



WOW: Word Of the Week

Emoji

September 25, 2024

This week my WOW research took me on quite a journey. In a recent communion thought at church, a friend spoke about the power of symbols. Later that week, I began thinking about symbols and emblems, then my wandering brain landed on emoji, and then word icon popped up from the far recesses of my mind. What's the difference? A complete answer is beyond our five minutes or less!

Symbol: something that stands for, represents, or suggests an object, idea, emotion, or relationship. Familiar symbols are used to represent a heart, cross, dove, peace sign, victory sign. ASL uses signs or symbols as representations of the alphabet.

Emblem: an abstract representation, for example, a sports team, a club, an organization.

But I chose the word emoji for this week's WOW.

Emoji. An emoji is a pictogram; a small digital image or icon used to express an idea, emotion, or other reality. The primary use of an emoji today is to fill in emotional cues otherwise missing from typed conversation. An emoji can be used to replace words. Interesting, emoji is one of those words that does not change from singular to plural (although I have heard people talk about "emojis").

The word emoji comes from Japan, where tiny, emotionally expressive pictures have existed since the 1990s, for over 30 years. Emoji were created by Shigetaka Kurita, a Japanese pager and cellphone designer who was inspired by Japanese kanji (Japanese script) and the kaomoji (pictographs composed of various symbols and characters that are arranged together to look like faces, to depict different expressions, emotions, and actions).

Emoji give emotional cues. Perhaps preachers need more biblical emoji, to show what Jesus was thinking and feeling. How does one read Scripture, words on a page, and grasp the background emotion, the facial expressions? How does one hear Paul clearly and correctly as he writes a quick (but not brief) letter to the Corinthians, with many incomplete sentences?

Disclaimer! I am not suggesting a need for an emoji Bible! Or a Bible that contains emoji, but someone may come up with that before too long! What I am suggesting is that we listen to the Bible with fresh ears, we read with fresh eyes, contemplating more carefully the background, almost hidden ideas, emotions, and realities. Deeper, less superficial, more thoughtful, more contextual study often means less literal reading, being more aware of figurative language, which is often a type of symbolism—metaphors, hyperbole, irony... What an opportunity to insert emoji! And it could be that we would remember the Bible story longer!

Our weekly WOW. Emoji. In your Bible reading and study, become more imaginative! Is there an emoji for this Bible story? Is there an emoji for this WOW? And by the way, does the familiar figure mean that Bob is thinking or that Bob is confused!