

BY EVERY WORD

BY STEVE DEMME

By Every Word

©2024 Steve Demme

Published and distributed by Building Faith & Family

Revision 0324

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright ©2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright ©1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from The Holy Bible, King James Version.

BY EVERY WORD

By Every Word	1
A New Plan	2
Never Too Early	3
Isaac Is Named	4
Steadfast and Faithful	6
The Name of God	7
Throwing Stones	13
From the Very First Verse	14
Never Too Early	16
Every Word	17
Every Day	19
A Wise Man	23
Walking in the Light	24
Hearing the Word	25
Nuggets of Truth in Ezekiel	25
Words of Conviction	26
All Scripture Points to Jesus	28
Be a Berean	33
How Many Wise Men? How Old was Jesus?	35
Fulfill	37
Born from Above	39
Faith Over Feeling	41
Hope	42
The Conviction of Things Not Seen	43
Suffering Saints	44
Hymns about Him	46
The Encouragement of the Scriptures	47
Gerbils	49
Ask	51
Asking God for a Love of the Truth	52
Battling with the Sword of the Spirit	53
The Washing of Water with the Word	55
Words of Life	56
The Spirit and the Word	59
God's Word is Doable	61
Discerning the Thoughts of the Heart	62
The Primacy of Scripture in the Hardest and Best Year of my Life	64
Breakthrough	67
The Great News	68
Known	71
Waiting on God	72
Taste and See	73
Walks with God	74
Digging Deeper	76
Still Reading, Growing, Learning, and Pressing on to Know	77
Bible Reading Charts	78
Learn the Greek Alphabet	78
Learn the Books of the New Testament	79
Stewardship, a Biblical Approach to Personal Finance	79
No Adding or Subtracting	80



**Building Faith
and Family™**

BY EVERY WORD

When Jesus was being tempted by the devil, He answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4) Since I have now read every word of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation many times, I know that Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of YHWH.”

Reading my Bible every day, while reading through the whole counsel of God annually, is the best discipline God has helped me to establish in my Christian walk. This habit began in the fall of 1976 when I was attending a small church in Essex, MA. I had been going to services there for a few months and was impressed with the level of biblical understanding the members of this fellowship possessed.

I was in my second year as a student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Several of my classmates would join me for Sunday evening Bible studies. I remember one evening Pastor Murray asked a question about a certain king in Israel. A humble, white-haired electrician answered, “King Hezekiah.” My friends and I looked at each other in surprise, for we had no clue what the correct answer was.

On September 20, 1976, I was leaving church and stopped in the narthex, where I picked up a small yellow chart for reading the Bible through in

one year. January 1 was Genesis 1–3 and December 31 was Revelation 20–22. I noted that the average number of chapters was three per day. I then found that the reading for September 20 was the book of Joel. That day, I read 3 chapters of Joel and began this daily rhythm. Next to asking Jesus to be my Savior, reading the Bible every day has proven to be the best decision I have made in growing in my faith.

For eleven years, I followed this schedule. It was difficult at first, and some weekends I had to read a good bit to catch up to where I was supposed to be, but eventually it became a part of my daily life. If I had not had a schedule to follow, I don't believe I would have kept at it as long as I did nor would I have read all 66 books of the Bible in one year.

Another factor which helped me in this quest was knowing that most of the congregation was following the same plan. I was not alone but a part of the body. I remember one older gentleman saying he had read the Scriptures through 50 times! Now I am the older gentleman writing to encourage you, and I am almost to 50 myself!

A NEW PLAN

As much as I liked the original plan, I found that I was spending 9 months reading from Genesis to Malachi and 3 months reading Matthew to Revelation. As much as I enjoyed the Old Testament, I missed reading the Psalms and the New Testament. I was also wishing there was a chart that would be family-friendly so our growing family could read through the Bible together. I then created a new plan with two tracks. I divided up the Old Testament into 365 readings and the New Testament with the Psalms into another 365 readings.

Using this chart, I could read the whole Bible with two readings per day (approximately three chapters), and my sons could begin by reading the New Testament (about one chapter). When families use this chart, the parents read the Old and New Testaments, and the children read the New Testament. Then, everyone is able to discuss their New Testament reading together. This system provides children the opportunity to develop this discipline at an early age. It also provides accountability for parents as little eyes are watching them.

Since the Old Testament, or the First Covenant, is the foundation for the New Testament, or New Covenant, I wanted my children to also read the first 39 books of the Bible (or 38 since they will have read the Psalms by following their chart). Yet it is a big jump from one chapter a day to three or more chapters a day. So, I designed an intermediary step with a simplified Old Testament chart that covers the historical portion of the Old Testament and is only one chapter a day. Children can then move from one chapter per day, to two chapters per day, before making the jump to the whole Bible in one year.

NEVER TOO EARLY

Paul writes to Timothy, “As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:14) This passage gives us insight into the early years of Timothy. It is

never too early to read the Bible, for not only does it acquaint us with sacred writ, but it also makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Children hear things and believe what they hear. Isaac was four, Ethan was two, and we had just finished eating dinner. My wife and I got up and were walking around when we overheard the boys having a discussion with some intensity. We peeked around the corner so they wouldn't know we were watching. Ethan was innocently looking at Isaac and asking, "Why?" and Isaac said, "Don't eat that," referring to the gravy and meat on Ethan's plate. Ethan looked up with his innocent blue eyes and said, "Why not?" Isaac responded authoritatively, "The fat belongs to YHWH!"

I don't recall ever teaching this as doctrine, but somewhere along the line, sitting in a worship service or hearing somebody read the Bible, Isaac had heard the fat belongs to God. He not only believed it; he was applying it!

ISAAC IS NAMED

Now you know that I have at least two sons, Isaac and Ethan. When my wife and I were married on a Sunday afternoon, the sermon that morning was about Isaac. It was an anointed message, and we both felt that if God were to bless us with a son, we wanted his name to be Isaac. Isaac was born miraculously to Abraham and Sarah when they were old and naturally unable to conceive children. His name means "he laughs." If you were to conduct a poll of why he was named Isaac, most people would say it was because his mother Sarah laughed. I also assumed this until I was reading my Bible in

January one year. I will let you peruse these passages from Genesis 17 and 18 and see if you can figure out who laughed first.

“God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.’ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before you!’ God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.’” (Genesis 17:15–19)

“YHWH appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, ‘O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.’ So they said, ‘Do as you have said.’ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.’ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it

quickly. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.”

“They said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he said, ‘She is in the tent.’ YHWH said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?’ YHWH said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for YHWH? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.’ But Sarah denied it, saying, ‘I did not laugh,’ for she was afraid. He said, ‘No, but you did laugh.’” (Genesis 18:1–15)

Both parents laughed at the impossibility of the task; however, I am of the conviction that Abraham laughed first.

STEADFAST AND FAITHFUL

As you know, God blessed us with our first son, Isaac. We had known what his name would be since our wedding day. He has brought us much laughter and joy in keeping with his name. Two years later, we discovered we were to have another baby. However, we did not know what to name the boy/girl. We searched through names in baby books, but nothing seemed to click. One Saturday, I was thinking about our dilemma when it occurred to me that I had not prayed and asked God. I was

in my study and immediately knelt and asked God to give us a name for our soon-to-be-born baby. As soon as I asked, a word came to my mind: “steadfast.”

I got up and began reading the baby book full of names, scanning the meanings instead of the names themselves. I soon found that the name which meant steadfast, firm, or faithful was Ethan. I then picked up my gray Young’s Concordance and looked up Ethan. I learned that Ethan the Ezrahite had written Psalm 89.

I was sitting at my desk by this time and looked through my bookshelf to find a Bible. I opened to Psalm 89 and was blessed to discover these words in the first two verses: “I will sing of Thy steadfast love, O YHWH, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim Thy faithfulness to all generations. For Thy steadfast love was established for ever, Thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens.”

Excitedly, I went to my wife and asked her what she thought about the name Ethan. She told me that was one of her favorite names. On February 14, 1982, Ethan August Demme joined our family. He is steadfast, faithful, and solid.

THE NAME OF GOD

In Scripture, names are significant. God’s people have had their names changed to reflect a new calling or a changed character. Names represent the nature of a person and are a big deal. For example, we know that God is holy. “Thus says the One Who is high and lifted up, Who inhabits eternity, Whose name is Holy.” (Isaiah 57:15) The psalmist declares, “Let them praise Your great and awesome name! Holy is He!” (Psalm 99:3)

Abram, which means “father,” received a new name to reflect the influence he would have on the whole world. God called him Abraham, which means the “father of nations.” His grandson, Jacob, had his name changed after wrestling with the Angel of God. “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” (Genesis 32:28).

In Exodus 20, God gives Moses the Ten Commandments. The third commandment, engraved by the finger of God, is about God’s name: “You shall not take the name of YHWH your God in vain, for YHWH will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7) The word vain means “empty, worthless, having no substance, value, or importance.” We must avoid taking His holy name in vain.

When I read a command that tells me clearly what not to do, I like to focus on the positive and what I should do. The opposite of vain is important, significant, having value, or sacred. I want to think highly of God’s name and honor it as very special. In the book of Malachi, God takes note of people who esteem His name highly and records their names in a book: “Those who feared YHWH spoke with one another. YHWH paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who feared YHWH and esteemed His name.” (Malachi 3:16)

Esteeming, or honoring, His name is the opposite of taking it in vain. Jesus echoes this sentiment when He teaches His disciples how to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” (Matthew 6:9) As you read through Scripture, you will notice many instances of God’s people praising Him and His name: “Bless YHWH, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name.” (Psalm 103:1)

In the original Hebrew text of the Bible the name of God is written as יהוה (YHWH), because the Hebrew alphabet normally only writes consonants and not vowels. Most likely this was pronounced “Yahweh” with the first vowel being an “ah” sound, the second vowel being silent, and the third vowel having an “eh” sound. This is supported by the way the name of God is shortened and used in other Hebrew names as well as some very ancient translations into other languages like Greek, but we can’t be 100% certain exactly how it was pronounced at the time of Moses.

At some point (probably a couple hundred years before Jesus was born), a tradition arose that the name of God should not be spoken out loud, perhaps as a way to be extra careful that the reader not break the commandment about taking the name of God in vain. Instead, when reading the Bible publicly, whenever people got to the letters YHWH they would say something else, usually “Adonai” (Lord), “Elohim” (God), or “ha Shem” (“The Name”). None of these can be used 100% of the time because sometimes those words also occur in the same phrase, so for example “YHWH our God” would be read as “THE LORD our God” but “Lord YHWH” would have to be read as “Lord GOD.” This has caused some confusion for later generations because most ancient translations into other languages like Greek and Latin translated the substitute words instead of the name YHWH and later in the Middle Ages when many Jewish synagogues added vowel markings to show how the Hebrew text should be said or sung, the vowel markings of the substitute words (like “Adonai” or “Elohim”) were added to the original consonants of YHWH.

In the 1500s, some European scholars misunderstood this and by combining the vowels from Adonai (“Lord”) written in

medieval Hebrew Bibles with the letters YHWH they came up with the spellings lehowa and Jehovah (“J” is pronounced with a “y” sound in most languages but under French influence it took on the “dg” pronunciation in modern English). From about 1500 to 1900 the name “Jehovah” became commonly used in English despite being initially based on a misunderstanding, and that is why it is commonly used in older hymns such as “Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah” (translated from Welsh to English in 1771).

Most English translations of the Bible use the substitute words “LORD” or “GOD” and indicate with small capital letters that this is representing the name YHWH, but a few English translations either use “Jehovah” or the more accurate “Yahweh.” I will just use the letters YHWH here so that when you read them you can say “Yahweh” (to be as accurate as possible) or “Jehovah” (if that’s the form you are used to) or even “Lord” (if you believe God’s name shouldn’t be spoken out loud).¹

As for me, I appreciate the intimacy that God exhibits when revealing His name to His people. The word “Lord” is a title, like Mister or Sir, and can apply to many people. A title implies distance in a relationship, whereas Yahweh or Jehovah is a personal name and fosters a sense of closeness and conveys a desire to be known. There is only one Yahweh. “God spoke to Moses and said to him, ‘I am YHWH. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty (El-Shaddai)—but by My name, YHWH, I did not make Myself known to them.’” (Exodus 6:2–3)

As a result of these and other passages in Scripture, I have chosen to refer to God by His proper name and will be

¹ Most of the content in the previous four paragraphs was contributed and edited by my son Isaac. He is learned and articulate and I count on him for his input and research. Thank you son.

replacing “LORD” and “God” with YHWH regardless of what English translation I am quoting. I will also be capitalizing pronouns which refer to God, as does the NASB and other translations. It is a privilege to know God and be invited to address Him by His personal name and not merely by His title.

YHWH is used over 6,000 times in the Bible, and that isn’t even counting all the times the short form “Yah” is used in other names!

“Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua.” (Numbers 13:16) Hoshea means “salvation.” Joshua means “YHWH is salvation.” Mary and Joseph were directed to name their son Jesus. Jesus is the same name in Hebrew and Greek as Joshua and therefore also means “YHWH is salvation.” “She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

Elijah means “YHWH is God.” His name is a combination of two words, El, which is the shortened form of “Elohim” (God), and Yah, which is the shortened form of YHWH (the proper name for God). Notice how many of the prophets and men of God have –JAH or –IAH at the end of their names or “JEH—at the front of their names! Almost all of these are “Yah” in Hebrew, the short form of the name of God. The prophet Isaiah’s name (Y’shayahu in Hebrew) means “YHWH is our salvation.”

“Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as YHWH had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. YHWH descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of YHWH. YHWH passed before him and proclaimed, ‘YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but Who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped." (Exodus 34:4-8)

Here are some of my favorite names for God.

YHWH Sabaoth, YHWH of Hosts.

"David said to the Philistine(Goliath), 'You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of YHWH of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom you have taunted.'" (1 Samuel 17:45)

El Shaddai, God Almighty

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, YHWH appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless.'" (Genesis 17:1)

YHWH Roi, YHWH is my Shepherd

"YHWH is my shepherd; I shall not want." (Psalm 23:1)

YHWH Roepka, YHWH Your Healer

"I am YHWH, your healer." (Exodus 15:26)

YHWH Shammah, YHWH Is There

"YHWH is there." (Ezekiel 48:35)

THROWING STONES

In John 10, Jesus says that He and God are one: “‘I and the Father are one.’ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.” (John 10:30–31) Notice their response: they sought to stone Him, for they thought the words He spoke were blasphemy.

It is significant that when Jesus declared He existed before Abraham, the listeners also picked up stones: “‘Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.’ So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at Him.” (John 8:56–59)

As we have seen, the root word for YHWH is Havah, which may be translated as “I am Who I am,” or simply “I am.” These Jews knew that when Jesus says He is “I am,” He is declaring that He is divine, or God in the flesh. Note that throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly reinforces this truth. Consider the following passages, and as you read through John, note all the others that follow this pattern:

“I am the bread of life.” (John 6:48)

“Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world.’” (John 8:12)

“I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:11)

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’” (John 11:25)

One of my favorite passages along this line, affirming the deity and power of Jesus, is when He is confronted by Judas and his gang: “Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and

some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to Him, came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am.' Judas, who betrayed Him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am,' they drew back and fell to the ground." (John 18:3-6)

Many Bible versions have translated the Greek words Ego-Eimi as "I am," or "I am He." However, as you can see in the Greek text, Jesus stood before the mob and calmly, yet authoritatively, asserted that He was "I am."

FROM THE VERY FIRST VERSE

Even though I had been reading my Bible for many years, I did not have a clear understanding of creation. I knew what Genesis said, but I had also heard much conflicting teaching about the age of the earth and evolution. I was presenting math workshops at a christian school convention in Alabama when I first heard, and later met, Ken Ham. He spoke with conviction about the accuracy and inspiration of the Scriptures.

As I listened to him, I learned much about the validity of creation. However, I also learned that the ministry which he founded, Answers in Genesis, was not solely focused on understanding creation but on defending the Scriptures from the very first verse of Genesis. I found his teaching anointed and powerful.

I began to search the Scriptures myself and discovered that Jesus assumes Genesis is accurate and inspired when He references it while debating the religious leaders of His day: "He answered, 'Have you not read that He Who created

them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?" (Matthew 19:4)

Jesus knew Abraham. "'Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.' So the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" (John 8:56-58)

Jonah's time inside a great fish spoke of the death of Jesus and His being buried for three days before being resurrected! "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:40)

In Matthew 24:37, Jesus is speaking about His return and references Noah: "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." Noah, Abraham and Jonah were all historical characters that are a part of the Biblical narrative.

I began assembling other passages which confirmed and affirmed the growing conviction I had that Jesus was inextricably connected with the creation of the world. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3)

"By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." (Hebrews 11:2-3)

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on

earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:15–17)

The Bible truly is inspired from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation!

NEVER TOO EARLY

Let me give an example of how my son learned something a lot faster than I did. As you know, I began reading the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation when I was 22. For 15 years, I read this passage in Numbers 23:21: “He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in Israel.” Every time I read this verse, I wondered how it could be true. I knew the Word of God was inspired and accurate; I also knew I was not God and expected to encounter verses I did not understand. My philosophy was to focus on what I did understand and then trust God to reveal mysteries as I grew and matured in my faith and understanding.

The first time I read this particular verse, I was scratching my head, for after reading Exodus, Leviticus, and half of Numbers, I thought the nation of Israel as a whole were a hard-hearted, sinful, stiff-necked, and rebellious people. They seemed to be full of iniquity and perverseness, yet Balaam, in the Spirit, declares that God “has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in Israel.” I penned a big question mark in the margin of my Bible, hoping that someday I would understand it. Finally, the blessed day arrived, a light shone in my mind, and I comprehended how this Scripture could be true.

I knew that our family was about to read this chapter for our family devotions (we generally read a chapter a day and were plowing through Numbers), and I looked forward to being able to explain this difficult verse. I kept my thoughts to myself, and after we read the chapter, I innocently asked if anyone knew how the Holy Spirit, through Balaam, could make this statement about the children of Israel. Ethan raised his hand and said, “Well, they were offering the sacrifices daily in the tabernacle.” My shoulders sagged inwardly as my bubble burst. He was correct. My seminary-trained mind had taken fifteen years to understand what this stripling grasped in one reading. Truly a child shall lead them. :-)

EVERY WORD

I have heard people say on many occasions that nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to read the whole Bible through. However, I believe there are several passages that exhort us to read “all Scripture.” The first is the one mentioned by Jesus: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3) If I want to “live,” I need to read every word! Amen. Jesus reminds us, “It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (John 6:63)

Another passage that inspires me to read all the Bible is when Paul writes to Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:15–16) Not only is every word breathed

out, or inspired, by God, it is profitable for every area of my life and equips me for everything I do. This promise is awe inspiring.

In one of his last exhortations to the church in Asia, Paul reminds the believers, “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27) He did not share with them just his favorite passages or the chapters that he especially liked, but Paul was diligent to make them know all of God’s thoughts from Genesis through Malachi. As a preacher and teacher, I know the temptation to focus on what is important and meaningful to me. However, Paul made sure that he had been faithful to teach and preach the “whole counsel of God” to those under his care.

In a Psalm which tells of His love for God’s Word, David has encouraged me to read all of the Bible. It is a long Psalm with 176 verses. One of my favorite passages is Psalm 119:160: “The sum of Your Word is truth, and every one of Your righteous rules endures forever.” When I preach or teach, I try to consult verses on the topic I am studying from all of the Bible, because to discern truth, I need the “sum of Your Word,” or all the pieces added up together. As you read this book, you will notice Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

I have a pretty sizable library of books that I have acquired throughout my life. Sometimes I look at the shelves full of tomes and remind myself, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35) Isaiah 40:8 affirms this reality: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.” There is an excellent chance that the whole world will experience a purging and cleansing by fire, and the only thing that will remain will be the eternal, complete, life-giving words of God.

EVERY DAY

When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, he was their leader. Then Joshua, who was the personal assistant to Moses, was the general who conquered the land and assigned each tribe their own place to live. Both of these men spent much time in the presence of God and asked Him for counsel and advice as they led millions of people out of Egypt and into the promised land. Judges is a dark period in the history of God's chosen people, for they continually rebelled. Then, when they were desperate, they would call out to God and ask for help.

God would raise up a judge to lead them, such as Gideon, Jephthah, or Samson. The last judge was Samuel. During his tenure, the people badgered God for a king of their own, like all the nations around them, and Saul was the first official king of Israel. He was succeeded by David, and then his son Solomon. With this background, the next section will hopefully be as meaningful to you as it is to me.

I have heard well-meaning followers of Jesus say that it is not important to read the Bible every day. I humbly disagree. Whether I read one verse or one chapter of the Bible per day, I think it is vital to my own spiritual development to ingest the inspired, life-giving Word of God at least once per day. When I was at seminary preparing to serve God, I had an assignment which led me to do some digging into the life of Solomon. I do not recall the particulars of the homework; however, in the process of studying, I became acquainted with a section of truth which has become a favorite of mine. It is found in Deuteronomy 17.

In Deuteronomy 17:14–20, God is giving directions to Israel about how to choose a king and how the king should conduct himself. “When you come to the land that YHWH your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom YHWH your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.” (Verses 14–15) As in much of Deuteronomy, this is clear and forthright. Let God choose your king, a brother, and one from among your tribes. He shall not be a foreigner.

In verses 16–17, God gives instruction for what the king should not do: “He must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since YHWH has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.” This is clear: don’t accumulate a bunch of horses, don’t buy them from Egypt, do not marry many women so they don’t turn your heart away, and don’t acquire massive wealth.

Then in verses 18–20, the king is given a specific directive of what to do: “When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear YHWH his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the

commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.”

Notice the phrase “a copy of this law.” In Hebrew, this is mishneh hatorah. Mishneh means “copy,” and torah means “law.” In the Septuagint (a Greek rendering of the Old Testament), it is deuterio-nomion, deuterio meaning “copy” and nomion meaning “law.” You can probably discern that this phrase is why the 5th book of the Bible, the one most quoted by Jesus, is entitled Deuteronomy. It means a copy, or essence, of this law.

When God chooses a king from the tribes of Israel, this king is not to get horses from Egypt, lots of wives, nor lots of silver and gold; instead, he is to obtain the scroll of Deuteronomy from the Levites, write a copy for himself, and then read in it every day of his life!! If the king does this, God promises five results of his obedience:

1. He will develop reverence for God: “Learn to fear YHWH.”
2. He will be obedient “by keeping all the words of this law... and doing them.”
3. He will be humble: “His heart may not be lifted up above his brothers.”
4. He will be balanced: “He may not turn aside...either to the right hand or to the left.”
5. His family will live long and prosper: “He may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children.”

The discipline of writing a copy of the book of Deuteronomy and then reading it daily will make all the difference to the king and his family. It certainly has made all the difference

for me. In reading the next several books of the Bible and following the lives of Saul, David, and Solomon, I believe only David took these words to heart, for David loved God and His Law. Sadly Solomon, who was the son of David and the wisest king in Israel's history, did not follow these exhortations given in Deuteronomy 17. Consider the life of Solomon as described in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

Remember that the king was not to go to Egypt for horses, have many wives, nor have excessive silver and gold. I would think that Solomon would have known these specific dos and don'ts for being a king, but alas, after his father passed away, Solomon disobeyed each of these directives. You can read the full text in 1 Kings 10 and 11. I have chosen a few verses to show how the wisest man on the planet did not obey the clear and specific warnings in Scripture and suffered, as did his family and his kingdom.

"The horses which Solomon had were brought out of Egypt." (1 Kings 10:28)

"He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with YHWH his God, as was the heart of David his father." (1 Kings 11:3-4)

"The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold." (1 Kings 10:14)

"King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches." (1 Kings 10:23)

The account of the life of Solomon and how he fell, how the kingdom was divided, and how his own heart turned away

from God is one of the saddest stories I know. I hope that I learn from this account of Solomon's life and do not repeat it. If the wisest man could overlook three simple commands and have his heart turn away from God, then so can I. It is for this reason, and many others, that I continue to read the Bible every day and apply what God reveals to me as I do. I want to be a true wise man.

A WISE MAN

While it is beneficial to read the words of God, it is essential to not only read, but obey what you read. Solomon possessed knowledge, but that was only a beginning. True wise men read and apply what they have read. Consider the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7): “Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24–27)

I have frequently asked audiences what makes a wise man and what makes a foolish man. Many of us have learned the song about the wise man who built his house on the rock, and we know the motions that accompany it, but sadly, few know the correct answer to my question. Some folks will say that the wise man built his house on Christ. But that is not accurate. The simple answer is, he “who hears these words of Mine and

does them.” The difference between wise and foolish people is simply obedience. Perhaps these two fellows went to the same church and heard the same sermons. Or they were in the same Sunday school class, and each took notes on what they heard. They heard the same truth, but one man did it, and another man left it on the pages of his notebook. I think this is what is referred to as walking in the light. James 1:22 reminds us, “Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

I do not understand everything I read in the Bible. If I did, I would be God, which I am not. I am a lifelong learner or disciple. I focus on what I do know and trust God to reveal what I don’t know when He thinks I’m ready. This is a relationship, and God is my teacher. His Spirit is teaching me a little here and a little there. He’s a really good teacher. He knows what I need to learn and when I need to learn it.

When I think of walking in the light, I imagine God shining His flashlight on a certain part of Scripture. Then when I see it, it is my responsibility to walk in it and put it into practice right away. As I step out in obedience, God then shines His flashlight a little bit further on.

Here are two passages that reinforce this concept. 1 John 1:7: “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” A similar phrase is found in Psalm 119:105: “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

HEARING THE WORD

Most of my life, I have read the Bible in a book made of paper and ink. Now I read my Bible on my laptop computer. I keep several versions open and can study as well as read with many resources at my fingertips. I also listen to the Bible on my smartphone with the YouVersion Bible app. As I do, I recall the words of Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” Listening to the Bible provides a different perspective than reading.

I especially like listening to large chunks of Scripture if I am driving on a long trip. Normally I read a chapter or two at a time on my laptop, and it is edifying to listen to the whole book of Ephesians at one shot. Originally these letters of Paul did not have chapters or verses and were meant to be read in one sitting. By the way, I do sometimes get behind in following my Bible reading schedule, and having this way of listening to Scripture helps me catch up!

NUGGETS OF TRUTH IN EZEKIEL

I had just returned home from a retreat where God evidently showed up, but sadly I did not sense His presence as did my classmates. I was puzzled. Why did I not connect with God's Spirit? Was it sin? I searched my heart, but nothing came to mind. On Monday, I made an appointment to ask counsel of a trusted professor, Dr. Christy Wilson. In his office, I explained my predicament. He listened and recommended I read a sermon by Charles Finney entitled “Breaking Up the Fallow Ground.” After I read this insightful exhortation, I looked up

the passage in Hosea 10:12: “Break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek YHWH, that He may come and rain righteousness upon you.”

I discovered that fallow ground was hard ground after a harsh winter. It needs to be plowed several times to be able to receive a planting. God revealed that my problem was a hard heart. I set aside time to pray, and as I knelt by my bed, I asked God to break up my hard heart. I was moved to tears and sensed a soft and repentant spirit. God also led me to a wonderful nugget of truth in Ezekiel 36:26: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” I have come to love this promise. For several months, I began each morning by asking God to give me a new, fleshy, soft heart based on this passage. He did, thank God.

WORDS OF CONVICTION

The Bible is living and active, and it is a work of the Spirit which convicts us of our sin and our need for a Savior. Conviction, though painful and unpleasant, nonetheless produces good fruit when we agree with God and acknowledge our disobedience.

“YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, ‘If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against YHWH by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby—if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the

lost thing that he found or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt.” (Leviticus 6:1–5)

One of the first times I read the book of Leviticus, I read about people who have sinned by robbing another and need to acknowledge their sin and make restitution, or pay back what they have stolen. I remembered instances where I had stolen items as a teenager and determined to go to the stores, confess my sin and ask their forgiveness, then not only pay back what I owed them but 1/5 or 20% more.

I wrote a letter of apology along with a check for athletic tape I had stolen while a basketball player. Then when I was home from school, I went to the department store where I had taken clothes, as well as the local grocery store where I had stolen candy. I spoke to the owners of these establishments and paid them back the value plus the extra fifth. It was hard but good.

Paul writes to the Corinthian church, “I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.” (2 Corinthians 7:9–10) I have since learned that I was being convicted by the Word of God and by the Spirit of God. I was not aware of my need to make restitution until I read these verses; this was new light for me to walk in. As we have already learned, “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Conviction is not a good feeling. It is grievous and painful, but it leads me to repenting of my sin and having a clear conscience, which feels awesome! Thankfully God does not leave us in a state of repentance but takes us to Jesus. Peter sinned badly in denying three times that He knew Jesus, but notice how Jesus pursued Peter. He restored him by giving him three opportunities to affirm his love for his Savior over a breakfast of fish at the Sea of Galilee.

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ and he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’” (John 21:15–17)

ALL SCRIPTURE POINTS TO JESUS

The Word of God points us to Jesus from Genesis to Revelation. As Jesus was speaking to the religious people of His day, who were familiar with the Old Testament, He reminded them, “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!” (John 5:39)

I sometimes forget to look for Jesus as I am reading the Bible. Several years ago, I was about to begin reading Leviticus. Before I began, I asked the Holy Spirit if He would help me

see Jesus in the reading for this day. “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before YHWH. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” (Leviticus 1:3–4)

I knew Jesus was the male without defect, but what I saw for the first time was the instruction to “lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering.” Immediately I thought of Jesus directing Thomas to lay his hand on Him. Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought of Jesus in this new light. “Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (John 20:27)

Jesus is not only the object of the Bible, He is the Bible. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) Later in the same chapter at verse 14, we read, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is the living Word. He is the life-size revelation of the Bible.

As the Bible reveals the Son, Jesus the Son also reveals His Father. “‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.’” (John 14:6–9)

If I could go the imagination station at Whit's End (from Adventures in Odyssey), I would ask to be taken back in time to Luke 24 when Jesus was walking along the road with Cleopas and his friend. These men did not recognize Jesus, and they began telling Him about the crucifixion. In the 27th verse, Jesus gave the best Bible study ever. I would love to have been there. "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." This explanation of the Old Testament was so meaningful to these men that they exclaimed later, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32)

I assume that Jesus began in Genesis and turned a flashlight on the many places where He was present. Consider the lamb, which first appears when Abraham is about to offer Isaac and God supplies a lamb. Then when the children of Israel were about to leave Egypt, God said, "Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household." (Exodus 12:3)

"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old." (Exodus 12:5)

"Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it." (Exodus 12:7)

"The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt." (Exodus 12:13)

With this background, Jesus explained that Isaiah 53 was about Him. “My servant grew up in YHWH’s presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about His appearance, nothing to attract us to Him. He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on Him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses He carried; it was our sorrows that weighed Him down.

“And we thought His troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for His own sins! He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet YHWH laid on Him the sins of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.” (Isaiah 53:2–7)

If I was not familiar with Isaiah, I might not have seen the clear references to Isaiah 53 in 1 Peter 2:21–25. Peter assumes his audience has a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament.

“Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him Who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Jesus was and is the Lamb of God prophesied hundreds of years earlier by Isaiah. John the Baptist also assumes we know the Old Testament when he declares, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) In Revelation, the Lamb is mentioned over 20 times.

Peter also mentions that Jesus is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Remember Psalm 23, which the Spirit inspired David to write. "YHWH is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of YHWH forever."

He is the Shepherd that seeks us when we stray. I love this gem in Ezekiel: "Thus says the Lord YHWH: 'Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out My sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness....I Myself will be the Shepherd of My sheep, and I Myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord YHWH.'" (Ezekiel 34:11-15)

He is the Good Shepherd described by John: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep....I am the

Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me....My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” (John 10:10–11, 14, 27–28)

In Revelation, there are over 20 references to the Lamb.

Revelation 7:17 captures both thoughts, that Jesus is the Lamb and the Shepherd: “The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

I don’t want to quote every Scripture about the Lamb, for that would keep you from having the joy of discovering these insights yourself with the help of the Spirit. “When the Helper comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, Who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me.” (John 15:26)

Scripture is a seamless garment from Genesis to Revelation.

BE A BEREAN

While I was studying for the ministry in seminary, I took a class which was for youth workers. The big assignment for the semester was to write a one-page outline of every book in the Bible. That was a long but edifying homework assignment. While we were working at this task, I asked some of my fellow scholars why they were taking the class, and their response was that they had never read the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation. They felt that this challenge would familiarize them with the whole Bible for the first time. Please don’t assume that everyone you meet in ministry has read the whole Bible even once.

Paul and Silas had an opportunity to speak about Jesus to the people who lived in Berea. They had just left Thessalonica and, as was their habit, found the local synagogue and explained how Jesus was the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. It is interesting that Luke (who probably wrote the book of Acts) describes the hearers as people who listened, then went home and read the Scriptures themselves to see if what Paul had referenced was accurate.

“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” (Acts 17:10–12)

Once, when my wife and I attended a popular seminar series, we were given a book with open lines to write down what was said. In each section there were also Scripture references, like John 3:16, or Acts 17:10–12. I was so busy writing what the teacher was saying that I did not have time to “examine the Scriptures” that he was basing on teaching on.

A few years later, many people in our congregation attended the seminar, and this time I did not write anything down. Instead, I looked up the Scripture references. What I read surprised me, for I found that as I read the passages mentioned, I did not agree with his conclusion. It seemed as if the Scripture books and verse numbers were listed, but when I took the time to read them myself, I heard a different meaning. Don’t assume that because a teacher mentions a Bible verse, what he is teaching is accurate. Be a Berean and read the Bible yourself.

HOW MANY WISE MEN? HOW OLD WAS JESUS?

When you grow up attending church and singing Christmas carols every December, you assume that there are three wise men, because of the carol, “We Three Kings.” However, when you read the account of the birth and early childhood of Jesus, you discover that maybe there were not three kings. Read these passages and see what you think!

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He Who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “You, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler Who will shepherd my people Israel.”’

“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced

exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy Him.” And he rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’

“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

“But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Rise, take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.’ And he rose and took the child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he

withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that He would be called a Nazarene.” (Matthew 2:1–15)

My conclusion is that there were several wise men, and together they offered him three kinds of gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It is also interesting to note that after Herod learned when they had first seen the star, he ordered the death of those children two years old and younger. Mary and Jesus were also in a house, and not a stable, when the shepherds visited them. Thus, Jesus was probably a toddler and not a newborn babe, even though all the scenes of the birth of Jesus in your Christmas decorations are most likely inaccurate.

FULFILL

It was January 1 and the first Bible reading of the New Year. I was beginning the New Testament again, starting with Matthew. Each year, the Spirit of God highlights and gives me new insights into His Word. In 2022, I was struck by the word “fulfill.”

“‘She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).” (Matthew 1:21–23)

The next day, I saw more fulfillment of Scripture. “‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “And

you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.”” (Matthew 2:5-6)

“[Joseph] rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called My son.’” (Matthew 2:14-15)

Then in 2024, I noticed there were several Old Testament passages referenced in Matthew 21 (for it is January 21st as I write this). But I especially noticed the passage about Jesus entering into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. “When they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, “The Lord needs them,” and he will send them at once.’ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”’” (Matthew 21:1-5)

After I read this, I pondered on this idea of fulfilling Scripture. Did God the Father direct His Son to do this, or was it the Spirit of God, or was it in the mind of Jesus Himself? I asked God and sensed that it was a team effort :-). What a great team the Triune God makes!

BORN FROM ABOVE

I was a teenager when I first heard the good news. I had been invited to attend a camp in the Rocky Mountains, which is a long way from Pittsburgh, PA, where I lived at the time. However, it seemed like a wonderful opportunity, so I boarded a bus and for the next three days got to know the other kids going to the camp. I noticed something different about them but didn't know how to describe it. Pretty soon, I learned that the camp in Colorado was a Christian camp, and my new friends were all involved in a ministry called Young Life. No one asked me if I was a Christian or a believer, for I had attended church since I was a baby. Instead, someone asked me if I had met Jesus. That was a great question.

Once we arrived at camp, we were assigned a cabin with a counselor. Each morning, we had devotions where we studied the Bible, and in the evenings the whole camp gathered for meetings. Everything I heard was good news. I learned that I could have a fresh start by asking God to forgive my sins. I also heard that I needed to ask God to come into my heart and be my Savior. One afternoon, I found a quiet spot on the side of a mountain and asked God to forgive my sins and come into my heart, and He did. I was different inside. I had met Jesus, myself. I told my counselor and the other campers in my cabin.

I recognize now that I had indeed entered into the reality of this powerful passage: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses

and is saved.” (Romans 10:9–10) According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, I was a new Steve: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

As Jesus explained this new birth in John 3:3–6, I had been born anew, or born from above, or born again. “‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’”

I was about to enter high school when God graciously met me, and I met Him, in Colorado. I knew the assistant principal and asked him when and where the club for Young Life met. He searched his records and could not find them. Several months later, I was given a slip of paper with an address and told that this would be where the “club” was meeting this week. Our Young Life group was not in the school but met at different people’s homes during the week. I began to attend these meetings and enjoyed them.

I was not consistent in my attendance, and my newfound relationship with God suffered. I heard someone describe this kind of journey as a roller coaster. I was up and then down. One weekend, I attended a retreat and rededicated myself to follow Jesus. Sadly, the roller coaster ride continued into my third year of college. I had tasted God’s goodness and knew He was real but was not a faithful follower until I read a book.

In the spring of my junior year, the Dean of Student Affairs, who was a good friend and mentor of mine, told me of an

opportunity to serve as a counselor for troubled teens in the Pocono Mountains of Northeast Pennsylvania. These young people would be accompanied by their probation officers. I had no experience working with folks like this and sought help in our local library. I found a book called *The Cross and the Switchblade*, written by David Wilkerson, who founded Teen Challenge.

As I read this book, God worked in my heart. Partway through reading it, I put the book down and said, “Okay, God, here we go!” God knew what I meant; I was committed to following Him fully. I worked eight weeks at the camp, then headed back to college determined to seek first His kingdom.

When I left school, there was one believer in my circle of friends. When I returned, I discovered that God had been at work in the hearts of three other men, and the five of us became a team. I needed fellowship, and we studied the Bible, prayed together, and built each other up. We are still friends to this day.

FAITH OVER FEELING

As a new believer, I received wise counsel from a Christian brother. He urged me to memorize 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” He then explained that when I sinned and asked God to forgive cleanse me, I might be tempted to believe God had not forgiven me because I may not “feel forgiven.” He was right! However, I had just learned the important truth that God’s Word is reliable even when my emotions may not agree.

Since then, I have added other verses for ammunition against doubt and unbelief, such as Psalm 103:10–13: “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so YHWH shows compassion to those who fear Him.”

Paul describes this approach to life as “walking by faith” and not by feelings: “We walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7) The Word of God is always true. As this verse declares, when we confess to God, then God, Who is faithful and just, will forgive and cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness. Period. End of story. Amen!

HOPE

In reading the Bible through each year, I have found much encouragement from men like David, who sinned grievously and yet was fully restored to God. Paul reminds us, “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4) I certainly have found hope in considering the life of David.

If you are not familiar with David, please read 1 Samuel. As you do, you will want to keep reading the amazing life that this man lived. He began as a humble shepherd and the youngest son in a large family. He became a gifted singer and a warrior who killed a giant. When he became king, he sinned grievously with another man’s wife and then had the man murdered. All the details are in Scripture for all to know.

When he was confronted by the prophet Nathan, he acknowledged that he had indeed violated God's commands. The results of his sin wreaked havoc in his own family for years. Nonetheless, David sought God and asked Him for forgiveness. Psalm 51 is David's prayer. I have used the language of his prayer many times when I have sinned. Here are seven of my favorite verses:

"Have mercy on me, O God, because of Your unfailing love. Because of Your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against You, and You alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in Your sight." (Psalm 51:1-4)

"Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from Your presence, and don't take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and make me willing to obey You." (Psalm 51:10-12)

THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN

Faith is believing what we cannot see yet know is true. My favorite definition of faith is found in Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." One of the reasons I have found reading my Bible daily to be so important to my new life in Christ is the important connection between the Scripture and faith. Paul says in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes from hearing, and

hearing through the Word of Christ.” The more time I spend in the inspired, life-giving words of truth, the more my faith is solidified. Truth feeds my faith.

Hebrews 11 is an incredible testimonial of the men and women of God who lived by faith. Within the 40 verses of this one chapter, the word “faith” is mentioned 26 times. When you have a few minutes and need some encouragement, read this blessed chapter and learn about our forefathers who lived and died in faith. I am always inspired to seek Him diligently and intentionally when I read the seventh verse: “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.”

SUFFERING SAINTS

When you read Hebrews 11, you will discover that following God is not easy. I mistakenly thought that when I received Jesus as my Savior, I would have peace, joy, and abundant life while escaping life’s problems. I learned this lesson from a saint who had endured great personal tragedy in her life and had much practical wisdom to pass on to me. Her name is Elisabeth Elliott. Her first husband, Jim, died from a spear in the jungle of Ecuador, and her second husband, Addison, died of cancer.

Listen to her tell how the Scripture encouraged her when she was a young bride in Ecuador. This excerpt is taken from her newsletter and reprinted with her permission in Hymns for Family Worship: “Hymns will get you through the night. In January of 1956, when five women were waiting with bated breath to find out whether our husbands were dead or alive, I

lay in bed in Nate Saint's home, my little daughter Valerie sick in a crib beside me. The hymn "How Firm a Foundation," with those magnificent words taken from Isaiah 43:1-2, sustained me, especially stanzas 2, 3, and 6, memorized when I was a child in our daily family prayer time:

Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.
When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee thy trials to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.
The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!"

For the better part of one year, I rented a room from Elisabeth while a student in seminary. I had the privilege of eating breakfast and dinner with her and another student. In December of that year, I was awakened by Elisabeth telling me my father was on the phone. It was 3:00 a.m. I made my way to the kitchen to discover my younger brother had been killed in an automobile accident. I was numb with grief.

A few hours later, she drove me to the airport and said one sentence which transformed my understanding of God and His ways: "God does not exempt us from suffering, but transforms us in it." I saw clearly that God does not guarantee us a life with no difficulties but does promise to be with us in them. Isaiah 43:1-2 that sustained Elisabeth reads, "Thus says YHWH, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by

name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

HYMNS ABOUT HIM

If you have read *Through Gates of Splendor* by Elisabeth Elliott or followed her life, you know she endured many difficult valley experiences. She once shared that what encouraged her during these dark times were phrases from hymns she had learned as a child. Before she and her siblings would go to school, their family would gather and read one chapter of Scripture and sing one hymn. As I recall, they began with number 1 in their hymnbook on January 1 and continued throughout the year. These hymns were stored in her mind and heart and became a source of comfort and solace when she needed help.

We know from Scripture that David worshipped God through music and wrote hundreds of hymns, which we call Psalms. These Psalms have blessed millions of believers ever since. Moses wrote a hymn. Jesus led His disciples in a hymn after He had shared the Lord’s Supper with them: “When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Matthew 26:30)

Paul and Silas sang hymns while in prison. “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” (Acts 16:25) Paul later directed that believers should speak “one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:19)

I have come to love hymns, especially the inspired classics that were written long ago and have stood the test of time. When our family was young, I sought to emulate Elisabeth Elliott's home, and we sang one hymn along with reading a chapter of the Bible daily. We even memorized several and could sing them together when driving on a long trip.

Hymns pick up my spirit. They are powerful declarations of truth. God has now led me to sing several hymns a day, along with reading Scripture, in my personal times of prayer and waiting on God. I think this is consistent with Psalms 149:6: "Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands." I continue to memorize more of these spiritual songs, and they have been a huge faith-builder to my walk with God. David taught us to "come into His presence with singing, and enter into His courts with praise." I am doing this.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE SCRIPTURES

Reading my Bible regularly has proved to be a source of hope when I have gone through difficult seasons in my life. And I remembered Elisabeth's advice in 1987 when my fourth son was born with Down Syndrome. At the time, I did not know anything about his condition. The midwife who delivered John sat us down and informed us that our son was different. She then told us she did not know if he would be able to walk, talk, or eat without a feeding tube. We could have been despondent, but in the room where John had just been born, there was a plaque with the words of Romans 6:23: "The free gift of God

is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” My dear wife looked at that passage and said to herself, “I can raise him to live forever.”

The next 10 months were very difficult as John, and our whole family, endured 4 major surgeries. We were all suffering. I tried to scale back my responsibilities but to no avail. The next year we resigned from all our commitments and moved to a different state to regroup as a family. I was putting one foot in front of the other, but I was not doing well. I call my condition survival mode. I continued to read the Bible, but I was only reading the Psalms. I read them over and over. I knew I needed to keep reading God’s Word every day, especially now when I was so needy.

One day I read Psalm 55 and found such encouragement and hope. It was verse 22: “Cast your burden on YHWH, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved.” The reason this particular verse was so important to me at that time was that I felt like I was barely holding myself together. I felt like Humpty Dumpty. I knew that I was at the breaking point and was afraid to even tell anyone how desperate I was for fear that I would fall apart, and all the king’s horses and all the king’s men wouldn’t be able to put Steve back together again.

Yet here was God telling me through His living Word that if I cast my burden on Him, or as a friend puts it, place all my cares in the lap of Jesus, then He would sustain me. In fact, He would not permit me to fall apart, or as the passage read, “to be moved.” What an incredible promise. What fresh hope I felt. I made an appointment in my mind to meet God on the coming Saturday. The morning came. I went into my bedroom, locked the door, knelt by my bed, and began

to sob as I poured out my fears and concerns to God. I placed them all in His lap. At that point, I began to heal. I arose with a great weight lifted off my shoulders. Truly His word gives hope. “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

This experience also taught me to take my burdens to God as soon as I began to carry them. I had often sung a hymn called “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” I enjoyed the song but had not fully grasped the meaning of the words. Now I recognize the depth of this hymn, particularly the first verse: “What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

I had forfeited peace and carried needless pain because I had not quickly carried everything to God in prayer.

GERBILS

1988–1990 was a hard season for our family. I was living day-to-day in survival mode with just enough energy to make meals, hold down a job, and care for our family. During these difficult years, my wife had chronic immune diseases and was using her limited energies to take care of our youngest child, who was a baby with Down syndrome. She was also continuing to homeschool our other three boys.

We were using a unit study program called KONOS, where the kids studied science, history, literature, and geography together as a family. This particular week, my wife had

introduced the weekly topic, which had something to do with reproduction. Now hold that thought while I paint the fuller picture.

A few weeks before, our boys had prevailed upon Sandi to buy them gerbils. I have allergies, so we couldn't have a dog, which is my definition of a good pet. To me, turtles and fish are not really pets. Sandi acquiesced to their request, but she was very insistent that we get two males because she didn't want them to breed, get out of that cage, and infiltrate the furniture. They ventured to the pet store and came home with two gerbils which they named Jim Thorpe, my favorite athlete of all time, and Georgie Russell, who was Davy Crockett's faithful companion they had seen on a video. The boys were thrilled with their gerbils and their tidy little cage.

Now let's go back to school as my wife introduces the new topic, which she followed up by passing out books for the kids to read. Normally, if Sandi had more energy, she would have given a neat hands-on illustration to kick off the new unit. KONOS had multiple suggestions of how to make an impression of the subject matter, but alas, Sandi was weary.

Imagine our surprise and the boys' delight when they woke up Tuesday morning to discover the gerbils had a litter. Of course, this was a miracle because they were males. Our observant sons then renamed Jim Thorpe "Jemima Thorpe," for she was obviously the mom.

What is my point in telling this story? Well, God taught me an important truth that day. He knew that Sandi and I were doing the best we could, but we did not have much power. We meant well, but physically, we were doing the minimum.

God, knowing our situation better than we did, looked down from heaven and said to Himself, “That woman needs an illustration.” Woomp! A litter of gerbils miraculously appears!!

Immediately, the Spirit brought this passage of Scripture to my mind, Isaiah 54:13: “All your children shall be taught by YHWH, and great shall be the peace of your children.” God made me know that day that He loved our children more than we did. He wanted them to have a good educational experience more than we did. I knew in a new way that God is for us. He is on our team, and He will teach our kids. I can look back now, and I say, “We did the best we could with what we had, and God filled in the gaps.” He really does care for us. Amen.

ASK

I had only been following Jesus fully for a year or so when I began reading biographies of earnest Christians such as Hudson Taylor and George Müller. When these men were in need, they asked God, and only God, to provide for them. Hudson Taylor was a missionary in China and was a long way from his home and support team in England. One of his favorite passages was, “It is better to trust in YHWH than to put confidence in princes.” He was encouraged by George Müller, who cared for thousands of orphans. One morning, he had 300 children dressed and ready for school; however, there was no food. George asked the children to find their places at the tables. Then, he prayed. Soon a baker delivered bread, followed by the milkman, and the children were fed and went off to school.

As I read these inspired accounts of faith, I was encouraged to try this manner of living myself. One fall, I was looking for

a pair of work boots. I normally bought a pair each year and wore them in the fall and winter when the weather turned cold and snowy. Then, after they were broken in, I wore them as I painted houses in the summer. I did not have the funds to purchase a pair this year and decided to pray. Without telling any of my friends or family, I asked God to for work boots.

That fall, my mom and dad were visiting me and wanted to see the city of Gloucester. As we walked through the town, my mom wanted to go into a certain shop. I was standing in the shop, bored and disinterested, when I observed a large, wire mesh bin filled with shoes with a sign which read “Fire Sale.” My interest was piqued, and I wandered over to discover a pair of size 13 work boots. I did not see any damage on them and bought them for one dollar!! I was amazed and encouraged. God had heard my prayer and provided just what I needed. Those boots meant more to me than checks to China or bread for orphans. Even after I wore them out, I kept one as a reminder that God hears our prayers!

ASKING GOD FOR A LOVE OF THE TRUTH

I began reading the Bible as a young man who was zealous to follow Jesus fully. I was committed to seeking first the Kingdom of God. I knew that a knowledge of the Bible was essential for equipping me to help others. I was also reading missionary biographies, such as Hudson Taylor, George Müller, Jim Elliott, and many others. I observed that these men of God shared a love for the Bible and their daily quiet time with God. I also noticed how much King David, one of my favorite people, loved the words of God. Notice what he says in the Psalms:

“The law of YHWH is perfect, restoring the soul: The testimony of YHWH is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of YHWH are right, rejoicing the heart: The commandment of YHWH is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of YHWH is clean, enduring forever: The ordinances of YHWH are true, and righteous altogether.” (Psalm 19:7–9) In 119:97, he says, “Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.”

God, speaking through Moses, exhorts parents to love God’s Word and have it occupy a special place in our hearts. “Hear, O Israel! YHWH is our God, YHWH is one! You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.” (Deuteronomy 6:4–6)

When I looked in the mirror and searched my own heart, I admitted that I did not love the law like David did. About the same time, I was reading the book of 2 Thessalonians and discovered this sentence, which helped me immensely: “They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (2:10) I like the word “received,” for it implied that this was something I could ask for and receive. I then prayed and asked God to give me a love for the truth, and He did!!

BATTLING WITH THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

“‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But He answered, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’ Then the devil took Him to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“He will command His angels concerning you,” and “On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.” Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ The devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.”’ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him.” (Matthew 4:3–11)

Notice that every instance where the devil attacks Jesus, He responds by saying, “It is written,” then quotes Scripture and declares the truth. We have the same enemy that Jesus did. He is described in Revelation 12:10: “The accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.” In John 8:44, Jesus tells us more about our enemy: “The devil...he was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

I have been tempted many times to feel like I could never be who I was supposed to be. I have been tempted to believe that the battle to overcome sin and the flesh was hopeless. I have been tempted to believe God did not really love me. I now am convinced these lies and accusations came from the devil. Ephesians 6:17 makes us know that the Word of God is not only food and truth, it is also a weapon to fight the lies and accusations of our enemy. “Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” When

tempted, my response is the same as the Son of God; I declare the truth and say, “It is written,” followed by an appropriate passage. Here are two of my favorite truths:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) “God is love,” (1 John 4:8), and God does not change, as we read in Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, and because He never changes, there is no condemnation, and nothing can separate us from His love. “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38–39)

THE WASHING OF WATER WITH THE WORD

Even when I do not comprehend everything I am reading in the Bible, I know that my spirit is positively affected. There is a cleansing component of being in God’s inspired Word. Here are two passages that describe the mysterious benefit of reading and listening to inspired words of life:

“Jesus told His followers, ‘Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.’” (John 15:3)

Similarly, Paul teaches men, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present

the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25–27)

I don’t fully understand this concept, but I receive it by faith. Another passage that speaks to me is John 17:14–17: “I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth.”

“Sanctify” is not a word we use much, but it means to set apart as holy. I like to think of reading the Word of God as taking a bath in truth. It changes me and sanctifies me. Jesus also said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5).

Paul reinforces this washing when he writes to Timothy, “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration [i.e. bath of new birth] and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” (Titus 3:4–6)

WORDS OF LIFE

The first Scripture I refer to in this book is, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4) Jesus said this after He had spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted to turn stones into bread, since he had not eaten in all that time. As I

mentioned, Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. There is more in this chapter of Deuteronomy than I originally referenced. My focus has been on the three words, “by every word” but this verse also contains the wonderful promise, that as we read every word we live and find life.

“You shall remember the whole way that YHWH your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of YHWH.” (Deuteronomy 8:2–3) The Word of God is true food. Every word of God satisfies and gives life. Scripture encourages me, feeds my mind, revives my spirit, and refreshes my heart.

We live by every word that comes from God. God’s words are true food. Every word of God satisfies and gives life. In John 6:63, Jesus says, “It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The Words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.”

I have read the whole Bible many times, and it unlike any other book I have ever read. The words of God are alive. They are truly an instrument of God the Spirit. He uses the inspired words to reveal what is in my heart. “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

In the next-to-last chapter of John, we read, “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30–31). When those who want to know more about God ask me which book of the Bible is a good one to begin reading, I recommend John. This book was written to help us believe in Jesus and find new life.

Peter echoes this idea: “You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living Word of God. As the Scriptures say, ‘People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the Word of the Lord remains forever.’” (1 Peter 1:22–25)

As I was listening to the Bible yesterday, I discovered a few more verses that connect the Word of God to new life and revival. The first one likens someone who meditates on the Bible to a tree planted by a stream of water. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of YHWH, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” (Psalm 1:1–3)

As you may have discovered, Psalm 119 expresses appreciation and affection for all of God’s Word. “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Verse 97) In

verse 93, we see how God's Word has revived the author. "I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have revived me."

Psalms 19 is a love poem between David and the Scripture. "The law of YHWH is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of YHWH is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of YHWH are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of YHWH is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of YHWH is clean, enduring forever; the rules of YHWH are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." (Psalm 19:7–10) Don't miss the first verse in this inspiring chunk of truth: "The law of YHWH is perfect, reviving the soul."

THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD

Even though Moses, David, Isaiah, Matthew, Paul, Peter, John, and others penned the letters, historical records, and words that we read in the Bible today, they were inspired by God Himself. "Inspired" means the authors were in-Spirited by the Holy Spirit. "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:20–21)

Paul affirms the inspiration of Scripture in his letter to Timothy: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16). "Breathed out" is another way of stating that God's words are inspired.

Paul affirms that the words of Isaiah the prophet were inspired by the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”’” (Acts 28:25–26)

Jesus knew that David was inspired by the Spirit of God: “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls Him Lord, saying, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies under Your feet?’”’ (Matthew 22:41–44, this makes more sense when you realize it is “YHWH says to my Lord” in Hebrew). Jesus quotes Psalm 110, written by David, but He makes it clear that David was “in the Spirit” and the Spirit was the one Who helped David to write this Psalm.

Each author has a unique way of expressing truth. Some people are attracted to Paul’s writing style, while others like the systematic approach of Luke in writing the Gospel of Luke and Acts. While I appreciate each of these men, my personal favorite is John in his gospel and his letters. He is direct and forthright, yet deep at the same time. However, regardless of who appeals to us, it is the same Spirit of God Who is carrying along each of these authors.

GOD'S WORD IS DOABLE

“This commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the Word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of YHWH your God that I command you today, by loving YHWH your God, by walking in His ways, and by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and YHWH your God will bless you.” (Deuteronomy 30:11–16)

When we obey the truth, God guarantees that we will not merely exist, but live! “O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live.” (Deuteronomy 4:1)

God’s heart for His people is that we will live and prosper in all that we do. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of YHWH, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” (Psalm 1:1–3)

With God’s help, I have been reading and obeying His Word for decades. I have lived a full and prosperous life. God has blessed our hearts, our family, our ministry, our business endeavors, and our health. I am truly living in the best sense

of this word. His Word has also helped me in finding a wife, as you will see in the next section. “House and riches are an inheritance from fathers; but a prudent wife is from YHWH.” (Proverbs 19:14)

DISCERNING THE THOUGHTS OF THE HEART

“The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

Sandi and I had been seeking God and trying to discern if it was His will for us to be married. We knew we had been led to begin intentionally courting that summer, and even though we each had many encouraging affirmations from God, we still weren’t fully convinced. God had given several Scriptures to encourage Sandi, and He had helped me with a verse from a Christmas song. I was driving one afternoon and asking God what His will was for us. The Spirit quickened a verse from “O Little Town of Bethlehem”: “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight!” I simply had cold feet, and the song made me know that Jesus was sufficient for my hopes and fears.

At the end of the year, we were visiting my parents in Pittsburgh on New Year’s Eve. While my mom and dad were entertaining their friends in the living room, Sandi and I had found a quiet room and were reading our Bibles together. The schedule we both followed had us reading the last few

chapters of Revelation, for it was the last day of the year. As we concentrated quietly, the sharp sword of the Word revealed my issues and gave me the confirmation I had been asking for.

A few months earlier, I had been seeking counsel from a godly mentor for his input on the situation, especially since he had known Sandi her whole life. He had expressed concern about the many physical ailments she had battled since she was in elementary school. I was aware of these concerns and her frequent headaches. However, despite her physical weakness, her character and spiritual set of soul were stellar. The words God gave me for her were “faithful and true.” There was a song in our hymnal that reminded me of her whenever we sang it. The chorus declares, “Not to the strong is the battle, not to the swift is the race, but to the true and the faithful, victory is promised through grace.”

That evening, we read Revelation 19, and the 11th verse, describing Jesus, says, “I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True.” These words seemed to be highlighted and were a wonderful confirmation that Sandi had the qualities that were most important despite her physical weaknesses.

Then two chapters later, I noticed the phrase “fearful and unbelieving” at the end of a longer passage. I was convicted by this Scripture as I saw that I was plain fearful and not walking in faith. I also observed that I did not want to be one of the company whose part was to be in the lake of fire!!

“He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’ Then He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who

thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:5-8)

When we finished the last chapter together, I recognized that God’s Word had confirmed that Sandi was faithful and true, and I was fearful and unbelieving. Since my needs were revealed and my concerns were addressed, I simply needed to obey God. I know it was not romantic, but as soon as we closed the Bible, I turned and asked her to marry me, and she said yes! :-)

THE PRIMACY OF SCRIPTURE IN THE HARDEST AND BEST YEAR OF MY LIFE

At a conference in Alaska, I was speaking to parents on Deuteronomy 6:7: “You shall teach [these words] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” At the close of the session, a wise mother asked me: “Why do you always leave out the two previous verses?” I didn’t know and looked them up. “You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-6)

Immediately, a light bulb went off in my mind, and I observed the order and wisdom in God’s plan for parents. Before we can

teach our children to love God and His Word, we need to love God and His Word. I began asking God to help me love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. As I was asking God to work in my heart, I thought about the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:4: “You have abandoned the love you had at first.”

This admonition was directed to the church, followers of Jesus. I knew I loved God when I first met Him on the side of a mountain in Colorado. And I knew I loved Him when I recommitted my life to seeking first His kingdom. But did I love Him now? Did I love God with everything in me? I did not want to lose my first love but to have it rekindled.

As I sought God to help me love Him, I wondered if Paul had encountered the same spiritual condition with the Ephesian church that prompted Jesus’ stern admonition in Revelation 2. I decided to reread the book of Ephesians. As I did, I saw how Paul was laboring to help them take in God’s love and especially His grace. I began to pray for myself based on a prayer Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:14–19.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

This is a long prayer and covers a lot of ground, so I have highlighted two phrases that stuck out to me, “rooted and grounded in love” and “to know the love of Christ.” asked God to make me know the love of Christ and put my roots down deep in His love. God answered that prayer, as I knew He would. But how He answered it was a surprise. I thought He would change my heart and I would awaken in the morning with a new affection for God. Instead, through sermons, hymns, Scripture, and my “special” son with Down Syndrome, God began making me know how much He loved me.

I remonstrated with God and said that while I appreciated this shower of blessing, I was wanting to love Him more, not learn more about how much He loved me. As soon as I uttered these words, 1 John 4:19 came to mind: “We love because He first loved us.” Of course! The more we comprehend His love for us, the more we will love Him in return. Up to this point in my life, I had little trouble believing God loved others, but I found it difficult to fathom that He loved me. However, I was beginning to taste His love and affection in a new way. I knew I needed to have my mind transformed, though, and thus began devoting many hours to searching the Scriptures. I studied to increase my understanding of God’s steadfast love, His grace, and His unfailing affection towards His adopted children. I knew I needed the Word of God to transform and renew my thinking.

BREAKTHROUGH

In my quest to comprehend and be rooted and grounded in love, I encountered a verse in John 15, which is now my favorite Scripture: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” (John 15:9) I had read those words many times, but that day it was as if they were all in caps. Jesus is addressing His disciples the night before He is to be crucified. He wants them to know of His love and care for each of them. As I reread these words, I was astounded, for I saw that as much as His Dad loved Him, that is how much Jesus loves us. Wow!

As I pondered this declaration, I thought about the relationship of the Father with the Son. The one instance where we have the clearest picture is at the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16–17: “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased.”

Consider all the love that is packed into the words that the Father communicated to His boy. You are My Son. My beloved Son. And I am well-pleased with You. Since many of us are familiar with these words, please give me some latitude to piece together a new translation so we may comprehend this threefold truth in a new way. “This is My boy!! I love Him to pieces!! And every time I see Him, He brings me great joy!!”

THE GREAT NEWS

Now when you put these two passages together, we see that because of Jesus and His work on the cross, God the Father now looks at us and says, “You are my adopted children!! I love you to pieces!! And every time I see you, you bring Me great joy!!” After following Jesus for decades, I realized that I was trying to do things so that I would be loved, and would belong, and would be pleasing to God. In 2012, my eyes were opened, and I saw for the first time that because of the tremendous price Jesus paid on the cross, I was already loved, adopted, and pleasing to God.

Old patterns of thinking do not change overnight, and I began spending hours and hours searching the Scriptures to verify this Great News. Romans 12:2 says, “Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.” I needed to change the way I had been thinking. Here are some powerful verses that make us know we are loved, forgiven, clothed, and adopted. May they encourage you as much as they have encouraged me. One of my friends finds that when she sees Scriptures arranged as below, she tends to gloss over them. However, when she reads them aloud, she gets the full benefit of these truths.

Loved

1. “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love.” (John 15:9)
2. “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

3. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)
4. "I am convinced that neither death, nor life... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38–39)

Forgiven

1. "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)
2. "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18)
3. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8–9)
4. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us." (Psalm 103:12)

Clothed

1. "I will rejoice greatly in YHWH, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10)
2. "Let Your priests, O YHWH, be clothed with salvation." (2 Chronicles 6:41)

3. "Come now, let us reason together, says YHWH: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)
4. "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14)

Adopted

1. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.... Beloved, we are God's children now." (1 John 3:1-2)
2. "You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by Whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." (Romans 8:15-16)
3. "Before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 1:4-5)
4. "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26)

KNOWN

One of my battles was believing that God loved and liked me. I had no trouble believing that He cared for others, just not myself. I was convinced that if He really knew me, He wouldn't care for me, for I knew things about me that no one else knew. I talked to God about this, and immediately the Spirit of God directed my attention to Psalm 139. The whole Psalm is amazing, but I have chosen a few key Scriptures.

"O YHWH, You have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do." (Psalm 139:1-3)

"You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are Your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, You are still with me!" (Psalm 139:15-18)

Bottom line, God knows me better than anyone, and He chose to send His Son to die for me, even when I was a sinner. "This is real love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." (1 John 4:10)

One phrase in a gospel song by the Gaithers resonates with my heart: "The One Who knows me best, loves me most!" Paul echoes this sentiment with this marvelous phrase into

Galatians 4:9: “Now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you).” With full assurance we can attest that with God we are fully known and fully loved.

Even after I had tasted God’s love and affection in such a marvelous way and had been transformed in my thinking, I still had some lingering issues. Often in the morning, I would awaken to doubts of God’s love. I seemed to wake up each morning in a cloud of self-condemnation. In my need, I asked God for help. The Spirit led me to two Scriptures in the Psalms, which I prayed for many days thereafter: “Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” (Psalm 90:14) And, “Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love, for in You I trust.” (Psalm 143:8) I no longer need to pray these prayers, for I am more rooted and grounded in the love of Christ than ever before. I now awaken with joy, for I know in my heart of hearts that my Dad loves and likes me.

WAITING ON GOD

After two years of studying and marinating in the truth of God’s love and grace, I waited on God for the first time. Many Scriptures encourage us to be still and know God, but I had never incorporated this practice into my regular routine. Consider these verses from the Psalms: “Be still before YHWH and wait patiently for Him.” (Psalm 37:7) “I wait for YHWH, my soul waits, and in His Word I hope; my soul waits for YHWH more than watchmen for the morning.” (Psalm 130:5–6) “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

For decades I served God, but was never quiet and still to enjoy His presence. In retrospect, I think it was because I did

not believe in my heart of hearts that God smiled when I drew near to Him. I did not believe that He liked me and enjoyed hanging out with me. However, now God has broken through to my heart. He has made me know that because of Jesus and His magnificent and effective salvation, He loves me just as much as He loves His Son.

On a sunny, crisp day in the fall, I met with God on a granite overlook in the Pocono Mountains. That special day, I rode my bike a few miles, walked to Lookout Point, and sat down. God met me there as I sought Him. I was still and silent, and God drew near. We communed – for this is the best word I know to describe the experience – for almost an hour. Sometimes I talked (silently); other times I listened, but we were together, a Father with His son. I am near to tears even as I write this. That experience was incredibly precious. It had taken two years for the precious truths of the Gospel to work their way from my head to my inner heart, and now I Was connected to my Dad as never before. I was tasting and seeing that God is good.

TASTE AND SEE

After waiting on God and meeting Him at Lookout Point, I was tasting and experiencing His presence. I was moving from a distant, arms-length awareness of God to an up-close and personal connection. My relationship with God was blossoming. One morning, during my regular devotion time, I sensed the Holy Spirit communicate to me, “You’re solid on the truth. Let’s work on the spirit.” I recognized these words from John 4:23, when Jesus conversed with the Samaritan

woman at the well. He said, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him."

Since God knows how to communicate with each one of His children, He was making me recognize that He wanted me to deepen my relationship with Him. This new phase of my journey, which emphasizes the "spirit" and encourages my relationship with God, does not diminish the "truths" I have known and embraced for decades; it builds upon them. The spirit and the truth go together. I cling to all I have learned about how my sin separates me from God and how the death of Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, takes away my sin and restores me to God. I know that it is only because of Jesus that I am cleansed and forgiven, washed and clothed, adopted and well-pleasing. It is the blood of Jesus which has brought me near to God and emboldens me to come before His throne.

WALKS WITH GOD

When I first began to practice being still before the Lord, I would do it while sitting in my leather recliner after reading my Bible. But I often found I was not only still, I was napping! Since I had met God outdoors the first time, I began to walk through my neighborhood to wait on God. Sometimes the Spirit and I jokingly refer to these times as my "walks with God," or "walking in the Spirit." Getting outside with no distractions has proven effective and beneficial. On these excursions, God has my undivided attention. It is just the two of us. These special times have become very meaningful and are one of the highlights of each day.

On one walk, the Spirit of God told me that we were going to do something different that day. I asked what I should do, and He directed me to sing. I sang (silently) “Rejoice, the Lord is King” as I walked on the sidewalk, because I know all four verses and it is a favorite hymn of mine. Praising God through music was exhilarating. I felt like I was joining the angels as I began with worship, and my spirit was encouraged.

I asked what I was to do next, and He said to give thanks. I began giving thanks and spent several minutes doing so. The more I exercised my thanks muscles, the more things I thought of for which to be thankful. I was enjoying this new approach. I expressed gratitude for the sunshine, my family, and practical items. Then I began to be thankful for what God has done for me. I thanked Him for loving and liking me, for cleansing me from sin, for clothing me in the righteousness of Jesus. Once I developed some momentum, my perspective on the day had already improved. I felt spiritually rich!

Then I inquired of the Spirit for the next step, and He directed me to “Bless His name!” I took this to mean I was to praise God for Who He is. After singing and giving thanks for what He has done for me, I now had the opportunity and privilege to bless Him for His attributes and His person. As I pondered the nature of God, my heart and mind adjusted to this new regimen, and I focused on what I knew about Him. God is good. He is patient. He is kind. He is the Creator. He is our shepherd. This focus on His character and nature was challenging, yet it produced excellent fruit. I reveled in the knowledge and awareness of God’s patience, goodness, and kindness.

After fifteen minutes of singing, giving thanks, and blessing His name, I recognized that I was following the principles of

Psalm 100 and was coming into His presence as it says in Psalm 100:2: “Come before His presence with singing.” While this way of drawing near to God was new to me, it was how David came near to God thousands of years ago. I used to view Psalm 100 as a nice, uplifting, typical Psalm. However, since I have tasted and experienced the presence and person of God many times while faithfully applying these principles, I recognize this Psalm is similar to the wardrobe in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; it is a portal into God’s presence.

DIGGING DEEPER

The more I sought God based on these passages, the more the verses in Psalm 100 came to life. I began digging into the Hebrew origins of each word and discovered that “joyful noise” is more akin to making a joyful militant shout! The specific word that is used in Psalm 100:1 is *Ha-Riu*. It is a derivation or cognate of the root word *Rua*, which means to raise a shout or give a blast. *Ha-Riu* is only used 12 times in the Bible, and two of these instances are in Joshua 6:10: “Joshua commanded the people, ‘You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout.’”

I have now added this to my daily discipline of seeking God according to the precepts of Psalm 100. I first give a shout, like “Hallelujah!” or “Praise YHWH!” or I echo the words of Moses, which he declared when the ark set out: “Arise, O YHWH, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.” And as I sing, I choose to

sing happily, for God's Word directs me to "make a joyful noise to YHWH, all the earth! Serve YHWH with gladness!" (Psalm 100:1-2a)

You may think I am conversant in Hebrew; however, I am not. But God has led me to a wonderful Bible resource called Bible Hub which I consult regularly on my computer, and I also use the app on my phone. I have taken several Hebrew classes, but looking through several books to access root meanings is arduous and time consuming. With BibleHub, I am able to accomplish in minutes what used to take me hours. It is user friendly and does not require training in Greek and Hebrew to use. I put together a short video tutorial on Youtube which you can locate by searching for Building Faith Families or Steve Demme.

STILL READING, GROWING, LEARNING, AND PRESSING ON TO KNOW

I could write much more of how God continues to teach me and lead me into a deeper understanding of His will and His ways. The best part of growing in my understanding of Scripture is that my knowledge of God is also increasing. Peter says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18). I am doing that. There is another gem in Hosea that I aspire to: "Let us know; let us press on to know YHWH; His going out is sure as the dawn; He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." (Hosea 6:3)

It is my hope that you will be inspired to begin your own journey of reading, growing, and pressing on to know God.

BIBLE READING CHARTS

As you now know, daily Bible reading has proven to be a significant part of my journey, along with regular fellowship with other believers who love God and His Word. The Bible reading charts I have referenced may be found at BuildingFaithandFamily.org under Resources. If you would like to communicate with me, my email is spdemme@gmail.com.



buildingfaithfamilies.org/bible-resources/

LEARN THE GREEK ALPHABET

If you would like to learn the letters of the Greek alphabet, you can watch a video where I teach this skill in under ten minutes.



<https://youtu.be/BQVoz-HX2cA>

LEARN THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

I also made a short video which has a fun way of learning the books of the New Testament.



<https://youtu.be/uPmifDA1ak0>

Both of these videos are found on my YouTube channel Steve Demme, Building Faith Families in the section titled: Popular Videos.

STEWARDSHIP, A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO PERSONAL FINANCE

If you have been encouraged by these anecdotes, consider the Stewardship Curriculum which has 36 Biblical Studies along with 36 sections which relate how I apply Scriptural principles in my own life. I wrote this for teens who are thinking about getting a paying job, perhaps buying a car, and opening a bank account. There are also audio recordings of the same material, similar to a podcast.



stewardshipmath.com/

NO ADDING OR SUBTRACTING

As much as I enjoy math, there are two verses that discourage me from addition and subtraction. The first is found in Deuteronomy 12:32: “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.” And the second is in the last book of the Bible: “Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book....I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He Who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.” (Revelation 22:7, 18–21)

May we each be among those blessed followers of Jesus described in the first chapter of Revelation: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” (Revelation 1:3) Amen!

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16)

Steve

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Demme and his wife, Sandra, have been married since 1979. They have been blessed with four sons, three lovely daughters-in-law, and six special grandchildren.

Steve has served in full- or part-time pastoral ministry for many years after graduating from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the creator of Math-U-See and the founder of Building Faith Families.

He produces a monthly newsletter and weekly podcasts. You can follow him on Facebook at facebook.com/stevedemme/

Steve is a regular speaker at home education conferences, men's ministry events, and family retreats.

BUILDING FAITH FAMILIES

Exists to teach and encourage families to embrace the biblical model for the Christian home. Scripture declares God created the sacred institution of the family. In His wisdom, He designed marriage to be between one man and one woman. We believe healthy, God-fearing families are the basic building block for the church and society.

The family is foundational and transformational. Parents and children become more like Jesus as they lay their lives down for each other, pray for each other, and learn to love each other as God has loved them.

RESOURCES TO ENCOURAGE AND STRENGTHEN YOUR FAMILY

The Monthly Newsletter

- This includes an encouraging exhortation as well as updates on Bible contests and upcoming speaking engagements.

Podcast

- Each week, a new episode is released on our website, iTunes, and our Facebook page. These may be downloaded for free.

Seminars for free download

- For over 30 years, Steve has been speaking and teaching at conferences around the world. Many of his messages are available for your edification.

BUILDINGFAITHFAMILIES.ORG

KNOWING GOD'S LOVE,

WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US

Comprehending God's unconditional love is the cornerstone for the overarching commands to love God and our neighbor. For we are unable to love until we have first been loved. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19) and "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us." (1 John 4:10)

The first, or as Jesus called it, the Great Command, is to love God. I began asking God to help me love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength and was wonderfully surprised by how He answered my request.

Instead of awaking one morning with a burning love for God, which I expected, He began to steadily reveal how much He loved me. In 2012, I found myself believing in a new way that God knows me thoroughly and loves me completely. This knowledge that God likes me for who I am, and not based on what I do, has transformed my life.

As I have become more rooted and grounded in grace, my relationship with God is now much richer and deeper. My wife and I are closer than we have ever been. Knowing I am loved and accepted just as I am has freed me to be more transparent and real as I relate with my sons and others.



LOVED TO LOVE

LOVING OTHERS AS JESUS HAS LOVED US

When Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest, He responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38)

As He was about to be crucified, Jesus washed His disciples’ feet and introduced a new revolutionary teaching: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)

Jesus was able to love well, for He was well-loved. At His baptism, the heavens opened, and God the Father spoke, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” (Matthew 3:17 NLT)

The more you and I comprehend and assimilate the love of God by His Spirit, the greater our capacity to love God and others, for perfect love flows from God. “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

As a husband and father, my primary responsibilities are to love God, my wife, and my children. I am writing as a man and sharing how God has led me to begin applying these principles in our home. But these principles are applicable to every believer.

The fruit of loving others as we have been loved will not only bless each of our homes, but our communities as well. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35).

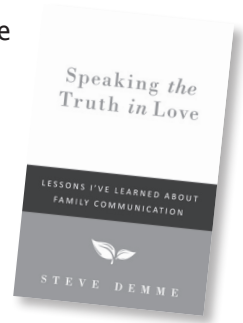


SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

LESSONS I'VE LEARNED ABOUT FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Most of what I've learned about communication, I acquired in the past few years during transitioning my business to a family owned business. The ability to communicate about difficult topics like business, values, your occupation, and a family's legacy takes effort and training.

As a husband and father, I have the potential to build up and encourage my family like no one else. I also have the ability to tear down and discourage my wife and sons. The Bible teaches effective principles of communication which are timeless.



My relationship with my wife and children has been transformed through godly safe communication. As I continue to grow in grace and the knowledge of God, I am in a better place to have open, transparent, and honest communication. While the skills we have acquired in being a clear speaker and an engaged listener are beneficial, investing time to have a quiet heart is essential. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

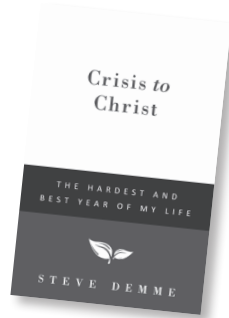
I hope the principles we have learned and applied to such benefit in our own home and business will be a help to you on your journey. May the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer. (from Psalm 19:14)

CRISIS TO CHRIST

THE HARDEST AND BEST YEAR OF MY LIFE

I have wounds, scars, baggage, and stuff from my past, which I have tried to ignore, but which is always present. In 2012, I was confronted with the distressing knowledge that my own wounds, which I thought were hidden and of no consequence, were wounding my wife and sons. I discovered I cannot hide my toxic issues, for eventually they will leak out and hurt those who are closest to me.

This difficult time, the hardest and best year of my life, was instrumental in changing my life and transforming my relationship with God and my family. On this journey, I experienced pain, which led me to acknowledge my own hurts and get help from the body of Christ to understand root causes of my distress and confront unbiblical thinking.



While I experienced incredible pain, I also discovered that my Heavenly Dad likes me just the way I am. Even though my path went through deep waters, God was with me every step of the way.

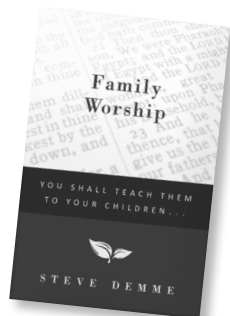
My motivation in writing is to affirm others who are going through similar valleys and tribulations. These hard journeys are normal for the Christian. Every person of note in Scripture endured at least one lifechanging crisis. God uses these difficult times to work deep in our hearts, reveal more of Himself, and transform us into the image of His Son.

FAMILY WORSHIP

YOU SHALL TEACH THEM TO YOUR CHILDREN

In this readable and encouraging book, Steve shares the ingredients for a doable plan of family worship. After many years of trying and failing, God helped the Demmes make studying God's Word a daily part of their home.

Steve also addresses obstacles which we all face in establishing the discipline of reading God's Word as a family. Be encouraged by Steve's experiences teaching his four sons, and learn from other families who share strategies that have worked for their children. All families are unique and special. May each home find their own style which works best for them.



"It was helpful to see the comments at the end from other families saying what they had done. I know in my heart that God does much more than we can imagine when we even take the smallest steps to disciple our children, but it was good to have some practical examples from you and others. Even just the reading of Scripture allows God's words to take root and his Holy Spirit to minister to us all."

"I loved the book and read it in about a week and a half. My chief take-away was family worship needs to be an important part of family life. Your book had some great examples of how to make it more appealing to the kids."

"My husband had never realized that he needed to give his family his best. He had never considered that we have to love God before we can teach our children His commandments."

HYMNS FOR FAMILY WORSHIP

This time-honored collection of 100 classic hymns will be a rich addition to your family worship. Make a joyful noise to the LORD!

In addition to the music for these carefully selected songs of worship, the history and origin of each hymn enhances the meaning of the lyrics.

There are four CDs with piano accompaniment for singing along in your home, car, or church.

Some of the titles are:

- What a Friend We Have in Jesus
- Holy, Holy, Holy
- It Is Well with My Soul
- To God Be the Glory
- All Hail the Power of Jesus Name
- Amazing Grace
- How Firm a Foundation
- Blessed Assurance
- Christ Arose
- Rise Up, O Men of God
- Jesus Paid It All
- Just As I Am, along with 88 more!



COME INTO HIS PRESENCE

TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD

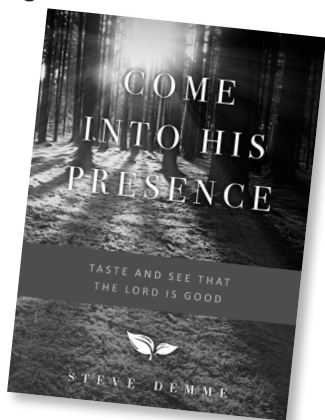
God invites each of us to come into His presence. His “Father heart” has ever yearned to be near His people. This book is about how the good Holy Spirit led Steve to apply the eternal principles found in Psalm 100 and draw near to God through Jesus.

“Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into His presence with singing! Know that the LORD, He is God! It is He Who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! Give thanks to Him; bless His name! For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.

By applying these inspired Scriptures, Steve has discovered what David meant when he declared, “Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in Him!” (Psalm 34:8 NLT)

Because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, God and His people are being restored to a close relationship with their Heavenly Father. “Look, God’s home is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them.” (Revelation 21:3 NLT)



STEWARDSHIP

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:34)

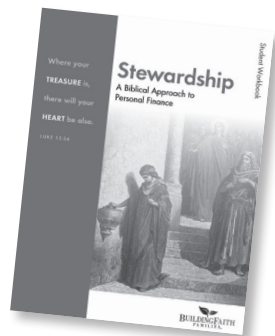
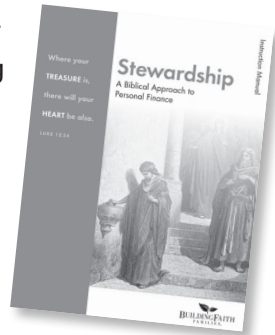
Stewardship is personal finance taught from a biblical perspective, written by the author of the successful Math–U–See curriculum, Steve Demme. With his signature humility, humor, and sharp math skills, Steve combines practical math instruction with biblical principles of finance and discipleship material.

This program is appropriate for anyone with a good understanding of math and beginning algebra. Many parents have commented they wish they had this class when they were a young adult.

The second edition is updated with current topics relevant to young people aged 15–17, who are beginning to explore more independent financial opportunities and responsibilities. Here is a sampling of the thirty–six topics

Consumer Math Topics

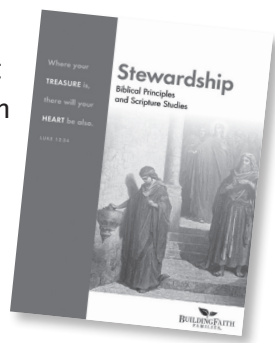
- Banking & Checking
- Budgeting & Credit Cards
- Cost of Owning a Vehicle
- Understanding Mortgages
- Insurance and Bearing Burdens
- Cost of Post Secondary Education
- Entrepreneur
- Christian Micro–Finance
- Compound Interest and Investing



Once the heart is connected to our treasure, it is essential to nurture our heart from God's inspired Word. In each of the thirty-six lessons, there is devotional material called Biblical Principles and Scripture Studies. These focus on Biblical principles of finance as well as Scripture studies on basic discipleship. Here is a sampling

Biblical Principles to Govern Our Treasure.

- The Love of Money
- Trusting God and Being Content
- Honor the Lord with Your Wealth
- Giving from a Redeemed Heart
- The Poor, Widows and Orphans
- The Blessing of God
- Scripture Studies to Instruct Our Heart
- Loving God and Belonging to God
- Conviction Versus Condemnation
- The First Commandment with a Promise
- David, a Man After God's Heart
- The Ministry and Work of the Spirit
- Jesus, the Suffering Servant Our Identity in Jesus



The Student Workbook has thirty-six lessons which are organized into a weekly format, with five worksheets per lesson. There are ten questions per lesson. Seven problems are from consumer math topics, two are from the Biblical Principles and Scripture Studies, and one is written to facilitate family discussion.