

Language Notes: 8

A Short Break

We just completed our first short-break from serving here in Hungary for the past four years. The whole time we were back in the USA for three months I was wondering what would happen to our Hungarian. Our daughter (age 8), who speaks the best Hungarian, had the greatest noticeable decrease in her vocabulary (e.g., she forgot a lot of basic, simple words she knew very well), but she also made a fast and total recovery within one week of being back here in Hungary. Both my wife and I found that we both speak better Hungarian than before. The 100s of rules that govern the language seemed to have settled better in our brains while we were away for the summer. Taking a break from language study may be just the thing that some people need in order to get ahead.

Ideas for Advanced Learners

I have heard from those who teach and preach in a second language that it is very hard to give lectures in part because they do not know all of the idioms necessary to make a point or illustration. A large number of “canned phrases” that we use come from the Bible. For example: “you reap what you sow,” “love your neighbor as yourself,” “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” “godliness with contentment is great gain.” All these are phrases we know by heart, but we do not know the exact location of the phrase in the Bible. While teaching we can easily use these phrases at the right time. But, when teaching in a second language, trying to translate your favorite Bible quote on the spot will most likely end up with something like, “*Having romance with cash, leads to having bad roots*” Someone sharp in the audience might appreciate the deeper spiritual implication of your quote, but most people will look confused.

So what are we to do? One project I am slowly working on is making a list of favorite little phrases from the Hungarian Bible and memorizing them. In almost every case, how it is said in the Hungarian Bible is very different than how I would have translated it myself. This is not the same as memorizing a lot of Bible verses and reference information; these are just the phrases. After all, “If God is for us, who can be against us!”

Daily Bread Size Prayer*

A second project that I have enjoyed this past year is taking a few verses, such as James 4:4-10, looking at the Hungarian phrases used in that passage, and then writing out a short prayer based on it. We all know that the special language used in church, Bible studies and prayers is often unique to the Christian culture within a given society. To learn some of these phrases and to be prepared to pray with other believers, I have started to study specifically how to pray based on selected Bible verses. The example from James goes like this, “Dear Father, I know that you oppose the proud, but give grace to the humble. Help me to be humble before you and always remember that your Spirit intensely desires a relationship with me. Help to obey you and to resist Satan. Thank you for your love for me. Amen.”

Hope these ideas help. EDP

**If you do not know, this is a made up phrase, understood by all lifers (i.e., life-long Christians). The Daily Bread is a small devotional published monthly, and for each day there is a short story and a two sentence prayer the end. Just so you know ☺*