original documents.

NIrV New International Reader’s Version

A popular resource that was created to add color to the Bible reading experience. Written for readers at an elementary-school reading level, it features a large number of footnotes that explain cultural and technical terms.

NLT New Living Translation

Balancing accuracy and clarity to convey the original meaning of the text.

CEV Contemporary English Version

Prioritizing accessibility for a broad audience.

NCV New Century Version

Prioritizing accessibility for a broad audience.

The Voice

A contemporary rendering of the message of the Bible in everyday idioms

AMP Amplified Bible

A broadly formal equivalent translation with explanatory alternate readings and amplifications.