

Lettering Design: Using Handwritten and Illustrative Techniques to Improve Memorization

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### Abstract

Graphic designers have many choices when designing and communicating with words which can be seen throughout history. Hand lettering techniques have been used for centuries to record information. Then with the development of moveable type came the mass production of reading materials and the introduction of typefaces. Today, much written communication is viewed through a digitized typeface on a screen. However, there has recently been a noticeable increase in hand lettered type, one of these reasons being that hand lettered type can be easier for people to remember. This paper and the visual application of the research examines how hand lettered and illustrative type can be used to promote Scripture memorization.

## Lettering Design: Using Handwritten and Illustrative Techniques to Improve Memorization

### Introduction

Speaking on lettering as popular art, Peter Blake, an English pop artist, said that, “despite all predictions to the contrary, the written word is still the prime conduit for precise information,” which is why there is always a need for graphic designers who can design and communicate with words, whether through hand lettering or the design and use of typefaces (448). Hand lettering techniques have been used for centuries as a way for humans to record stories, information, advertisements, and many other applications. David Crowley, author and designer, says, “handwriting has long been a touchstone in the history of graphic design” (4). With the development of moveable type, more information could be recorded in faster time which required less labor, leading to the mass production of reading materials. Today, people view a host of their readable communication through a digital screen, while printed materials have taken on a lesser role. Almost all of this reading material is visualized using a mechanical digitized typeface. However, there has been a recent resurgence in the use of hand drawn type and type illustration, especially by companies for use in their advertising on social media and packaging. One reason for this return to hand lettering illustrative type could be due to the theory that illustrative type, rather than only mechanically and digitally designed type, is easier for most people to remember (Eitel and Scheiter 153).

To this purpose, I have created a book of lettering designs of Scripture for the purpose of encouraging adults to interact with and memorize Scripture. I worked to develop good design, recognizable and creative letterforms and a stimulating color palette to artistically express scripture passages that are recognizable and memorable.

### **Brief History of Handwriting**

Humans have long used handwriting as the main way of recording history, promoting causes, advertising, and creatively expressing all kinds of ideas, and “until the invention of moveable type, writing retained a vestigial connection to the body” (Crowley 4). Mark notes that the most widely recognized first known form of writing is Sumerian Cuneiform that originated in 3500-3000 BCE (“Writing”). In 1300, Black Letter, also known as Gothic script, was created to produce copied texts like the Bible. 1460 marked the creation of the roman typeface, which was developed for use in the printing press (“Landmarks”).

Although the evolution of type into mechanized and standard versions still continued, the importance of handwriting was also on the rise. In the 1800s, having good handwriting was promoted as a virtue and children were taught penmanship skills in school (“Landmarks”). Handwriting is expressive and unique to each person and it has been analyzed to find connections with social status, emotions, and the individual who wrote the lettering. David Crowley notes that “various uses of handwriting are rooted in the belief that the hand can express individuality. This idea is written deeply in our culture” (5). Today signatures are still used to authenticate purchases and documents and to grant authority. Signatures are also used in design to give a sense of individuality and quality to companies and their products.

Lettering is an art form that developed out of handwriting and calligraphy: the functional avenues of lettering. As seen in the pictographic written languages of hieroglyphics, Sanskrit and the illuminated texts of the Middle Ages, “it takes but little imagination to realize that lettering offers considerable opportunity for a certain type of decorative art.” Moreover, “all of these [written languages] indicate that the great artists of the past approached lettering essentially as an

art procedure” (“Lettering” 1). Mark states that this “art procedure” can be seen in the creation of masterpieces such as illuminated manuscripts that were produced between 500-1600 CE in Western Europe (“Illuminated Manuscripts”).

### **Development of Type**

As handwriting developed into typefaces, three major type families presented themselves. Black Letter, or Gothic, was the first type family used for printing when the printing press was first invented in Germany. Roman, or Antiqua, was the first family used in Italy (Preece and Wells). The Italic typeface was modeled after scripted handwriting. All of these type families originated from the work of calligraphers but were gradually developed into type used in the printing press.

After the invention of the printing press, ornamentation of type and elegant illustrations were still used to make texts into works of art. This meant that there was still a need for calligraphers and typographic illustrators, although the design and illustrations became more simplified so as to be more utilitarian. In 1531, Claude Garamond created his roman typeface that was designed for mass mechanical reproduction. This led to a time where the printed book using designed typography was more common than the handwritten or embellished manuscript versions (Preece and Wells). The rise in popularity of mass-produced texts created a need for more typefaces. John Baskerville and Giambattista Bodoni altered Garamond typefaces, adding their own flairs and nuances (Preece and Wells). Another roman typeface designed by Stanley Morison for *The Times* (London) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to be known as the most successful type design of that era, which was “a result of its economy and legibility when used on high-speed presses (Preece and Wells).

Type was designed to be marketable, meaning it could not be too expressive or decorative, limiting its usefulness. One researcher writes that “type designers have long been concerned with letter form and its impact on reading,” noting that “text fonts are designed for reading continuous paragraphs of text, and the main goal in their design is to produce optimally legible letter forms” (Sanocki and Dyson 132). Due to these constraints, typesetters and advertisers looked for ways to catch peoples’ eye with something different. They often had a designer hand letter a headline or an advertisement because it was more distinctive than a typeface and would catch the viewers’ attention. Otherwise, the message goes unseen. Lettering designer Walter Peterson states that “masses of solid type can be deadly to the eye.” If this occurs, “an advertisement is in danger of falling flat on its face; a magazine article or book may go begging for readers” (114). In other words, although type can be great for reading long passages of text, it is not as visually stimulating as decorative lettering or embellished type. This is something designers became aware of during the age of moveable type.

Type is much more universal at present, making it more difficult to distinguish unique styles that define any one area of type design. However, there are different classes of type used for specific purposes, such as typefaces designed for web use. Since the first Macintosh computer was introduced in the late 80s, graphic designers worked almost exclusively on developing typefaces for digital use (Sharkey 26). Recently, this specialization has changed.

### **Resurgence of Hand Drawn Type**

In the modern day, there has been a noticeable resurgence in handwritten type. Examples of handwritten type can be seen in many places, such as the various companies that have made

use of illustrative type for packaging design and advertising purposes. Reasons for the possible resurgence vary, but all point back to the uniqueness possessed by hand drawn elements of type.

One reason for the resurgence in the use of hand drawn type is that people and companies are looking to create distinctive marks to differentiate themselves from others of similar offerings or goals in the competitive market. A few well-known examples of companies using hand lettered type for their logos include the Virgin Group, Kleenex, Kellogg's and Cadbury. Many companies use hand lettered designs in their social media posts because it captures a viewer's eye and encourages a closer look to understand the message. As researchers Milner Gray and Ronald Armstrong put it, "A message is legible, in a display sense, only if it catches the reader's eye and makes him read. What is physically seen must be mentally noticed. What is viewed must be apprehended" (122). Eye catching designs are especially essential in social media designs when viewers are often scrolling quickly through feeds. Katie Snyder, writer and blogger for JNA Advertising, notes that "lettering provides a fun and unique contrast to the typical black-and-white machine-made type we see on a regular basis." Lettering can make social media posts or packages really stand out from competitors.

Another reason for the resurgence in the use of hand drawn type could be a rebellion against the digital world of precision. Many designers think that designing exclusively with typefaces limits the creative process. Peterson says that "type is much more than mere reading matter. In sensitive hands, it becomes a decorative element, a wonderful tool to bring illustrative design where no illustration has been presumed to exist" (114). Creativity is able to flourish when designers can break out of the precision of traditional type and explore the free flowing and imperfect aspects of hand lettering.



Graphic designers and illustrators also try to think outside the norm of what has been done many times before. However, designers may borrow from what was popular in years' past and work it into their designs, but with their own special flair. Seeing designs that hint at a certain time period can evoke certain thoughts, emotions or feelings. Creating designs that connect consumers with memories of the past is an effective tool used by designers because "repetition, with interesting variations, is the heart of successful advertising promotion" (Peterson 114). One example of this is the trend of designers and illustrators taking designs from the past and reusing them in new ways, such as the swirls and shading found in lettering from the 60s and 70s. This can evoke nostalgic feelings in consumers that consumers then connect with the brand. As Rian Hughes puts it, "fashions in type, as with fashions in fashion, often look to the past for inspiration and then update it with a new twist" (1). Though many resurgences of popular type design do involve the use of something that has been done before, each designer is challenged to use what has been done in a new and different way to make designs memorable to for consumers.

### **How Lettering Design can be Used to Improve Information Retention**

Along with the development of technology, especially with computers and phones, humans have been increasing their visual intake more and more. With so much visual stimulation, it can be easy for the human mind to forget things that are plain in appearance. Due to the overabundance of stimulating visuals, the typeface has lost some of its visual meaning and significance, becoming barely noticeable and certainly harder to recall in memory in comparison with other visuals. Jean-Gerard-Lapcherie once said that a "page is meant to be read. It is not meant to be looked at. Printed words on a page are barely noticeable. As soon as reading begins,

our perception of typography ends” (qtd. in Reifenstein 71). Therefore, something else is needed to help readers reengage with the text. Jean-Gerard-Lapcherie suggests the use of Typographic artifices because they “force the reader to look at the text,” and they “make it visible as a thing and as a thing endowed with an existence of its own” (qtd. in Reifenstein 71). When typefaces are more visually stimulating, the letters are actually seen, not just the block of text. Sanocki and Dyson state that “it is clear now that letter perception provides a critical front end for reading because letters are functional units; they are independent pieces of the word code” (132). The form and perception of the letters is important for improving readability and comprehension of the text as a whole. This in turn can improve memory of the ideas contained in the text.

Researchers have studied the human memory and discovered that “both visual attention and visual working memory processes selectively activate and prioritize particular visual representations above others” (Olivers et al. 1243). To a certain extent, people pick what they want to remember visually out of what attracts the eye the most. In an article about learning with pictures or text, Alexander Eitel and Katharina Scheiter write that “a wealth of empirical research has demonstrated that students learn better with text and pictures than with text only or picture only” (153). This indicates that illustrative lettering could be more stimulating to the memory than only the digitized text of the words. Artistic lettering is also more closely related to pictures than to words, making it possibly more stimulating to the memory, especially for those who identify themselves as being visual learners. As Snyder puts it, “hand lettering is the perfect balance between the hard, crisp and clean lines of typography and the free-flowing marks of illustration.” Studies have also shown that the handwriting of letters is more recognizable to viewers than typing letters. This leads to the theory that handwritten artistic lettering could be a

valuable way for viewers to improve their memory of a subject. In the case of this project, artistic lettering could be used to improve a subject's memory of Scripture.

### **Scripture Memorization: Importance and Methods**

As was mentioned before, the invention of the printing press led to the mass production of reading materials, especially Bibles, that were more easily accessible to consumers. This has continued into today where many Christians have access to God's Word. Despite this easy access, many Christians find it hard to memorize Scripture. There are many possible reasons for this difficulty, including cultural influence, lack of connection to the Scriptures, and lack of knowledge of how to memorize.

One difficulty Christians experience when it comes to memorizing Scriptures is the influence of secular culture. Author John Wilson notes sadly that "we live in a time when memorization is routinely scorned, an attitude summed up in the ubiquitous phrases 'rote memory' and 'rote learning'" (40). In recent years, Scripture memorization has become a forgotten discipline. In a world where originality and free thinking are highly held virtues and traditional Biblical values are scorned, the thought of memorizing something that is thousands of years old and said to be filled with rules and restrictions seems pointless. In fact, "memorizing, we are told, discourages creativity, critical thinking, and conceptual understanding" (Wilson 40).

Despite what culture may say, Scripture memorization remains an essential skill for believers. Many times, in both the Old and New Testaments, believers are encouraged and even commanded to commit the Word of the Lord to memory. They are commanded to "keep this Book of the Law always on [their] lips; meditate on it day and night, so that [they] may be careful to do everything written in it. Then [they] will be prosperous and successful" (*New*

*International Version*, Josh. 1:8). Believers also know that regardless of how long ago the Bible was written, its truths are timeless and alive today, just like it says in Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Peter Olson, a biblical storyteller and minister, reiterates this truth, saying, “the Bible is not just a two-dimensional storybook, but it is instead an image of the living word of God!”

The importance of knowing the Scriptures can be read clearly in the Bible itself, but many Christians still struggle to know how and what to memorize, causing a lack of motivation and fear of failure. Some believers report feeling a lack of connection to the Scriptures: knowing their importance, but not seeing an effect on daily life. Olson believes that this does not need to be the case. “When we treat the Bible as a book that is alive, its message becomes prominent in our lives” (Olson). Once the believer knows the power of the Lord’s presence and has a hunger for His Word, the desire to memorize Scripture starts to grow, though some still struggle to find an effective method for committing words to memory.

Dennis Hart Dewey, another minister and biblical storyteller, writes that “Modern memory science bears witness to the felt reality of antiquity, namely, that remembering is a creative, constructive process.” Dewey also iterates that “we think of “memorizing” as storing a string of printed text in the brain,” when what Christians should be doing is learning by heart. This, Dewey says, “is a whole-person process involving many dimensions” (2). Another author puts it this way: “Memorizing means stocking the imagination with the experiences, images, and symbols that undergird the words” (LaVerdiere 35). This statement could be suggesting that the

visual component of seeing the words or images or a combination plays a big part in the success of memorization.

One method that has been used by many non-artists is handwriting memory verses. Dewey remarks that “there is much to be said for the practice of actually writing the text out by hand. Making the words by the movement of the hand muscles linked to the hand-eye interaction can be a valuable mnemonic technique” (5). Dewey also observes that “sometimes it is helpful to draw pictures in the script, in effect to ‘storyboard’ it with images” (6). This method of memorization would translate directly into viewing lettering designs, which is the text made into an illustration. However, just using these methods once does not guarantee that the Scripture will be memorized. One study done by researchers on visual long-term memory remarked that “although visual long-term memory (VLTM) has large enough capacity to store a virtually infinite amount of visual information, not every information that we wish to remember is encoded.” These researchers observed that “active maintenance is what grants access to long-term memory (LTM) storage” (Fukuda and Vogel 1481). Specifically, memorization takes effort and repetition.

One important thing to note about Scripture memorization is that it will not by itself give a believer mastery over all problems that come up in life. Although memorizing Scripture can help a Christian to know what to do in certain situations, it is not up to the believer to put pressure on his or herself to always know the answer from Scripture for every instance. In fact, “we do not have to master Scripture and then make it relevant to our lives; through Scripture, God opens up a new place for us to dwell, a place of fellowship with Christ on a path leading to love of God and neighbor” (Billings 24). This makes hiding God’s word in the heart a joy and

not just a duty. God gives believers the freedom and the creativity to memorize Scripture in the way that best suits the individual in how he or she was created to live and learn. One way that could be very beneficial to many Christians that are visual learners is viewing and creating lettering designs of Scripture.

### **Visual Research**

While working on compiling this research about lettering design and how it can be used as an aide for memorizing, especially in light of the importance of memorizing Scripture, I began to visualize how I could use my own creative lettering designs to provide a creative solution. In the past, I have done many lettering pieces when working on my own memory verses. As I was thinking about the research presented above, I realized that I could use the pieces I had done for myself to also help other people memorize Scripture. I then compiled the pieces that I had done before to update and revise them to communicate the message of the Scripture more clearly. To do this, I worked to create designs that are cohesive and provide representations of the verses that are like pictures, not just words on a page. I reviewed what other lettering artists have done and noticed specifically that all of their pieces left a lingering picture or scene in my mind that helped me to remember the verse. I then tried to approach each of my pieces as if I was creating a scene. The words of the verse stand out and the background compliments and reinforces the message of the words. Once I had compiled these pieces, I worked to incorporate even more of this research into the creative aspect of my thesis.

### **Creative Aspect: Scripture Lettering Design Book**

For the creative portion of the thesis, I will be addressing the difficulty many adults experience when memorizing scripture. The question I will try to answer is: can lettering designs

of different meaningful Bible verses encourage adults to interact with and memorize Scripture by making the verses come alive visually in a memorable way? To answer this question, I have designed and created a book of lettering designs of Scripture to encourage adults to write God's Word in his or her heart. The purpose of this creative portion is to develop good design and letterforms as well as a stimulating color palette into artistic expressions of scripture passages that are recognizable and memorable. Other artists have done similar work, including Stefan Kunz, Ruth Chou Simons, Laura and Jason van Dyk of God's Fingerprints, Zeke Tucker and Ian Barnard. Each of these artists combines Scripture with the use of his or her own personal lettering style as well as illustrations or photography which work together to create very meaningful and memorable designs.

My creative project is different from other similar endeavors because of my unique style. I have combined many different hand lettering techniques with textures and other illustrative elements. I have also used an engaging color palette to make the words appear to have become more alive and dimensional, especially when compared to the printed text.

I was very intentional with my color choices, noting that red and blue are the most stimulating for memory and best for increasing productivity, according to a study done by the University of British Columbia (Olesen). With this in mind, I created a color palette using different shades and tints of red and blue. I also checked the contrast of these colors, making sure that a person with any type of color blindness would still be able to read the Scripture.

I also paid careful attention to my lettering forms, making sure that the illustrative qualities did not take over the ability for viewers to recognize the letters and words. The authors of an article on lettering for the public image state that "the selection of a letter style for any

given purpose should be governed by the two requirements of being appropriate to that purpose and suited to the means of its execution” (Gray and Armstrong 120). I made sure that my style of lettering for each piece was unique and engaging, but also was appropriate to the context of the Scripture.

In conclusion, hand lettering can be a valuable and effective tool for communicating and memorizing Scripture. As a Christian, I believe that the Lord has created each individual uniquely, with different and special ways of understanding and communicating with Him through the Scriptures. This research and visual application of the research outlines a possible avenue for individuals to engage with and memorize Scripture effectively, so that His Word might be hidden in the heart of each person (Psalm 119:11).



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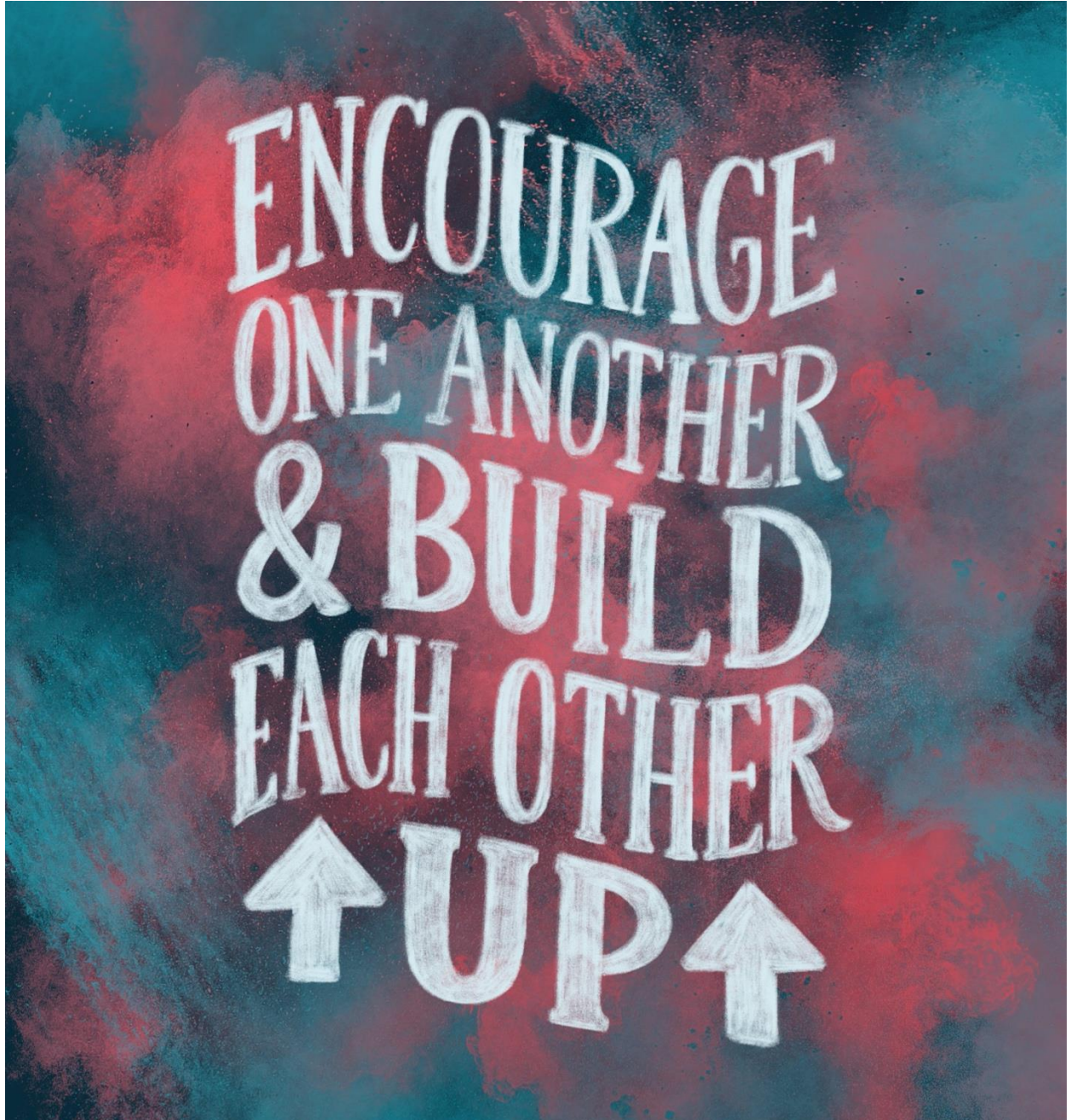
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THE LORD WILL  
GUIDE YOU ALWAYS.  
HE WILL SATISFY  
YOUR NEEDS IN A  
SUN-SCORCHED LAND  
& WILL STRENGTHEN  
YOUR FRAME. YOU WILL BE  
LIKE A WELL WATERED  
GARDEN; LIKE A  
SPRING WHOSE WATERS  
NEVER FAIL. ISAIAH  
58:11

REJOICE  
always  
I WILL SAY  
Again  
REJOICE