

Church-Centric Bible Translation: “Getting Started”

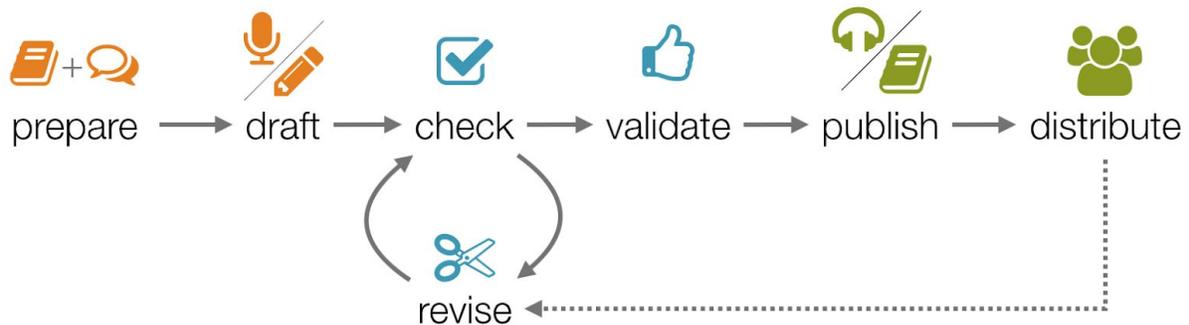
Introduction

Do you want your church to grow and mature but you realize that they need Biblical content in their language if they are going to understand God’s Word better? Do you wonder how to get started, how to get trained, and how to make a good translation? If so, this document is for you!

At unfoldingWord (<https://unfoldingword.org>), we make it our goal to equip people like you to translate the Bible and other biblical content from a language you know into your own language. We have trained and helped translators in hundreds of translation projects. We are creating translation training materials, translation helps, source texts, and computer programs that will help you in this process.

This document is a quick guide to help you know how to start on your translation project and continue it on to completion. We recommend you read all the way through this document, ignoring the links, to get an overview of the process, then come back later to follow the links as needed for more detail. For a more thorough treatment of these subjects, please read translationAcademy (<https://unfoldingword.bible/academy>).

Translation Process Overview



Step 1: Prepare

Before You Start

As you begin to think about translating, the first thing you should do is pray. Gather believers who speak your language and pray. Reach out to believers who are not a part of your church and invite them to pray with you. Pray for unity. Pray that God would establish His Church. Pray

that God would give wisdom and bless the translation process. Without the Holy Spirit's help, all translation work will be in vain. With a broad, unified group of believers praying for the translation project, it is likely that the completed translation will also have broad acceptance.

Goal of Translation

Translation is a complicated task and takes organization and a plan. Whenever considering a large task like this, considering [why we translate the Bible](#) and describing the desired end result is a great place to start. When translating the Bible or other biblical content, the goal should be the growth and maturity of the church that speaks your language because the translated resources help them to better understand the Word of God.

Definition of a Good Translation

A translation will best accomplish this goal if it has four basic characteristics:

- [Clear](#) - A good translation uses precise words so that the meaning is unambiguous.
- [Natural](#) - A good translation sounds like the way people talk in your language.
- [Accurate](#) - A good translation faithfully portrays the original author's intended meaning.
- [Church-Approved](#) - A good translation process will help ensure broad recognition.

Translation Committee

We recommend that a translation committee be selected - Church leaders who are well respected, speak the language, have the authority to make decisions, and who are willing to learn about translating biblical content. They will need to understand the translation process and find people who can fill the various roles needed for a quality translation (drafters, checkers, computer people, etc.). Many decisions will need to be made by this committee, such as: [What should be translated?](#) In what order? [What source text should be used?](#) What style should the translation take? Which dialect should be represented? Is this a good translation? What about the issue of [copyright and licensing](#)? And [many other questions](#).

For more information on the Preparation Process, read [Setting up a Translation Team](#).



Step 2: Draft

Selecting a Translation Team

After Preparation has been completed, the translation committee will need to [select a translation team](#). Each member of the translation team should sign an agreement (available at <http://ufw.io/forms>) that they agree with each of these documents:

- [Statement of Faith](#) - All translators should understand and abide by the Statement of Faith.
- [Translation Guidelines](#) - All translators should understand and abide by the Translation Guidelines.
- [Open License](#) - To achieve the most impact, an “unrestricted” license is needed to ensure freedom to translate, adapt, remix, and distribute.

Importance of Training

Translating is a skill that improves with training and experience. For this reason, we highly recommend everyone involved in the translation process receive training in the [basics of a good translation](#), the difference between [Form and Meaning](#), the importance of [Meaning-Based Translations](#), and the importance of a good [Translation Process](#).

Importance of Experience

After this training is complete, to further increase the capacity of the translators, we suggest that they start translating something other than the Bible, such as, Open Bible Stories (<https://openbiblestories.com>). (Get started [here](#).) Starting with Open Bible Stories not only gives your church a great resource, but also helps the translators be better prepared to translate the Bible.

Drafting

When the team is ready to start translating, they should start with a [first draft](#), and be sure they understand how to use [translation helps](#) to help them better understand the text. This is an important task, so we recommend that each of these steps be started and ended with prayer.

Drafting can be done on paper or digitally. If started on paper, the draft should eventually be digitized. We recommend using translationStudio (<https://unfoldingword.bible/ts/>) for drafting the Bible or Open Bible Stories.

For more information on the Drafting Process, read [here](#).



Step 3: Check

Goal of Checking

The goal of checking is to help ensure that the translation has been made according to the [Statement of Faith](#) and the [Translation Guidelines](#). In particular, it is important to make sure that the translation is [Clear](#), [Natural](#), and [Accurate](#), but this is worthless if the translation is not also [Church-Approved](#).

Ensuring a Clear, Natural, Accurate Translation

There are many different kinds of checks that can be performed to help the checker ensure the quality of the translation. Here are some examples: [Self Check](#), [Peer Check](#), [translationWords Check](#), [Accuracy Check](#), [Language Community Check](#), [Church Leader Check](#), and many [Other Methods](#). Remember, all of these checks help the checker to verify it is a [Clear Translation](#), a [Natural Translation](#), and an [Accurate Translation](#). Studying some basic [Steps in Checking a Translation](#) will be helpful.

There are many different processes that can be used to check a translation. We encourage the Translation Committee to adopt a process that works well for them and includes at least the checks mentioned above. This [Three-Level Process](#) is one such process and can be referenced by the Translation Committee. Several tools are also available to assist the checking process. We recommend translationCore (<https://unfoldingword.bible/tc/>).



Step 4: Validate

If a translation is crafted so that it is clear, natural, and accurate, yet is not accepted by the Church, then the translation has failed in its goal of being effective for the Church. This is why validating the translation is so important.

Ensuring a Church-Approved Translation

Very early in the translation process, the Translation Committee needs to answer these questions: What is needed for this translation to be approved by the church? Who are the key people who need to endorse this translation? What role will they need to have to endorse it? Some may want to be on the Translation Committee. Some will need to be involved in the checking process. Others will just need to read through it after the translation is complete but before it is published. The Translation Committee should come up with a process that works best in their people group and Church context. The goal of this step is that as many people as possible accept the translation while not compromising the quality of the translation.



Step 5: Publish

Where to Publish

Once the checking is completed, it is helpful to publish the translation in a place where others can find it and refer to it. We recommend using Door43 (<https://door43.org>), a content storage and backup service that automatically publishes a translation as a formatted web page available for printing or download. Both translationStudio and translationCore interface with Door43.

What Formats are Needed

When considering publishing, the Translation Committee should consider what format will be most effective for their people. Is a text version sufficient that can be shared on mobile phones? Does it need to be printed? Would it be more effective to be recorded and distributed as audio files? Making the translation accessible in a format that works well for your people greatly increases the chances that people will use the translation.



Step 6: Distribute

The final step that needs to be thought through is distributing the finished products. There are many venues that can be used. The Translation Committee should consider from the beginning what the ideal distribution methods will be. There are many questions that need to be considered: Does the product have a [license](#) that allows for easy distribution? Will the finished products be freely distributed?



Step 7: Revise

From the beginning, the Translation Committee needs to come up with a plan for how to maintain the translation once it is “completed.” All translations will eventually need to be revised. This can be due to a number of factors, including the language changing, better understanding of the original languages, changed preference of word selections, or many other reasons.

When the decision has been made to revise an existing text, the purpose of the revision must be made clear to the translation team. (If there is no translation team, then the revision must start back at “Step 1: Preparing”.) After the team has made the necessary revisions, the text should go through the Checking and Validating steps before being Re-published and Distributed.

Conclusion

It is time to “Get Started!” Contact other Church Leaders who speak your language and invite them to pray together about what steps God might have them take towards translation. Talk to them about translating Biblical Content into your language and what effect that could have. When the time is right, form a Translation Committee and get started!

If the other Church Leaders aren’t ready to do this, you might try reading through Open Bible Stories with them and ask them how they might use this resource in their ministry if it was in their language.

We know that effective translation is a lot of work! But we believe that all this effort is worth it because it has potential to help equip the church in your people group to grow in their understanding of God's Word and grow in the love for God and their neighbor. We pray with you that God would use your translation efforts to eradicate false doctrine and confusion and instead help "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19).

If there is anything we can do to help you work through this process, please [contact us](#) (email help@door43.org)! God bless you!

