DEW

ARABIA

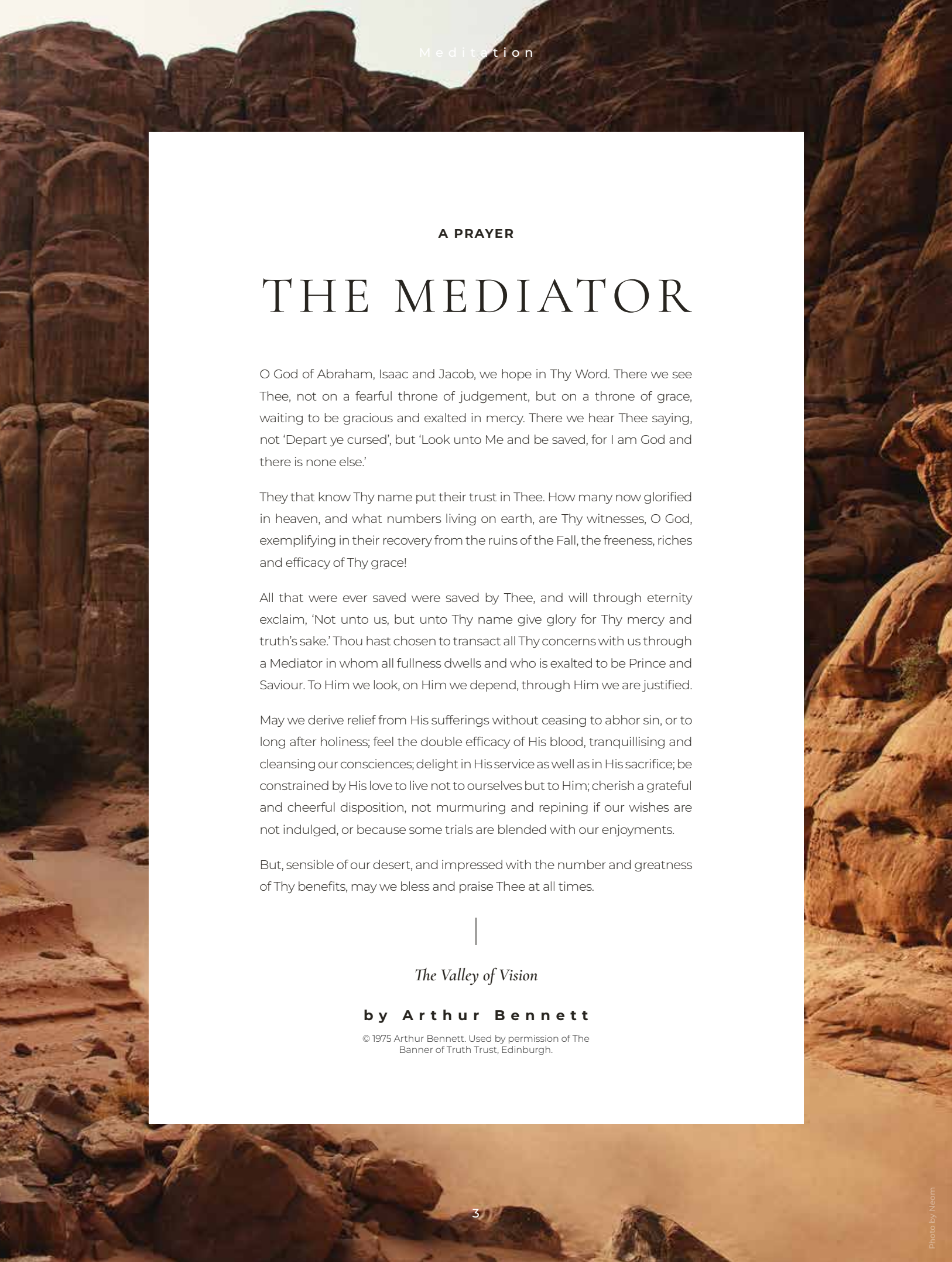
CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

EDITION FOUR



A magazine with refreshing droplets of God's Word to Christians in the UAE.

DEW ARABIA



A PRAYER

THE MEDIATOR

O God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we hope in Thy Word. There we see Thee, not on a fearful throne of judgement, but on a throne of grace, waiting to be gracious and exalted in mercy. There we hear Thee saying, not 'Depart ye cursed', but 'Look unto Me and be saved, for I am God and there is none else.'

They that know Thy name put their trust in Thee. How many now glorified in heaven, and what numbers living on earth, are Thy witnesses, O God, exemplifying in their recovery from the ruins of the Fall, the freeness, riches and efficacy of Thy grace!

All that were ever saved were saved by Thee, and will through eternity exclaim, 'Not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory for Thy mercy and truth's sake.' Thou hast chosen to transact all Thy concerns with us through a Mediator in whom all fullness dwells and who is exalted to be Prince and Saviour. To Him we look, on Him we depend, through Him we are justified.

May we derive relief from His sufferings without ceasing to abhor sin, or to long after holiness; feel the double efficacy of His blood, tranquillising and cleansing our consciences; delight in His service as well as in His sacrifice; be constrained by His love to live not to ourselves but to Him; cherish a grateful and cheerful disposition, not murmuring and repining if our wishes are not indulged, or because some trials are blended with our enjoyments.

But, sensible of our desert, and impressed with the number and greatness of Thy benefits, may we bless and praise Thee at all times.

The Valley of Vision

by Arthur Bennett

© 1975 Arthur Bennett. Used by permission of The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh.

Photo by Neom

BELOVED READER,

A dusty book; the hardest item on your daily to-do list; a collection of rules that makes you feel guilty. Even pastors acknowledge that regularly opening the Bible does not always become a *natural* desire of the heart. Most of us instinctively reach for almost anything else instead—social media, the news, emails, even a cookbook. Others, perhaps to justify why they avoid it, quietly put the Bible itself on trial: *Is it really reliable? Is it still relevant? What authority does it actually have?* Yet too often, we ask these questions without any real intention of honestly searching for the answers.

In this edition, we invite you to openly and humbly explore answers to foundational questions about the Bible: its reliability, sufficiency, authority, inerrancy, clarity, and necessity. As you read, you will discover that Scripture does far more than show us the way to eternal life. It gives wisdom for how to live, grace for each day, true joy and freedom from the power of sin. It stirs within us a growing desire to love and obey God from the heart! The book that often seems difficult or burdensome is actually overflowing with grace, life, and hope. Throughout history, many people have even given their lives to preserve its words faithfully and defend its teaching, because the Bible speaks about the very Source of life.

Our prayer is that the articles and meditations in this edition will increase your desire to read God's Word, renew your confidence in its truth, and encourage you to respond to it with humble obedience. May you never feel that you are finished with the Bible. Instead, may you keep returning to it—to know God more deeply, grow in your relationship with Him, and be strengthened each day by the grace He gives us, through His own Word.

In His service,
The Dew Arabia Editorial Team

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Social Media Highlights

YOUR DESIRES are much deeper than you think they are.

If you think getting into that great school, getting a great career, and finding a tremendous spouse is going to satisfy your heart, you have no idea of the greatness of your own soul or how infinitely deep your desires really are. You are going to find that nothing, in the end, actually satisfies.

When you are born again, you begin to see this: the kind of love I was always looking for from my parents or my spouse is what I will receive from my heavenly Father. The sense of achievement I was looking for in career success and all of those things is what I will receive when the Triune God says to me: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

— Paraphrased from Tim Keller

"Nature may roar and nations may rage, but *the Lord reigns over all*. For a missionary in a storm, this truth is a life raft. God, not chance, controls all that takes place in this world." — Luke Waite





God delights to meet with His people through His Word. Bible reading is about hearing God's voice, not checking a box. Be consistent. Plan a time. Plan a place. Plan to meet with God. Don't quit when you don't understand. Pray. Ask questions. God's Word changes us as we believe and obey it. God's Word is sweeter than honey and more precious than gold.



Buddhism and shamanism were part of Anna's identity. Listen to this podcast as she shares how God used a Bible study, suffering, and missionaries to bring her to faith.

"True Christian worship is NOT based on our creative imaginations, thoughts, experiences, or feelings about God, but finds its ground, purpose and motivation in the character of God Himself revealed in Scripture." — Alvin Litonjua

"I fear for much of Western Christianity, that it's just not real.

... If you need to have your cancer healed in order to be happy in God, then you're not a Christian." — John Piper

Podcast

ASK MISSIONARY

How should success on the mission field be measured? Chad Vegas answers.



"It's tempting to believe the lie that a yes from God confirms His blessing, while a no is a form of punishment or heavenly disapproval. Or perhaps, we wonder, does God even hear our desperate cries? ... When God says no, we often wonder if we've got a bad connection: "Can You hear me?" "Can You hear me now?" But, sometimes, for reasons that we may not understand, His good purpose is to say no. ... God's no to our prayers is always a yes to His providential purposes. We can hold fast to Him, knowing that He hears us, He cares for us, and He is always at work. He does not forget us or fail us just because He tells us no." — Melissa Kruger



God keeps you in perfect peace if you set your mind, not on your own feelings, but on Him (Isaiah 26:3).

"When affections go before believing, they are little worth; but when they follow it, they are exceeding acceptable and precious in the sight of God." — John Owen (*Works of John Owen*, vol. 9, p. 23)



Colophon

Dew Arabia™ is an independent publication dedicated to the Christian community in the UAE. Its mission is to deepen Christians' engagement with Scripture through thoughtfully selected content and to provide a platform for local Christian authors to share their writings.

Dew Arabia is named to represent the life-giving droplets of God's Word to Christians just as dew brings life to the desert's dry expanse.

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Every future date mentioned in this publication presumes *Deo volente*—God willing.

Friends Recommend



New!

The Surprising Savior

25 ADVENT DEVOTIONS by Dave Furman

Prepare your heart for Christmas with this beautiful new 25-day Advent devotion. It tells familiar stories in a fresh new way, helping you see just how amazing every tiny detail of the very first Christmas really is.

Looking at the Christmas story through the book of Luke, it brings you hope and encouragement in your own times of waiting. It reminds you that God loves to use the weak, the humble, and the ordinary to carry out His wonderful plans.

Christmas can bring many emotions and challenges, and this devotion gently helps you remember that God is always faithful, through every season. Thoughtful questions also give you a chance to reflect on your own heart or have good talks with family and friends.

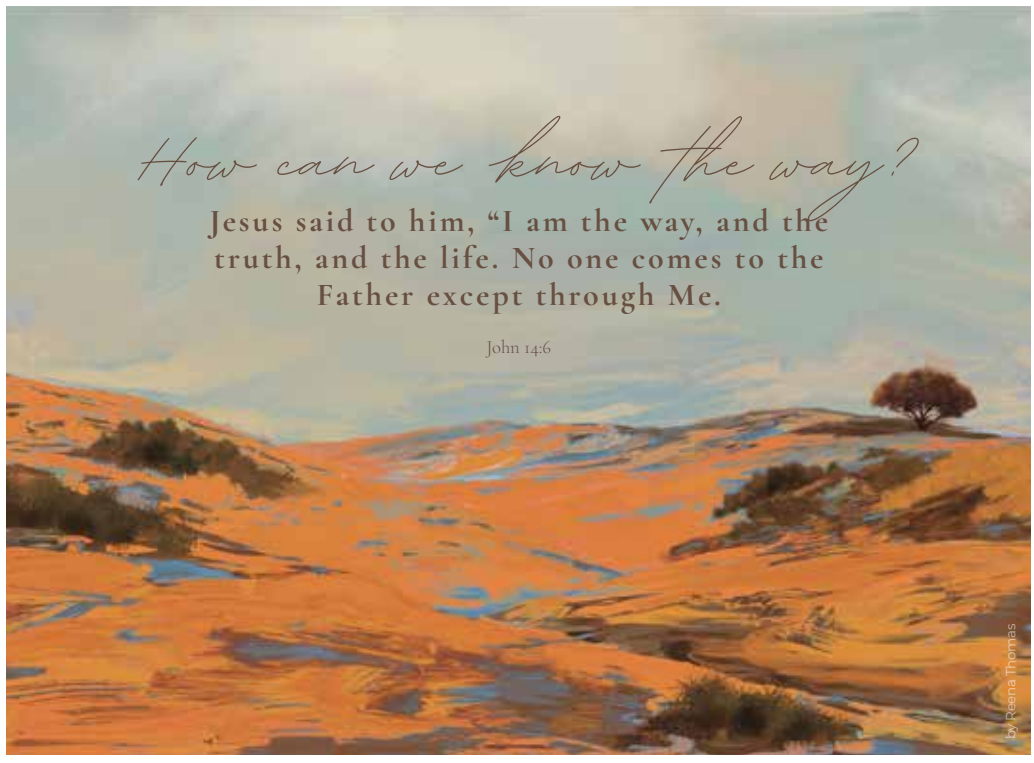
New!

Who Wants to Be a Biblionaire

A fun online Bible trivia quiz with a game-show twist. Challenge your family and friends and find out who knows the Bible best. Created by a fellow believer here in the UAE.

Play at **gloryquest.fun/#biblionaire**





Notable Lines



Selected excerpts from

Why Trust the Bible?

by **Greg Gilbert**

Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.

With Deceitful Intent?

Isn't it possible that, while they [the biblical authors] repeatedly insisted they were telling the truth [...] they were really just reeling us in to dupe us and make us believe a bunch of lies? [...] pulling off a gigantic hoax of this kind would have been exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. For one thing, all twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written within just a few decades of Jesus' life. That means that as those books were beginning to circulate, literally hundreds—and probably even thousands—of people were still alive who had seen Jesus and what He did with their own eyes. So if Luke, for example, was just making things up or even embellishing them, plenty of people around could have said, "Hold up. That didn't happen. You're fabricating your story, Luke." We have no record of anyone ever saying that. [...] even the people who had the biggest stake in putting an end to Christianity didn't deny that Jesus really did and said the things the biblical authors claimed He did. — pp. 87–88

Are the Biblical Miracles Plausible?

Jesus' miracles, for instance, are not just amazing things that happened. When you study them, you realise that right down to their very core, they're connected to the message Jesus was proclaiming. That's why Jesus heals people rather than just pulling a rabbit out of a hat; He's illustrating that He can heal people from the disease of sin. It's why He raises people from the dead instead of making a coin disappear down his sleeve; He's showing how His work brings spiritual life out of spiritual death. Even His walking on the water wasn't just a parlour trick; His disciples recognised that it confirmed His claim to be the great "I AM," the One who brings the ocean—the ancient realm of chaos and evil—into submission, the One who, as the psalm puts it, is "mightier than the waves of the sea" (Psalm 93:4).

[...] The miracles of the Bible are not in any way superfluous or extraneous to the stories in which we find them; on the contrary, they are essential to them, [...] Moreover, rather than legends or myths built up over time, they are eyewitness accounts of what real people said they saw with their own eyes. However you slice it, the biblical miracle accounts differ utterly from a Greek or Babylonian myth, and they require a whole different kind of reckoning. — pp. 112–113

the greatest LOVE STORY

A LOVE THAT TRANSFORMS

There is a reason that the best stories end with a bride and groom living happily ever after. It is a picture of the greatest true story of all: God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to bring us back to God. Sin broke our friendship with God, but Jesus came to fix what was broken. This is the story:

God's love: *The Bible tells us that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not eternally die, but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

The broken part: *Unfortunately, we do not love God as we should; our sin separates us from Him, leaving us in need of being forgiven* (Romans 3:23).

Jesus' sacrifice: *God did not want us to stay lost and separated from Him. So, Jesus, God as human, took the punishment for all the wrong we did. By living perfectly, dying on the cross and then coming back to life, Jesus offers forgiveness, new and everlasting life with God* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Our response: *So, how do we become part of this happily-ever-after? It's a free gift! By grace alone, through faith in Christ, we are saved. Turn away from your sin and follow Jesus* (Ephesians 2:8–9)!

Volunteer with us!

We are currently looking for help with distribution and **Arabic translation**!

Share your creativity!

Whether it's a painting, a quilt, your kids' drawing, a handmade gift or something else inspired by your faith, we would love to see what you've made! Share your creations with us!

Send your well wishes!

Looking to congratulate someone, share your prayers and wishes or express a heartfelt 'thank you'? Send it in to be featured in *Dew Arabia*!

Reach out to us at contact@dewarabia.com



Selected excerpt from

Tabletalk, May 2015: "Doctrine for All of Life."

by **Dave Furman**

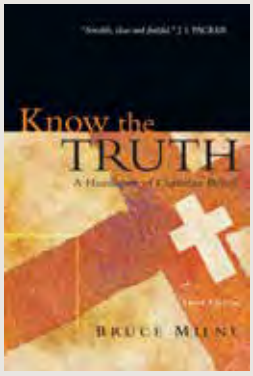
Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2015.

The Same Gospel

The gospel changes lives. Though there are certainly cultural differences between the West and the East, we must resist the temptation to change the gospel. If we do, and people respond, then we have won people not just to a "variation" of the gospel, but to a false gospel, which is no gospel at all. Only the gospel of God concerning His Son is the good news. We want people to hear God's truth and not a deceitful version of the message. The truth is that our sin against a holy God deserves death and God's righteous judgement. It is only through faith in Christ's sacrifice for sinners that we will be saved.

[...] We are not the authors of the gospel, but ambassadors. As an ambassador, we don't have the authority to change the message, regardless of whether we minister in Montana, Mozambique, or Malaysia. We are called to herald God's message to the world.

[...] When we work in areas different from the one from which we came, we might be tempted to hold back parts of the gospel that seem difficult for people to believe. Perhaps we may leave out things like man's sin, God's wrath, and eternal damnation for sinners in order to make the gospel "kinder." We might also be tempted to make the gospel more prosperous in the here-and-now by promising earthly riches that Jesus doesn't promise.



Selected excerpts from

Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief

by **Bruce Milne**

3rd edn., Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009.

The Need to Be Born Again

Since we are creatures and sinners, God's truth can be had only as a gift of His condescension which overcomes our instinctive resistance to God and illumines our darkened minds. In biblical terms, we cannot know God and His truth until we have been born again (John 3:3).

[...] This wonderful message at first appears to be anything but 'good' news, for it confronts us with our sin, our moral helplessness, intellectual blindness and the sombre fact of God's wrath against us. But in the same breath it assures us of His almighty love for sinners expressed in the gift of His Son Jesus Christ who died for sinful men and women on the cross. The gospel summons us to turn from our sin and to cast ourselves upon God's mercy held out to us in Christ.

In responding to that summons in simple trust we experience a new beginning in our lives, a new birth, and with it a new capacity to grasp and respond to God's revelation. If we are true Christians, this first implication will already be a reality for us, but we can never be too clear about this biblical axiom: 'no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.' This principle operates throughout our Christian life. God makes His truth available only to the humble. As we come in utter dependence, acknowledging our sinful ignorance and blindness and our constant need of His divine illumination, He stoops to us in grace and grants us again and again the gift of His truth. — p. 63

The Need to Work Hard at the Bible

Scripture has come to us out of a period of time spanning several millennia, from the experience of peoples whose culture is unfamiliar. It is written in languages which are not our own. To understand and interpret the Bible correctly therefore requires the demanding discipline of bridging these cultural and linguistic gulfs which separate us from the Bible's time and world.

Obviously the Holy Spirit is an indispensable guide, and we need to guard against the suggestion that untutored Christians with the Spirit cannot grasp the message of the Bible or use it to their profound spiritual profit [...] interposing an intermediary between God and the individual soul.

[...] Much of the truth of the Bible is uncovered only by hard and demanding study. — pp. 63–64

The Need to Be Obedient to Scripture

If God has revealed Himself and His purposes to us in Jesus Christ as He is known to us through all the Scriptures, then clearly we are under a total obligation to submit our lives to the teaching of the Bible. It is a particular temptation of student life to imagine that truth is for the mind alone; but for Scripture "knowing the truth" implies living it out in particular situations.
[...] If our passion for truth does not imply a passion for obedience to truth, then we are not truly serious about it. In the end the doctrine of authority is eminently practical. It confronts us with a specific challenge: to obey all that the Bible teaches, all of the time. — pp. 64–65

Theology

WHY WE NEED GOD TO SPEAK

The Necessity of Scripture

In my final year of university as a history student, I went to Russia for a research trip. The trip was hastily planned with no support from a local university there. I had little money and barely any Russian language. I was able to read Cyrillic, but could not speak at all. In short, the trip was ill-advised. I got to Moscow and lost about half of my money to a scam taxi. The train tickets I had bought to St. Petersburg were also fraudulent. I wandered around Moscow with no contacts and no clue what to do next.

Finally, I saw a sign that said интернет-кафе (Internet Café). There I met someone with whom I was able to converse in German, and as I went out with him, we met a couple of men who spoke German and some English, and they were able to help me and get me on the train to St. Petersburg that I needed. Without the ability to understand, I had been helpless and hopeless until someone spoke with me in a way that I could understand. Our hopelessness and helplessness without God speaking to us is far greater and has much greater significance and consequences.

Transcendence

> "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in" — Isaiah 40:22.

God is transcendent. That is to say, He is inestimably and unspeakably beyond us. Isaiah speaks of Him as sitting above the earth and stretching out the heavens the way we draw the curtains on a hot day here in the UAE. To speak of God as being as beyond us as you are to an ant or a grasshopper is a drastic understatement. Scripture is necessary because of God's transcendence.

Do you speak to grasshoppers? When you find an ant in your kitchen, do you feel a need to veil your speech as you plot with your spouse or roommate to wipe them out? Do you fear that the insects may coordinate and launch a counterattack? Of course not. The fly in your kitchen is at such a drastically different level of intellect and power than you that it could never understand who you are or what is happening. God's greatness and transcendence beyond us is far beyond anything of which we could properly conceive.

However, because God has made us in His image, we do have more understanding than the insect in our house.

> "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" — Ecclesiastes 3:11.

God has made us with a knowledge of Him and a longing for eternity. We see this throughout Romans 1 as well. However, His revelation in creation is such that we know that there is more, and we long for glory but are utterly unable to reach the glory of truth in our own strength. God is the great king above all the earth. He has made us to long for Him, to yearn for heaven, yet because of His greatness we cannot reach Him. Scripture is necessary because of God's transcendence, and in the Scriptures, we taste God's immanence. Immanence is the attribute of God which teaches us that He is present and near to His creation. Scripture is necessary because of God's transcendence and possible because of His immanence. Though we are less compared to Him than a housefly or ant, He speaks to us in human speech and reveals Himself to us in ways that we can understand and to which we can cling.

Supraculturality

Scripture is necessary because our God is high and exalted; He is more than we can possibly comprehend. Scripture is also necessary because it is supracultural. Scripture extends beyond any particular culture or language. It is norma normans non normata, the Norm which norms and cannot be normed. It is the rule that rules. It is not bound to a particular language and culture, but extends to and rules over all culture, all other rules. This is of particular practical significance for us here in the UAE. Our goal is not to achieve a metaculture [a shared culture formed above or across different cultures] in this cultural melting pot, nor to maintain our own individuality in a cultural mosaic. Neither is the hope to see which culture can become dominant so that a Malayali Christian, Nigerian Christian, Filipino Christian, Arab Christian, British Christian, and South

African Christian finally decide to gather around whichever culture wins the negotiation. Rather, as Christians from all cultures, our goal is to "be transformed by the renewing of our minds" — Romans 12:2.

Scripture is necessary for us because everything else is culturally bound and culturally defined. Without something beyond us, each culture would be left to its own whims and weaknesses. Scripture provides a universal rule which transcends every human line of division. However, God's grace is such that He speaks to us in words we can understand. Though the Scriptures were originally given in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, it really is God's Word as you read it in English, Hindi, Arabic, Spanish, or any faithful translation. We celebrate God's universal work in creation and in adopting a people from all cultures, but as we worship together as blood-bought saints from every corner of the globe, we can only do so because of the supraculturality of God's good Word.

Salvation

Earlier I referred to Romans 1. Romans 1 makes it clear that every person is born with a knowledge of God, given because of how God has made us in His image and observable in creation.

> "For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" — Romans 1:20.

> "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" — Psalm 19:1–2.

God has spoken in creation in a way that displays His character and power; however, there is no salvation in this general revelation. Through general revelation, I can know God, His holiness, His creating power, and His law, but I can never know the redemption that God offers in Christ. God's power and might are seen in creation, but without His special revelation in the Scriptures, we could never know His patience and grace. We could never know His faithfulness and steadfast mercy. We could never know His care for Israel, His concern in His law for the oppressed; we could never grasp the depths of our sin or the weight of the penalty against us. Without the Scriptures, we could never know God's jealousy as a husband with an unfaithful wife, His patient care and discipline as a father with His children, His faithfulness and might to preserve a remnant because of His love, faithfulness and concern for His glory. And without the Scriptures, we could never see Christ. We could never see the cross where God's justice and mercy meet. We could never know that acceptance before God does not depend on our righteousness or obedience, but on the righteousness of Christ received by grace alone through faith alone.

God's Word is necessary for salvation because in it we see Christ. In Galatians 3:1, Paul talks of Christ being publicly portrayed as crucified before the eyes of the Galatians. How did they see Christ crucified? By the preaching of God's Word! In 2 Peter 1, Peter talks about his experience as an eyewitness of the transfiguration of Christ, then talks about something more sure. What is more sure than seeing the glory of Christ unveiled before your own eyes? The written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments! Scripture is more necessary to us than water or oxygen because in the Scriptures alone God speaks to us to reveal Himself and show us Christ. There is salvation in no other name.

As I wandered around Moscow, and recognised the depths of my predicament [difficult situation] as an English speaker where English is uncommon and a foreigner in a strange land, I would have been without hope unless someone had spoken to me in a way I could understand. Only when I heard in a way that I could understand could I move ahead in a way that was good. Much greater was our need before God and much greater is His grace to us in giving us His Word and speaking to us so that we can understand. Praise God for His transcendence, His immanence, His wisdom, and His grace displayed in the Scriptures to which we have free and abundant access.

by **J. P. Stokes** — Elder in Abu Dhabi

Reflective Questions

1. What three reasons does the author give for why the Bible is necessary?
2. How would your week look different, and how would your daily approach to Scripture change, if you lived with the conviction that you cannot live without God's Word?
3. What good things—work, family, ministry, sleep, or entertainment—have you allowed to crowd out time in God's Word? What habits help you stay rooted in Christ through His Word, and what habits compete with that?
4. The author explained why the Bible is the rule that rules, even over culture. How do you respond when the Bible contradicts your own wisdom, feelings, or cultural beliefs? Which one actually functions as your final authority?
5. How can you depend on the Bible as necessary and as your final authority for faith and life without treating it like a magic answer book for every small daily decision?
6. Do you read the Bible just for advice and encouragement or are you looking to know God and see Christ better?

Exploring Scripture

GOD HAS SPOKEN

The Authority of Scripture

A World of Many Voices

When we landed in the UAE, we arrived with more than our two 23 kg suitcases. Beyond our luggage, we brought with us traditions, national cultures, languages, habits, family expectations, and deep assumptions about life. Then, once here, we found ourselves surrounded by even more voices: the public presence of Islam, the pressure of ambition, the confidence of modern science, the language of psychology, the noise of social media, the promises of self-help, the appeal of philosophy, the lure of superstition and mysticism, and the authority of our own desires. In different ways, all of these press upon us, asking for our trust, allegiance, and obedience.

We all live amid many competing voices. But which voice has the right to govern the Christian life and bind the Christian conscience before God?

The Bible is God's Address to Man

> "All Scripture is breathed out by God" — 2 Timothy 3:16.

The Bible, that is, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is not merely a medium for man's religious search for God. It is God's address to man. The authority of the Bible rests on its ultimate Author. By authority, I mean Scripture's right to command what we must believe, forbid what we must reject, and govern how we must live before God.

This is the God who spoke creation into being. This is the God in whose image we have all been made. This is the God who spoke to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and the prophets of the Old Covenant. This is the God who spoke through the apostles of the New Covenant. Above all, this is the God who has spoken climactically in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1–2).

Therefore, when we come to Scripture, we are not merely reading ancient religious literature, moral wisdom, or human reflections about God. We are hearing the written Word of the living God, breathed out by His Spirit and given with supreme authority.

Scripture carries divine authority because Scripture is breathed out by God. The church, the academy, tradition, and private experience may serve, study, confess, or respond to Scripture, but they do not stand above it.

The Human Authors and the Divine Author

In his second letter, the apostle Peter reflects on the Transfiguration of Jesus. He and the other disciples had seen Christ's glory with their own eyes and heard the Father declare from heaven, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (2 Peter 1:17). Peter did not hear this second-hand. He was an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ.

Peter directs the church away from resting its faith upon private and unrepeatable experience and towards the public, enduring prophetic Word. Therefore, no dream, impression, or claim that "God told me…" may be treated as possessing Scripture's authority or used to bind another believer's conscience. Instead, Peter points the church to the written Word. He says, *"We have the prophetic Word more fully confirmed"* (2 Peter 1:19).

In other words, the glory Peter saw on the mountain confirmed what God had already promised through the prophets: Jesus is the beloved Son, the promised Christ, and the glorious King. Scripture is therefore the public, enduring, God-given Word by which every experience, impression, and claim to divine guidance must be tested and understood.

Peter then explains how Scripture came to us. He writes, "*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). Peter is speaking here about the origin of Scripture. Scripture did not arise from human imagination, religious genius, private opinion, or personal intuition. It came from God.

At the same time, God did not erase the humanity of the biblical writers. The human authors were not mindless instruments. They wrote in real historical settings, using their own language, personalities, vocabularies, pastoral concerns, and literary forms. The prophets spoke as men commissioned by God, and the apostles wrote as authorised witnesses of Christ. The histories, letters, poems, prophecies, and laws of Scripture bear the marks of real human authorship, yet behind and through them stands God Himself.

Neither the ancient nor the modern church makes Scripture authoritative. The church receives and acknowledges the authority Scripture already possesses because it is the Word of God.

The Bible was written by roughly forty real human authors, but God is its primary Author. This is why Scripture carries divine authority. Its authority is given from above, not conferred from below. Neither the ancient nor the modern church makes Scripture authoritative. The church receives and acknowledges the authority Scripture already possesses because it is the Word of God. As Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica,

> "We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" — 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

This distinction between God-breathed Scripture and all other writings also helps us understand why the church came to distinguish between Scripture and other valuable Christian writings. Early Christian works such as the *Didache, 1 Clement*, and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, for instance, are historically important documents. They give us a window into the life and concerns of some of the earliest Christians, but they are not Scripture. Their early date does not give them divine authority, for they do not belong to the prophetic and apostolic foundation of the Old and New Testaments.

Christ's Own View of Scripture

> "Scripture cannot be broken" — John 10:35.

Our Lord Jesus engaged with Scripture in the most instructive way. Before the New Testament writings were completed, the word "Scripture" referred primarily to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—the sacred books of the Old Testament. Jesus approached these writings as truthful and authoritative.

Jesus resisted Satan by Scripture (Matthew 4:1–11), corrected false teaching by Scripture (Matthew 22:29–32), fulfilled and submitted to Scripture (Matthew 26:54–56), declared that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35), and opened the Scriptures to show that they testified to Him (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; John 5:39).

Yet Jesus did more than honour the Old Testament Scriptures. Before His suffering and death, He commissioned His apostles as His authorised witnesses and promised that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that He had taught them and guide them into the truth. In this way, Christ Himself stands behind the apostolic witness that forms the foundation of the New Testament, whether written by the apostles themselves or by those closely associated with their witness. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, "*He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you*" (John 14:26; 16:12–15).

This apostolic authority is seen with particular clarity in the ministry of Paul. Paul did not write merely as a private theologian offering religious reflections, but as an apostle of Jesus Christ, commissioned by the risen Lord. Remarkably, Peter speaks of Paul's letters and says that some distort them "*as they do the other Scriptures*" (2 Peter 3:16). This shows that, already within the apostolic age, the writings of Paul were being received not merely as useful Christian instruction, but as Scripture. The New Testament, therefore, does not rest on later church invention. It rests on the authority of Christ, who commissioned His apostles, and on the Spirit who guided their witness.

Therefore, Jesus is not only the One who held the highest view of Scripture; He is also the central focus of Scripture and the Lord who authorised the New Testament writings. If we belong to Christ, we cannot have a lower view of Scripture than Christ Himself had.

Scripture Above Every Lesser Authority

> "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" — Colossians 2:8.

Applied to the many competing voices around us, we must be clear: no other authority may occupy the final place that belongs to Scripture alone.

Tradition can be a gift. Creeds, confessions, councils, pastors, and church history can help us, but tradition ▸

must remain under Scripture. When tradition contradicts Scripture, Scripture corrects tradition.

Science can help us study God's world, but it cannot finally determine the meaning of life, the nature of sin, the way of salvation, or God's moral will. Science studies creation; Scripture gives us God's authoritative revelation concerning sin, salvation, and obedience.

Psychology may offer useful observations about human thought, emotion, trauma, habit, and behaviour. But it must not become the final authority over identity, guilt, holiness, sin, repentance, forgiveness, marriage, parenting, or the soul.

Philosophy may ask profound questions about truth, meaning, goodness, and reality. Yet human reason must never sit in judgement over divine revelation. Our thoughts must be brought captive to Christ, not placed above His Word.

Horoscopes, superstition, and occult forms of guidance are not neutral and harmless practices. They train the heart to seek guidance from creation rather than the Creator. Christians do not belong to fate, stars, spirits, or hidden powers. We belong to Jesus.

Christians in the UAE live among people who take revelation seriously, and that can open meaningful and respectful conversations. Yet the Christian is bound to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given through the prophets and apostles and centred on Jesus Christ, in whom God's redemptive promises find their fulfilment. The Christian's final authority is not public pressure, religious majority, cultural expectation, or even the desire to avoid offence. Our final authority is the Word of God.

The Glad Submission of God's People

"His commandments are not burdensome" — 1 John 5:3.

The Word of God binds the mind, conscience, will, and heart of God's people. From Scripture we receive an identity deeper than nationality, and through Scripture we are gathered as brothers and sisters from many cultures into one body, the church. Scripture teaches us to live holy lives in private and public, governing our work, speech, money, purity, family life, worship, and witness. It protects the church from being ruled by personality, preference, culture, or pragmatism, and keeps Christ at the centre. In a church made up of many nations, Scripture is not the possession of one culture. It is the voice of one Shepherd gathering one flock.

This submission is neither reluctant nor miserable. It is the glad submission of sheep who know the Shepherd's voice. The authority of Scripture is not the cold authority of a textbook, but the living authority of the God who saves, sanctifies, corrects, comforts, and leads His people.

In a world of many voices, the Christian does not need to be tossed about by every tradition, trend, philosophy, or fear. God has spoken. His Word is true. His Son is sufficient. His Spirit gives understanding. His people must hear, believe, obey, and rejoice. ■

by **Michael F. Smit** — Elder in Abu Dhabi

Resources

Church History

COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE

WHO PUT THE BIBLE TOGETHER?

Who decided which books belong in the Bible? Was it a group of powerful men randomly picking their favourites? And how can we trust that they got it right? Let's explore the story behind the Council of Carthage.

A Growing Collection

From the very beginning, believers received the Old Testament as God's Word, the Scriptures Jesus quoted from and said "cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Jesus chose twelve men, and later Paul, to be His apostles, which means 'sent ones'. They and their close companions wrote gospels (accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection) and letters, which churches read aloud, copied and passed on. Peter already placed Paul's letters alongside "the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

The Council

As Christianity spread, other writings also appeared, some falsely claiming to come from the apostles. Around AD 140, a teacher named Marcion rejected the Old Testament and kept only an edited version of Luke and ten of Paul's letters. Other groups spread writings such as the Gospel of Thomas. With false teachers adding and removing books, the church needed to state clearly which writings were truly God's Word. So in AD 397, church leaders met in Carthage (Tunisia), among them the well-known Augustine of Hippo (354–430). They affirmed the 27 New Testament books we have today. These were not new choices. Thirty years earlier, in AD 367, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria had already listed the same 27 books, and a council at Hippo had accepted them in AD 393.

Based on What?

The church asked simple questions. Was the book written by an apostle or a close companion? Did it agree with the teaching already received? Had churches everywhere accepted and read it from the earliest days? Books such as the Gospel of Thomas failed these tests. Behind these questions was a bigger one: did this book come from God? This mattered because only God's words can guide what we believe and how we live (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Can We Trust It?

A book did not become Scripture because a council voted for it. The council simply recognised what God had already given, the books Christians already knew were God's Word. And although councils are helpful for formal recognition, they are fallible and can get some things wrong: the Council of Carthage mistakenly placed apocryphal books alongside Old Testament Scripture. Ultimately, Scripture is the final authority—it is self-attesting. The church accepts the Bible because it knows God's voice (John 10:4–5).

Scripture References

Why the Bible is Trusted as God's Word

What Jesus Thought of the Old Testament

Jesus affirmed the Old Testament's divine authority

- Jesus quoted from the Old Testament (Matthew 4:4–10; 12:3–5; 19:3–6; Mark 14:27).
- Jesus called it "the word of God" (Matthew 15:3–6; Mark 7:9–13; John 10:34–35).
- Jesus mentioned the inspiration by the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36).
- Jesus never set His own authority against the authority of Scripture, even though He is the Son of God with divine authority (Matthew 26:54–56; John 10:35).

Significance: Jesus quoted the Old Testament as final authority. He called it God's own Word and taught that the Holy Spirit spoke through its writers. This shows that these writings come from God, and that we can fully trust them.

Jesus accepted the whole Old Testament

Jesus affirmed the whole Old Testament and each main part: the law, the Psalms and the prophets (Matthew 4:4–10; 5:17; 11:10; Mark 7:6; 12:10; Luke 24:25–27, 44; John 5:39, 46; 10:35).

Significance: Jesus did not reject or dismiss any part of the Old Testament. Because He accepted it as a whole, we can trust all of it, not only selected parts.

Jesus said that Old Testament history is true

Jesus believed that the historical stories really happened. He spoke about people like Abel, Noah, Jonah, Abraham, and Lot as real people in history (Matthew 12:3–4, 40–41; 19:4–6; 22:29, 32; 23:35; 24:37–39; Mark 12:26; Luke 17:26–32; John 3:14; 8:56–58).

Significance: Jesus did not treat the Old Testament stories as myths or legends. He trusted them as true history. This gives us confidence that these stories are historically reliable.

Jesus supported the Old Testament moral teachings

Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them (Matthew 5:17–22, 27–28; 7:12; 15:3–6; 19:3–6, 17–19; 22:37–40; 23:23; Mark 7:9–13; 10:9; Luke 16:17).

Significance: Jesus upheld Old Testament ethics as the ongoing standard for right living. He did not teach that every Old Testament law continues in exactly the same way, because some laws belonged to the old covenant and were fulfilled in Him. But Jesus clearly taught that God's moral law is still important and showed that true obedience must come from the heart.

Jesus saw the Old Testament pointing to His own mission

Jesus understood that the Scriptures pointed to His work (Matthew 21:42; 26:24, 31, 54–56; Mark 8:31; 14:49; Luke 4:21; 9:22; 18:31–33; 22:37; 24:25–27, 44–48; John 5:39–40, 46; 13:18; 15:25; 19:28).

Significance: Jesus taught that the Old Testament was pointing to Him. It prepared people to understand His suffering, death, resurrection, and saving work. Therefore, we should read the Old Testament as a story that leads us to Jesus and shows God's plan through Him.

The Authority of Jesus' Words and Teaching

Jesus proclaimed the power and authority of His words

- Jesus stated that His words have unique power and authority (John 6:63; 15:3).
- Jesus declared that His words will never pass away (Mark 13:31).
- Jesus taught that His words must be heard, believed and obeyed (Matthew 5:21–22; 7:24; John 8:31–32).

Significance: Jesus spoke with authority that belongs to God alone: His words are eternal, life-giving, and binding on every person.

The apostles recognised Jesus' divine authority

- The apostles treated Jesus' words as authoritative teaching (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 7:10; 11:23–24).
- The apostles placed Jesus' words alongside the Old Testament Scriptures (1 Timothy 5:18; 2 Peter 3:2).
- The apostles' reverence for Jesus' words is also demonstrated by the careful preservation of His teaching in the four Gospels.

Significance: Belief in Jesus' divine authority was held by the apostles and other eyewitnesses of His life. It was not a later invention.

The Special Authority of the Apostles

Jesus chose and sent the apostles

- Jesus chose certain men to be His apostles (Luke 5:27; 6:12–16; John 17:6).
- They were special witnesses of His life, death and resurrection (Acts 1:21–22; 2:32; 4:33; 5:30–32; 10:39–42).
- Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 2:1–4).
- Jesus sent them to teach and bear witness in His name (Matthew 28:18–20; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).
- Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into truth (John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:13–14).

Significance: Jesus personally chose, trained, and sent the apostles. He made them special witnesses of His life, death and resurrection, and promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them. Therefore, their teaching about Jesus was not merely human opinion or dependent on human memory alone. Their Spirit-guided teaching forms the authoritative foundation of the New Testament.

The apostles spoke and wrote with God-given authority

- The Holy Spirit helped them understand and teach God's truth (1 Corinthians 2:9–13; 1 Peter 1:12).
- Peter placed Paul's letters with "the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).
- The apostles' spoken and written teaching carried the Lord's authority and was to be accepted and obeyed (1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:14; 2 Peter 3:2).

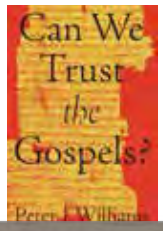
Significance: The apostles taught and wrote through the Holy Spirit. Their teaching was received as Scripture and as commands from the Lord. Therefore, the New Testament can be trusted as God's true and authoritative Word.

Key Theological Synthesis from These Passages

1. **Jesus accepted the Old Testament as God's true and authoritative Word.** He trusted its history, upheld its moral teaching, and taught that it pointed to Him.
2. **Jesus spoke with divine authority.** His words are eternal and must be believed and obeyed.
3. **Jesus appointed the apostles as His Spirit-guided witnesses and teachers.** Their teaching was not merely human opinion or dependent on memory alone.
4. **Therefore, the Old and New Testaments form one trustworthy revelation from God.** The Old Testament points to Christ, and the New Testament records and explains His saving work.

Adapted from Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, 3rd edn. (IVP, 2009).

Recommended Books



Can We Trust the Gospels?

Peter J. Williams

Examining evidence from non-Christian sources for the reliability of the four Gospels.



A Peculiar Glory

John Piper

God has provided a way for all people to know that the Bible is the Word of God.



The Christ Files

John Dickson

Historical look at Jesus from both Scriptural and other non-Bible documentation.



The New Testament Documents

F. F. Bruce

What historical research reveals about the New Testament canon.



Why Trust the Bible?

Greg Gilbert

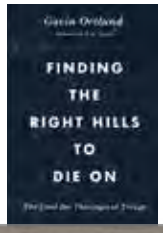
Exploring historical and theological arguments to trust the Bible



The Scriptures Testify about Me

Kevin DeYoung

Foundation of the sufficiency, clarity, authority and necessity of the Bible.



Finding the Right Hill to Die On

Gavin Ortlund

When should doctrine divide? Ortlund ranks doctrine from essential to unimportant.



How Can I Get More Out of My Bible Reading?

Jeremy Kimble

Improve your Bible reading: understand, question, and apply.



Does the Old Testament Really Point to Jesus?

Samuel James

Answers common questions in an easy-to-read format.



Does It Matter What I Believe?

Samuel James

How key biblical principles (like the Trinity, ecclesiology, the atonement) shape everyday life.



How Do I Get the Most from My Pastor's Sermons?

Gunner Gundersen

Outlines useful practical habits.



How Can I Make the Most of Sunday Services?

Erin Wheeler

Do we worship as we please or as God commands?



The Message of the Old Testament

Mark Dever

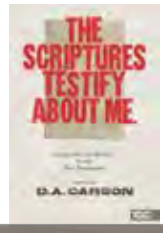
Overview sermons of each Old Testament book to see the big picture of God and the promises He made.



The Message of the New Testament

Mark Dever

Overview sermons of each New Testament book in light of the Old Testament: how God fulfilled His promises.



The Scriptures Testify about Me

Edited by D. A. Carson

Collection of studies on Old Testament texts in relation to Jesus and His work.



Not by Sight

Jon Bloom

35 creative retellings of Bible stories of walking by faith.



Thinking Christianly

Samuel Parkison

22 short reads on following Scripture to navigate complexities of today's culture.



The God Who Is There

D. A. Carson

Basic introduction to faith, understanding what we believe and why we believe it.

TEENAGERS & CHILDREN



Do Not Be True to Yourself

Kevin DeYoung

Countercultural yet biblical advice for high school and college students.



10 Questions About the Bible

Todd R. Chipman

30 devotionals for 8–14-year-olds: the Bible's origin, how to study it, and its reliability.



Who Is God?

Kate Hox

52 illustrated family devotions for ages 5–12, tracing God's story through all of Scripture.



The Ology

Marty Machowski

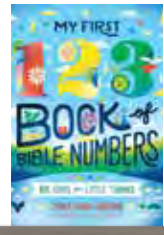
Making abstract theology concepts easier to understand with the use of creative examples, illustrations, and analogies.



The Biggest Story

Kevin DeYoung

With powerful illustrations, this book imaginatively retells the Bible's core message for children.

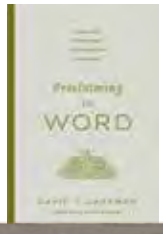


My First 123 Book of Bible Numbers

Samuel Parkison

Teach 3–5-year-olds Bible facts and numbers together.

PREACHERS



Proclaiming the Word

David J. Jackman

Basic principles of biblical exposition to study and prepare for preaching.



The Heart of Preaching

Mike Bullmore

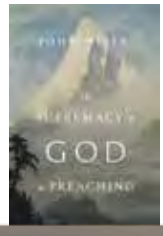
The centrality of the gospel to help pastors convey its power in a more tangible way.



Word Centered Church

Jonathan Leeman

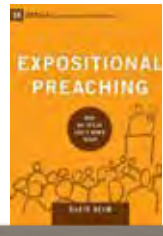
Theological and practical, how the church is transformed by Scripture.



The Supremacy of God in Preaching

John Piper

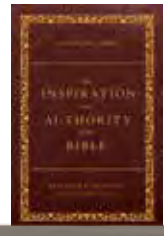
A call on preachers to let God's greatness shape every sermon.



Expositional Preaching

David Helm

A practical, step-by-step guide for preachers.

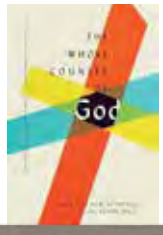


The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

B. B. Warfield

Careful and wise analysis of the Bible being God's Word.

WOMEN



The Whole Counsel of God

Tim Patrick and Andrew Reid

Accessible and practical, helping preachers to plan a whole-Bible series.



Joyfully Spreading the Word

Edited by K. Nielson, G. Furman

Reflections and real stories from women who evangelise in ordinary, everyday life.



The Good Portion - Scripture

Keri Folmar

Are you bored with the Bible? This book is an encouragement to delight in the Word of God.



Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full

Gloria Furman

Improve your Bible reading: understand, question, and apply.



Women of the Word

Jen Wilkin

Convinces why theology matters, and offers a study plan engaging both heart and mind.

EVANGELISM



The Story of His Glory

Brian G. Hedges

A short, clear explanation of the Gospel, perfect for sharing.

COLUMN

EATING WITH ALIENS

In Sanskrit, there is a phrase that means, "guest is god". Many Indians take this to heart. No guest can leave without being served refreshments, and when they seem satisfied, they must be encouraged to have more, and then some more, until they are pleading with you to stop feeding them.

So you can imagine my surprise when I visited a family from another country and they served me nothing to eat! I left hungry, but with a lesson on culture. Some assume their guests must be asked repeatedly to eat more. Others assume guests will ask for what they need.

I have learned that the former can seem forceful to some, but others, like my Habesha friends, are shy to help themselves unless they are offered more, at least four times!

Then there is the question of what to do when food is served. In some cultures, the host takes the first bite in good will, to show that the food is safe to eat. But again, others differ. So how do we strike the perfect balance of hospitality in a cross-cultural place?

I like to remember a few things whenever I play the role of host or guest. Firstly, in Christ we are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens in the family of God (Ephesians 2:19). When it feels like we are eating with aliens, we must remember that in truth, this is family.

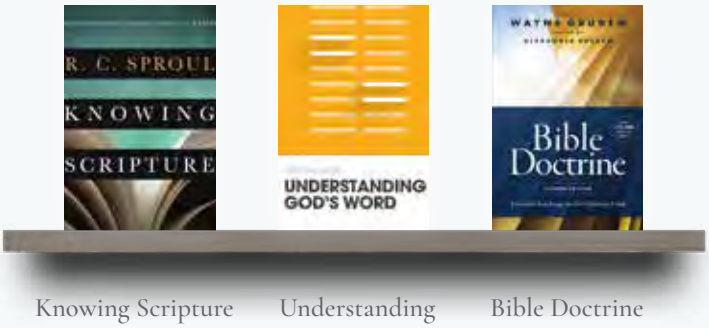
Secondly, Christ came in the form of a humble servant (Philippians 2:7). Humility in hospitality means asking, not assuming. I sometimes, perhaps slightly awkwardly, ask my guests about their culture, and that tells me if I should keep offering them food or not. Clarifying cultural differences avoids misunderstanding and encourages ease. And as a guest, this means making your needs known without a sense of entitlement.

Showing and receiving hospitality out of love for Christ frees us to be authentic, to serve out of love and not a fear of man, to accept service with gratitude and to give of what we have been given.

JOANNA OKPAKO

Church Member in Dubai

STUDY



Knowing Scripture

R. C. Sproul

Approach to study Scripture: eleven practical guidelines for biblical interpretation and application.

Understanding God's Word

Jon Nielson

Introduction for interpreting the Bible when confused by complex texts.

Bible Doctrine

Wayne Grudem

An accessible and streamlined summary of the seminary textbook *Systematic Theology*.



Prolegomena

Herman Bavinck

Bavinck looks at what theology is, how God shows Himself to people, and why the Bible matters.

Knowing the Bible series

J. I. Packer & Douglas Sean O'Donnell

12-Week studies lead participants through different Bible books.

The Meet Me in the Bible Series

Colleen D. Searcy

Various 8-week Bible studies with a framework for studying any Bible book.

DEVOTIONAL



In All the Scriptures

Nicholas Piotrowski

Three contexts of biblical hermeneutics as a foundation for interpreting the Bible.

Memorizing Scripture

Glenna Marshall

Practical tools to memorise Scripture, think deeply, and draw closer to God.

Everyday Gospel

Paul David Tripp

A 365-day devotional that guides readers through the entire Bible in canonical order, from Genesis to Revelation.

Scripture Reading

Psalm 119:1–16

ENGLISH

Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet

4 Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord!
2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
who seek him with their whole heart,
3 who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways!
4 You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.
5 Oh that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!
6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my
eyes fixed on all your commandments.
7 I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous rules.
8 I will keep your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me!

9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
10 With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
11 I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
12 Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!
13 With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.
14 In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.
16 I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word. (ESV)

TAGALOG

Ang Kautusan ni Yahweh

1 Mapalad ang mga taong malinis ang pamumuhay,
kautusan ni Yahweh ang sinusunod araw-araw.
2 Mapalad ang sumusunod sa kanyang patakaran,
buong pusong naghahanap sa kanyang kalooban;
3 ang gawain ay matuwid, namumuhay silang ganap,
sa kanyang kalooban ay doon sila lumalakad.
4 Ibinigay mo nga sa amin ang iyong mga utos,
upang buong pagsisikap na ito'y aming masunod.
5 Gayon ako umaasa, umaasang magiging tapat,
susundin ang iyong utos, susundin nang buong ingat.
6 Kahihiyan ay hindi ko matitikman kailanpaman,
kung ako ay susunod nang tapat sa iyong kautusan.
7 Ang matuwid mong tuntunin habang aking tinatarok,
buong pusong magpupuri, pupurihin kitang lubos.
8 Ang lahat ng iyong utos ay sisikapin kong sundin,
huwag mo akong iiwanan, huwag mo akong lilisanin.

Pagiging Masunurin sa Kautusan ni Yahweh

9 Paano mapapanatiling malinis ang pamumuhay ng sinumang tao, sa kanilang kabataan?
Sa pamamagitan ng pagsunod sa banal mong kautusan.
10 Buong puso ang hangad kong sambahin ka't paglingkuran,
huwag mo akong hahayaang sa utos mo ay sumuway.
11 Ang banal mong kautusa'y sa puso ko iingatan,
upang hindi magkasala laban sa iyo kailanman.
12 Pupurihin kita, Yahweh, ika'y aking pupurihin;
ang lahat ng tuntunin mo ay ituro po sa akin.
13 Ang lahat mong mga utos na sa aki'y ibinigay,
palagi kong babanggitin, malakas kong isisigaw.
14 Nagagalak na susundin ko ang iyong kautusan,
higit pa sa kagalakang dulot nitong kayamanan.
15 Ako'y laging mag-aaral sa lahat ng tuntunin mo,
nang aking maunawaan, pagbubulay-bulayan ko.
16 Sa bigay mong kautusa'y lubos akong nalulugod,
iingatan sa puso ko upang iyo'y di malimot. (MBBTAG)

HINDI

1 जो लोग पवत्रि जीवन जीते है, वे प्रसन्न रहते है।
ऐसे लोग यहोवा की शक्षिाओं पर चलते हैं।
2 लोग जो यहोवा की वधिान पर चलते हैं, वे प्रसन्न रहते है।
अपने समग्र मन से वे यहोवा की मानते हैं।
3 वे लोग बुरे काम नहीं करते।
वे यहोवा की आज्ञा मानते है।
4 हे यहोवा, तूने हमें अपने आदेश दयि,
और तूने कहा कहिम उन आदेशो का पूरी तरह पालन करें।
5 हे यहोवा, यादमिैं सदा
तेरे नयिमो पर चलूँ,
6 जब मैं तेरे आदेशों को वचिारूँगा
तो मुझे कभी भी लज्जति नहीं होना होगा।
7 जब मैं तेरे खरेपन और तेरी नेकी को वचिारता हूँ
तब सचमुच तुझको मान दे सकता हूँ।
8 हे यहोवा, मैं तेरे आदेशों का पालन करूँगा।
सो कृपा करके मुझको मत बसिरा!

9 एक युवा वयक्ति कैसे अपना जीवन पवत्रि रख पाये
तेरे नरि्देशों पर चलने से।
10 मैं अपने पूर्ण मन से परमेश्वर कसिेवा का जतन करता हूँ।
परमेश्वर, तेरे आदेशों पर चलने में मेरी सहायता कर।
11 मैं बड़े ध्यान से तेरे आदेशों का मनन कयिा करता हूँ।
क्यों ताकमिैं तेरे वरि्द्ध पाप पर न चलूँ।
12 हे यहोवा, तेरा धन्यवाद!
तू अपने वधिानों की शक्षिा मुझको दे।
13 तेरे सभी नरि्णय जो वविकपूर्ण है। मैं उनका बखान करूँगा।
14 तेरे नयिमों पर मनन करना,
मुझको अन्य कसिी भी वस्तु से अधकि भाता है।
15 मैं तेरे नयिमों की चर्चा करता हूँ,
और मैं तेरे समान जीवन जीता हूँ।
16 मैं तेरे नयिमों में आनन्द लेता हूँ।
मैं तेरे वचनों को नही भूलूँगा। (ERV)

ARABIC

١طوبى للكاملين طريقا السالكين في شريعة الرب. ٢طوبى لحافظي شهاداته. من كل قلوبهم يطلبونه. ٣ايضا لا يرتكبون اثما. في طرقه يسلكون. ٤انت اوصيت بوصاياك ان تحفظ تماما ٥ليت طرقي تثبت في حفظ فرائضك. ٦حينئذ لا اخزى اذا نظرت الى كل وصاياك.
٧احمدك باستقامة قلب عند تعلمي احكام عدلك. ٨وصاياك احفظ. لا تتركني الى الغاية.

٩ب ـ بم يزكي الشاب طريقه. بحفظه اياه حسب كلامك. ١٠بكل قلبي طلبتك. لا تضلني عن وصاياك. ١١خبأت كلامك في قلبي لكيلا اخطئ اليك. ١٢مبارك انت يا رب. علمني فرائضك. ١٣بشفتيّ حسبت كل احكام فمك. ١٤بطريق شهاداتك فرحت كما على كل الغنى. ١٥بوصاياك الهج والاحظ سبلك. ١٦بفرائضك اتلذذ. لا انسى كلامك (سميث فان دايك)

URDU

1جو لوگ پاک زندگی جیتے ہیں، وہ مسرور رہتے ہیں۔
ایسے لوگ خداوند کی شریعت پر عمل کرتے ہیں۔
2وہ لوگ خداوند کے معاہدے کو مانتے ہیں،
وہ مسرور ہوں گے اپنے دل کی گہرائیوں سے خداوند کو تلاش کریں گے۔
3وہ لوگ بُرے کام نہیں کرتے۔
وہ خداوند کا حکم مانتے ہیں۔
4اے خداوند! تو نے ہمیں اپنے احکام دیئے،
اور تو نے کہا کہ ہم ان احکام کو پُوری طرح مانیں۔
5اے خداوند! اگر میں ہمیشہ تیری شریعت پر چلوں۔
6تو میں کبھی بھی شرمندہ نہیں ہوں گا
جب میں تیرے احکام کا مطالعہ کروں گا۔
7تب جیسے میں تیری صحیح شریعت کا مطالعہ کرتا ہوں
ویسے اپنے پاک دل سے تیرا شکر ادا کرتا ہوں۔
8اے خداوند! میں تیرے احکام کو مانوں گا۔
اِس لئے مہربانی کر کے مجھ کو رد نہ کر۔

9جوان شخص کیسے اپنی زندگی کو پاک رکھ سکتا ہے؟
تیری ہدایتوں پر چل کر۔
10میں اپنے پُورے دِل سے خدا کی خدمت کا جتن کرتا ہوں۔
اے خدا! اپنے فرمان پر چلنے میں میری مدد کر۔
11میں نے تیرے کلام کو اپنے دل میں رکھ لیا
تا کہ میں تیرے خلاف گناہ نہ کروں۔
12اے خداوند! میں تیری ستائش کرتا ہوں۔
تُو مجھکو اپنی شریعت کی تعلیم دے۔
13میں اپنے لبوں سے تیرے سارے فرمودہ احکام کو بیان کروں گا۔
14تیرے معاہدوں کے متعلق سوچنا
مجھے دوسری اشیاء سے زیادہ پسند ہے۔
15میں تیرے اصولوں پر غور وخوض کرتا ہوں
اور میں تیری پسند کے مطابق زندگی بسر کرتا ہوں۔
16میں تیرے اصولوں سے خوش ہوں!
اور میں تیرے کلام کو نہیں بھولوں گا۔ (ERV-UR)


JIM HARRISON
JULIP
How to Be a Better Person
JOHN NEFF
How to Find Peace
ANNA BARNES
How to Have a Happy Marriage
GoatMan
How I Took a Holiday from Being Human
Thomas Thwaites
The Mars Room
Rachel Kushner
TODAY WILL BE DIFFERENT
the Language of Flowers
VANESSA DIFFENBAUGH
REBECCA TRAISTER
GOOD AND MAD
PHILIP K. DICK
The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch
STEPHEN KING
TOM ROBBINS

Theology

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible is true, but it's just not enough. When life gets hard, when push comes to shove, when we are trying to solve problems or build churches or train children, maybe we need something more. This is how many Christians in our region and around the world think and live. In so doing, they are, perhaps unknowingly, looking down on the doctrine of the *sufficiency* of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 says "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*."[1]

The reason why the Bible exists, according to this verse, the reason why Scripture is inspired, is so that believers may be equipped for *every* good work. Not some good works, not many good works, not only the good works that take place in the context of a church, but *every* good work. That means that if you have the Bible, you have all the truth you need to be equipped for every possible good work God would want you to do.

This is Scripture's attribute of *sufficiency*: the doctrine that Scripture contains all the words of God He intends us to have, which are all we need for salvation, for trusting Him perfectly, and for obeying Him perfectly.[2]

Let's take a closer look at how 2 Timothy 3 develops this doctrine, and then consider implications for the church in Arabia.

Understanding the Sufficiency of Scripture

1. Scripture is Sufficient Because of Its Source

Where did the Bible come from? 2 Timothy 3:16 answers: it was "breathed out by God."[3] In biblical context, the point is that the ultimate source of all Scripture is God. Though human writers were the ones who put pen to paper, God's truth is what "flowed through the minds, souls, hearts, and emotions of His chosen human instruments."[4] The Holy Spirit supernaturally used the personalities, education, and life experiences of the human writers to write words that were true, accurate, and exactly what God intended to communicate.

2. Scripture is Sufficient Because of Its Nature

Paul reminds his protégé Timothy that "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings" (3:15). There are a lot of writings in the world. But the Bible is different from all of them. These writings are "sacred," meaning they are holy, pure, set apart. Scripture is unique.

But what "Scripture" does the apostle have in mind? The word Paul uses in 3:16, "Scripture" (Gk. *graphē*) is a technical term for God's inspired Word, most directly understood in that day as the 39 books of the Old Testament.[5] However, in at least two places in the New Testament, "Scripture" clearly refers not only to the Old Testament but also to the New Testament. For example, in 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes a statement of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7, and describes it together with an Old Testament quotation as "Scripture."[6]

So when Paul says the Scriptures he's describing "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15), he is pointing not only to the Old Testament but to the gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. This gospel message is rooted in and anticipated by every part of the Old Testament, but is only fully realised and ex- ▸

plained in the preaching and writing of the apostles, eventually collected in the New Testament.[7] The Bible we have, including the 66 books of the Old and New Testament, is unique and sufficient.

3. Scripture is Sufficient Because of Its Function

Inspiration, inerrancy, uniqueness, and other great attributes of Scripture exist for a purpose. In 2 Timothy 3, the point is that as a consequence of the Bible's source and nature, the Bible is useful.

One function, already noted, is that Scripture is "able to make you wise for salvation." Scripture teaches, instructs, disciples you in what you need to know to come to salvation through faith. As the church has been given the mission to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded" (Matthew 28:19–20), the tool God has given for this task is His Word.

Many pastors, missionaries, and believers of all kinds have found themselves in such a place. ... Wondering whether the right place to look for life answers and ministry strategy is the latest book, method, strategy, or guru.

Yet the value of the Word extends even further. Scripture is "profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16). The word means "useful, beneficial, advantageous."[8] What is Scripture useful *for*? The verse gives four specific examples: "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." These terms span all the basic tasks of ministry to others, underscoring that Scripture is profitable for every kind of biblically prescribed ministry.

Perhaps Timothy was entertaining doubts on this point. Many pastors, missionaries, and believers of all kinds have found themselves in such a place. Wondering whether Scripture really is sufficient. Wondering whether the right place to look for life answers and ministry strategy is the latest book, method, strategy, or guru. Yet Paul speaks across time and geography, reminding all would-be servants of Jesus Christ that Scripture *is* profitable.

Then, in the logic of the passage, 3:17 is describing the *purpose* of 3:16 (notice the word "that"). We could follow the flow with a series of questions and answers.

> Q: What is Scripture like?
> A: It is 1) breathed out by God, and 2) profitable.
> Q: OK, but why?
> A: Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable *so that* the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The goal is that pastors who preach the Word and believers who read the Word would be "complete" (Gk. *artios*). Scripture's God-breathed teaching, reproof, correction, and training all come together with this result. The sense of "complete" is competent, prepared, capable, able to meet all demands. There is nothing demanded that is not provided.

Because Scripture has made God's people complete, they are "equipped for every good work."[9] The New Testament often uses the language of "good works" to talk about the ministry and mission of a Christian. The phrase refers not to good works that earn salvation, nor culturally defined nice behaviour, but rather the actions that come as a consequence of a heart that has been transformed by the gospel.

Jesus talks about "good works" as the conduct of believers by which they make visible the glory of God and bring others to know Him and glorify Him (Matthew 5:16). Throughout the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus), Paul instructs the church in how to adorn sound doctrine as God's representatives. He emphasises how, as Timothy is preaching and teaching the Word, the result should be a congregation abounding in the good works that make the one true God known. Paul summarises: Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

So Scripture is a means to this end; a means to the divine programme of creating a people who live out the Bible because they are transformed by the gospel, and by living such lives together in the church, the world is invited to come and see and know their creator.

All that one needs to participate in this divine programme is given in Scripture. There is nothing the child of God needs that is not given in the Word of God. Because he has the Bible, there is no good work Timothy is not able to do. The same is true of you. Because God has given you the Scripture, you are able to do every good work He means for you to do.

Living the Sufficiency of Scripture

All evangelical believers would say "I believe in the sufficiency of Scripture." However, believers often fail to *live* as though Scripture has everything they need. Since the sufficiency of Scripture addresses *every* good work, the ways believers in the UAE can and must apply the doctrine extend to every area of Christian living. For now, I'll suggest four key implications.

1. Preach the Word

The first and necessary implication of Scripture's sufficiency is Scripture's proclamation. Because the very next thing Paul says is: "preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

The Lord has blessed the UAE with many churches that practise a high view of Scripture and proclaim the authority of Scripture over all of life. If you are serving or leading at such a church, keep up the good work! Keep loving Scripture. Continue preaching expositionally. Continue reading and learning and growing in such a way that the Word of Christ richly dwells in you (Colossians 3:16). Persevering in this ministry of the Word week in and week out, year in and year out, will lead to growth and transformation, personally, corporately, and globally.

2. Prioritise Biblical Truth over Other So-Called "Truth"

To learn to fly a helicopter you're going to need some information that isn't in the Bible. The sufficiency of Scripture means God's Word provides all you need to glorify God, with your heart, mind, body, and speech, as you fly the helicopter. The doctrine doesn't mean that the Bible contains technical instructions about every possible occupation.

Is it right to say "all truth is God's truth?" No, if that phrase is used to suggest insights from human experience and science should be received as equally true and useful sources of guidance on how we think and behave. It's true that God's common grace allows non-Christians to discover all sorts of helpful information about the world He created. Yet even "facts" derived from common grace are usually inseparable from the interpretation and worldview from which they are presented. To receive extrabiblical information as neutral "truth" is to deny the corruption of human reason that results from the fall (cf. Romans 1:18ff.).

It's become regrettably avant-garde in some circles to use the term "biblicist" as a slur against those who insist on being guided first of all by what is explicit in Scripture. While it is wise and helpful to learn from the history of the church, it is good and right for God's people to test all things against what God has actually said.

For a Christian, the Bible is not one book among many. It is from and about Jesus, who is "the Truth" (John 1:14). In Christian thought, Scripture stands alone as true truth, the standard and norm that tests, corrects, and judges any human claim to truth. It is fitting, then, for believers to prioritise Scripture in their time, in their listening, and in their study, so that our thoughts and our words might increasingly distance from the ways of the world and move closer to the mind of Christ.

3. Protect the Silence of Scripture

One way to violate the sufficiency of Scripture is to ignore portions of it, to stop short of affirming all that Scripture affirms. Another way to violate the sufficiency of Scripture is to authoritatively say more on a given topic than Scripture makes clear. Paul implored the Corinthian believers to "learn . . . not to go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6).

[Examples of turning a biblical principle into a very specific rule that Scripture itself does not clearly command could include:
Modesty The Bible teaches to dress modestly, but someone may go further and say Christians must not wear a certain type of clothing.
Worship The Bible teaches God-centred worship, but someone may say that only hymns, or a certain service style are biblical.
Education The Bible tells parents to teach their children God's truth, but someone may say homeschooling is the only faithful way.]

False teachers go beyond Scripture from evil motives, inventing new teachings in a way that serves their own goals and desires. Evangelicals are tempted to go beyond Scripture from good motives, trying to help the church, but doing so in a way that is more specific than can be defended exegetically. When we fail to protect the silence of Scripture, we blur lines between what is explicit in the text and what comes to us from denominational traditions or personal preferences. This should not be. Scripture is sufficient. God is purposeful where He speaks and He is intentional where He does not speak.

4. Propagate Primary Ministry

At Gulf Theological Seminary, we distinguish between "primary ministry" and "derivative ministry." Primary ministry is preaching and leadership that is based on explicit and in-depth study of Scripture. Derivative ministry is ministry-by-template, teaching and leading according to scripts provided by popular resources or churches. Derivative ministry is popular because it's a lot quicker to start and less work to do. Yet we are convinced it falls short of God's standard. Believers shouldn't tolerate derivative ministry from their leaders.

[Examples of the distinction between primary and derivative ministry:
Preaching **Primary ministry:** The pastor studies the passage, its context and meaning carefully, and prepares a sermon from the text. **Derivative ministry:** The pastor uses another church's sermon and repeats it with little study.
Bible study **Primary ministry:** The leader works through the passage and prepares questions that help the group understand and apply it. **Derivative ministry:** The leader reads questions from a popular study guide not checking whether its interpretation is accurate.
Church growth **Primary ministry:** Leaders ask what faithfulness to Scripture requires, even if growth is slow. **Derivative ministry:** Leaders copy the style and methods of a fast-growing church in the hope of producing the same results.]

Believing in the sufficiency of Scripture doesn't mean the pastor studies less. Rather, he studies more. Because what to believe, to teach, to do, is not up to him. Because he's totally convinced God's Word is true and God's Word is sufficient, his job is to declare with God's authority what God has said. Therefore, he's going to work as hard as he possibly can to make sure he gets it right. Believers should welcome this kind of ministry, and expect it of their pastors.

Conclusion

The Bible is enough. If you have a Bible, you are not missing any truth that God wants you to have. As you learn and live the Word of God with the people of God, you have all you need to be saved, to live a life of faith and obedience, and to hope in God's glorious future. Christian, learn to love the sufficiency of Scripture. ■

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[1] ESV, emphasis added.

[2] This paraphrases the definition of Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 159. This definition in turn is a condensation of the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.6.

[3] This is somewhat muddled by translations that render theopneustos as "inspired" (KJV, NASB). The point is not Scripture's inherent nature, but Scripture's divine origin.

[4] John F. MacArthur, Jr., *2 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 143.

[5] For example, in Romans 1:1–2, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures."

[6] The second example is in 2 Peter 3:16–17, in which the Apostle Peter refers to Paul's writings as "Scripture."

[7] See also 1 Timothy 1:10–11; 2 Timothy 1:8, 10; 2:8; 4:3; Titus 2:1.

[8] BDAG, s.v. ὠφέλιμος.

[9] In the Greek text, there is a play on words at this point, where the word is a synonym of the word before it. We might say something like "that the man of God may be competent, made competent for every good work." It emphasises that he is currently existing in a state of competency, and the reason why is because the Scriptures have made him competent.



SPURGEON

CHARLES SPURGEON'S
MORNING AND EVENING

DEW ARABIA

Photo by Muhammad Irfan Baloch

Readings by C. H. Spurgeon

"let the peoples renew their strenghts"

Isaiah 41:1

Everything on earth needs to be renewed. Nothing that's been created can keep going on its own. "When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground" as the Psalmist said (Psalm 104:30). *Even the trees, which don't get tired from worrying or working too hard, still need rain from the sky and food from the ground to live. The cedar trees of Lebanon, which God Himself planted, survive only because each day they're filled with fresh sap drawn from the ground.*

In the same way, we need God to make us new again, or we won't last. Just like we need to eat food to repair our bodies when they get tired, we need to feed our souls with God's Word—by reading the Bible, listening to preaching, or worshipping and taking communion. How weak will our faith, hope, and love become when we ignore these spiritual disciplines! Some people who believe in God live like poor and hungry beggars because they don't read the Bible regularly and attentively or don't pray on their own.

If our faith can survive without God, it is not from Him; it is only our imagination. Because if God gives us faith, we would need Him as much as flowers need water each morning. Without constant spiritual renewal, we will not be ready for the never-ending attacks of the devil, the hard trials God allows, or even for the struggles and fights inside our own hearts. When a big storm comes, you don't want to be like a tree that didn't root deep enough to drink up fresh water and hold tight to the rock with many strong roots.

When a storm hits, you don't want to be like the sailors who didn't strengthen their mast, didn't drop their anchor, or didn't stay close to the harbour. If we allow our grace, faith and steadfastness to grow weak, evil will for sure get stronger and fight very hard to overpower us. Then we might end up painfully ruined, defeated, and deeply ashamed. So let us, in humble prayer, go to God for His mercy. Then we will see His promise come true: "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31).

Modern translation of Charles Spurgeon's Morning and Evening daily readings; evening 2nd January.

"hayaang magpanibagong lakas ang mga bayan"

Isaias 41:1

Ang lahat ng bagay sa mundo ay kailangang patuloy na panibaguhin. Walang nilalang ang kayang magpatuloy sa sarili nitong lakas. Gaya ng sinabi ng salmista: "Iyong isinusugo ang iyong Espiritu, sila'y nalilikha, at iyong binabago ang balat ng lupa" (Awit 104:30). *Kahit ang mga puno, na hindi napapagod sa pag-aalala o sa labis na pagtatrabaho, ay nangangailangan pa rin ng ulan mula sa langit at sustansiya mula sa lupa upang mabuhay. Maging ang mga punong sedro ng Lebanon, na ang Diyos mismo ang nagtanim, ay nabubuhay lamang dahil araw-araw silang tumatanggap ng sariwang dagta at sustansiya mula sa lupa.*

Ganoon din tayo. Kailangan nating patuloy na panibaguhin ng Diyos, kung hindi ay hindi tayo makakatagal. Kung paanong kailangan nating kumain upang muling lumakas ang ating katawan kapag ito'y napapagod, kailangan din nating pakainin ang ating kaluluwa sa pamamagitan ng Salita ng Diyos—sa pagbabasa ng Biblia, pakikinig sa pangangaral, pagsamba, at pakikibahagi sa Banal na Hapunan. Gaano kahina ang ating pananampalataya, pag-asa, at pag-ibig kapag pinababayaan natin ang mga gawaing ito na nagpapalago sa ating espirituwal na buhay! May mga taong nananampalataya sa Diyos ngunit namumuhay na parang mga pulubi na gutom na gutom, dahil hindi nila regular at buong pusong binabasa ang Biblia o personal na nananalangin. Kung ang ating pananampalataya ay kayang mabuhay nang hindi umaasa sa Diyos, hindi ito nagmula sa Kanya; bunga lamang ito ng ating sariling imahinasyon. Sapagkat kung ang Diyos ang nagbigay sa atin ng pananampalataya, kailangan natin Siya kung paanong kailangan ng mga bulaklak ang tubig tuwing umaga. Kung wala ang patuloy na espirituwal na pagpapanibago, hindi tayo magiging handa sa walang tigil na pag-atake ng diyablo, sa mabibigat na pagsubok na pinahihintulutan ng Diyos, o maging sa mga pakikibaka sa loob ng sarili nating puso. Kapag dumating ang isang malakas na bagyo, ayaw nating maging tulad ng punong mababaw ang mga ugat—hindi sapat ang lalim upang sumipsip ng sariwang tubig at hindi nakakapit nang mahigpit sa bato sa pamamagitan ng maraming matitibay na ugat.

Kapag dumating ang bagyo, ayaw din nating maging tulad ng mga mandaragat na hindi pinatibay ang kanilang palo, hindi ibinaba ang kanilang angkla, at hindi nanatiling malapit sa daungan. Kung hahayaan nating manghina ang biyaya ng Diyos sa ating buhay, ang ating pananampalataya, at ang ating katatagan, tiyak na lalakas ang kasamaan at puspusang lalaban upang tayo'y madaig. At maaari tayong humantong sa masakit na pagkawasak, pagkatalo, at matinding kahihiyan.

"Ngunit silang naghihintay sa Panginoon ay magpapanibagong lakas, sila'y paiilanglang na may mga pakpak na parang mga agila, sila'y tatakbo at hindi mapapagod, sila'y lalakad, at hindi manghihina" (Isaias 40:31).

Makabagong salin ng Morning and Evening ni Charles Spurgeon, mula sa pagbasa para sa gabi ng Enero 2.

THEOLOGY & TECHNOLOGY

REDEEMING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
FOR THE GLORY OF GOD



DEW ARABIA

Christian Living

The aliens are finally here; yet no one recognises them. For decades human beings have been obsessed with aliens—powerful extraterrestrial beings who could take over planet Earth. In the United States, for example, conspiracy theories abound regarding the so-called landing of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) in the 1940s carrying extraterrestrial beings. Regardless of one's belief about UFOs, no one would want extraterrestrial beings with unmitigated power invading Mother Earth and upending our peaceful existence. To an extent, that is what the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) feels like.

AI as a productivity tool has been around for a while; however, the way and manner in which it has grown over the past few years has been nothing short of an alien-like invasion. It has taken over jobs, displaced industries that have been in existence for centuries—like legal aides, customer service, personal assistants, and other forms of Christian ministry—and it threatens to take over more. Across many companies, insatiable shareholders are pushing for more returns, and business executives see AI as the saviour that would lead them to that promised land of record-breaking profits. Never mind its effects on millions of workers and their families whose livelihoods are taken away by this power-grabbing alien called AI. There is an unprecedented push in almost every industry for employees to adopt the use of AI in everything they do. For some folks, AI adoption feels like receiving the mark of the beast the apostle John speaks about in Revelation 13:16–18. This is because it appears that, without AI, nothing can be done either in the corporate world or in our personal lives. Although AI is in its nascent stage, there are many people who cannot imagine life without AI. It is therefore not surprising that the posture of many Christians towards AI is so negative, and that includes practitioners of Christian education. Some of my recent conversations showed that some Christians view AI as a threat against the creation mandate, where God charged man to be fruitful and multiply (cf. Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15). Their question is: how can that mandate be fulfilled when AI is taking over all the jobs?

For practitioners of higher education, the concern is slightly different. Aside from the unethical behaviour of some students submitting AI-generated content as their own work, there is also a concern about whether AI is dulling the minds of students and what that means for the creation mandate. As a result, the initial response of many educational institutions has been one of outright rejection of AI in all its forms in academic work. For example, my seminary requires students to put a declaration at the bottom of all their writing assignments affirming that no AI was used. However, the question is: is this the best way for Christians to respond to AI—to move to the other side of the pendulum? In this essay, I offer four reflections on AI and how Christians should approach it based on St Augustine of Hippo's framework on how Christians can benefit from pagan institutions. The position of this article is that Christians should not shun the use of AI wholesale nor embrace it uncritically, but appropriate what is useful in it.

Learning the alphabet

In Teaching Christianity II.40.101, Augustine of Hippo, one of the most influential thinkers in the history of the Western world, writes:

> "Christians must not altogether shun those human institutions that are indispensable to a productive way of life. Up to a point, in fact, we should pay attention to them and be mindful of them… Above all this means letters of the alphabet, without which reading is impossible… institutions like those are useful; there is nothing wrong with learning them."[1]

It was believed in Roman mythology that the alphabet originated from the pagan god, Mercury; as a result, some Christians were reluctant to learn it. In my 21st-century mind, I cannot possibly think of any reason why anyone would oppose learning the alphabet. As a matter of human rights, it is a criminal offence punishable under law in most countries for a parent not to send their children to school. Education, which involves learning to read and write, is part and parcel of every civilised society. It is therefore unimaginable to think that there was a time when some Christians opposed learning the alphabet. I wonder how these Christians were expecting to read the Word of God in its written form, if they had not learned how to read by first learning the alphabet.

To what extent AI adoption will become a human right in the future, I cannot tell, but it has certainly changed the way people learn today. For example, sitting in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, I am ▸

able to join theological conversations that have been going on for centuries without travelling around the world combing through libraries and monasteries. Through Research Rabbit, an AI tool, I am able to identify and read the leading voices on particular doctrinal issues before chiming in. That is a huge blessing! It has been said that "we all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us," and that certainly includes the acquisition of knowledge. Our knowledge of God and His dealings with His creation is built progressively, and therefore the fact that AI helps to synthesise centuries-long conversations in order to add our own voice is something that must be celebrated rather than opposed. This is just one example of how AI can be a blessing. I am sure as time goes on, there will be many other blessings that will become apparent from the use of AI for the Christian.

... now that the problem I used to solve has been solved in a smarter way by AI, what is the next problem I should move on to solve, as a person created in the image of God?

What about the harmful effects of AI?

Having said that, I am also cognisant of the voices in the opposing camp who bemoan the harmful effects of AI. I have already alluded to its mass displacement of workers, not to speak of its addictive and mind-dulling effects. Some also speak of how students submit AI-generated content as their own work. These are all valid concerns; however, something can be said for each of these apparent or perceived side effects of AI.

First, we must understand that the mandate for man to till the land and be fruitful goes beyond agricultural work—those of us living in the 21st-century service-oriented economies must understand this. According to the International Labor Organization, only 2% to 4% of the population in advanced and high-income economies are directly employed in the agricultural sector.[2] In Ghana, where I come from, and other third-world countries, the figure is often north of 50%, but that has less to do with a desire to remain faithful to the creation mandate than with our failure to adopt innovative agricultural practices. God, in His creation of the universe, was not involved in a labour-intensive activity. Creation was a knowledge-based activity as God spoke the universe into being. Therefore, the charge that AI is displacing large numbers of workers, thereby undercutting the creation mandate is misplaced. I firmly believe that when God commissioned man to till the land and be fruitful and multiply, He was in effect saying that whatever your hands find to do, do it to the best of your ability and to the glory of His name (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:23–24). And that may be blue-collar, white-collar, service-based, or knowledge-based work. Our objective as human beings is to find solutions to problems. All jobs exist to solve particular problems in society. However, through the ingenuity of those who have used their God-given talent to come up with AI, man has now been able to solve many of the problems which needed an army of people to solve. The most God-honouring thing for those who have been displaced by AI productivity tools is to ask: now that the problem I used to solve has been solved in a smarter way by AI, what is the next problem I should move on to solve, as a person created in the image of God? I do acknowledge that this line of thinking may sound simplistic and patronising, because it will not be easy for people who have trained and worked for decades in a particular profession to transition to a different kind of work after losing their jobs to AI just like that; yet it is a more positive approach than simply opposing the tool that is here to stay. In my opinion, no matter how advanced AI gets, Christians of all people should not be afraid of becoming redundant in society, because as vice-regents of God in creation, they will never be out of work. God works through Christians to sustain His creation, which means they are in business as long as the earth is in existence and God is at work in the world. The Scriptures seem to suggest that not even angels can take the job of the Christian, let alone artificial intelligence (Genesis 1:26–28).

AI may lead to unethical behaviour

Then, there is a charge against AI because students can present AI-generated content as their own; hence, the call to shun it altogether. This charge is an important one and goes to the heart of how education has been conducted over the centuries. If anything at all, AI has revealed how flawed some of our current practices of education are. James Smith makes a valid point in his book Desiring the Kingdom when he writes, "Christian education has for so long been concerned with information rather than formation."[3] For many centuries education has been about passing on information from teacher to student, and once the student is able to regurgitate the information back, the student is deemed to have achieved the outcomes of education and sent off into the world. However, the question is: is this what education is supposed to do? According to Smith, education "is a constellation of practices, rituals, and routines that inculcates a particular vision of the good life by inscribing or infusing that vision into the heart (the gut) by means of material, embodied practices."[4] It is evident from this definition that education is supposed to be more than just passing on information and expecting students to reproduce it. This is echoed by Kyle Hughes in his book Teaching for Spiritual Formation where he draws lessons from the examples of the Church Fathers to show how education is supposed to be whole-person formation rather than transmission of information from teacher to student.[5] However, this vision of whole-person formation was supplanted by expediency and concentration on mass-producing productive human resources to satisfy the insatiable industrial machine.[6]

AI can be exploited for good or evil; therefore, it is the character of the person who wields the tool that we must go after.

The current education system is designed in such a way that if a student can repeat the information that has been passed on to him or her, education is presumed to have been successful.

However, AI has taught us that this presumptuous assumption is flawed. Now that AI can reproduce information better than a student could, educators must rethink what it means to educate and how to assess successful outcomes. More than that, a student who is able to pass off AI-generated work as his own should cause educators to question themselves— what kind of virtues are taught in the schools that lead a student to be only concerned about obtaining a passing grade? At present it appears to me the axe has been swung against the wrong tree. Instead of pointing fingers at the practices of education, AI has become the scapegoat. Like many things in modern society, AI can be exploited for good or evil; therefore, it is the character of the person who wields the tool that we must go after.

However, in its current state, two important issues remain to be addressed as AI becomes part and parcel of everyday life. The first concerns the way generative AI models have gathered the data underlying their predictive algorithms: data has been scraped from millions of books and articles without the consent of their authors. The second is how little distinction these algorithms make—or even can make—between quality research and low-quality content. A professor of mine recently recounted how AI repeatedly hallucinated nonexistent sources or failed to find quality resources during his experiment for his PhD work (not to generate content, only to gather resources). The first problem can be addressed through existing copyright protocols, since most countries already have legal and administrative structures in place to protect intellectual property rights. The second problem, however, only reiterates the point that AI, at its best, remains artificial—and that is precisely why it can never replace human beings made in the image of God. It still requires considerable human intervention, like any other technology.

AI is not neutral

Having said that, it must be acknowledged that AI is not neutral. Many of those who have built it or are behind the calibration of its algorithms are sinful men and women like the rest of mankind. The blood of our first parents runs through them. Just like Adam and Eve, many AI engineers see it as a tool that provides unfettered power to humans, removing the shackles of any restrictions and limitations placed by a so-called divine being. What they are after is omnipresence and omnipotence—attributes that belong to God alone. Therefore, I am not advocating for an unquestioned mass adoption of the capabilities of AI by the Christian. I agree with Augustine that "certainly some things instituted by human beings have a sketchy likeness to those found in nature. Among these those that tend to involve associating with demons must be utterly rejected and denounced." It is true that AI can be a good tool; however, the present world is still under the rule of the devil and his demons. Therefore, man can unknowingly become a willing ally with the devil—and that certainly includes those anti-God programmers and developers who are behind AI algorithms calibrating it to supplant virtue in society. Therefore, Augustine's advice is key: as Christians seek to benefit from the positives of AI, they must do so with a keen awareness that this vile world is not a friend to grace. Christians must set boundaries regarding what they can and cannot use AI to do. For example, a preacher cannot under any circumstances preach an AI-generated sermon, nor can a worship service leader pray an AI-generated prayer.

Conclusion

We may not be aware, but the aliens are already here, and they have taken over the operational command of how we live in the 21st century. AI is changing how we think, how we study, how we work, how preachers may prepare sermons in the future, etc. There is no aspect of human life that is untouched by this powerful force. There are two ways Christians can approach this technology. They can either see it as the mark of the beast and resist their foreheads being tattooed with its initials, or heed Augustine's advice—similar to learning the alphabet—and see AI as a tool of common grace and leverage its benefits while they discard its anti-God influences and objectives. More importantly, there should be a concerted effort to encourage more Christians to become AI engineers and programmers who will bring a God-centred approach to building AI tools and calibrating their algorithms to promote virtue in society. I do not want to sound anachronistic, but I cannot help but wonder what Augustine's posture towards AI would be if he lived in the 21st century. I completely agree with him that, when pagans "happen to speak truths that are consonant with our faith. Not only is there no reason to fear those teachings of theirs, but we should in fact be reappropriating them for our own use, like property returned to its rightful owners."[7] ■

... there should be a concerted effort to encourage more Christians to become AI engineers and programmers who will bring a God-centred approach to building AI tools and calibrating their algorithms ...

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by Kwesi Sena — MATS, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, elder in Dubai

[1] Augustine. The Teacher. Teaching Christianity. Translated by Carolyn J.-B. Hammond. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2025, 357.

[2] International Labour Organization. Employment, Productivity, and Trade in Developing-Country Agriculture. https://www.ilo.org/resource

[3] James K. A. Smith. Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 17.

[4] Smith, 26.

[5] Kyle R. Hughes. Teaching for Spiritual Formation: A Patristic Approach to Christian Education in a Convulsed Age (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2022), 2.

[6] D. A. Carson. A Biblical Theology of Education. *Themelios* 46 (August 2021): 205.

[7] Augustine. The Teacher. Teaching Christianity. Translated by Carolyn J.-B. Hammond. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2025, 389.

COLUMN

THE PROBLEM HUMANITY CANNOT SOLVE

As my wife and I read God's Word together, looking for the light of truth, now and then a passage raises a question we cannot let go of—and we find ourselves talking it through. This time it was my wife who raised it. After reading how sin spread from Adam onward, she asked, "Why did God allow the human race to continue existing, despite its stubborn sin—grieving His heart?"

"God's decision to let us live on," I replied, "is a deliberate, temporary act of mercy, giving everyone an opportunity to receive salvation before final judgement."

My wife smiled only a little—showing a mix of sadness and confusion: "Really, sin is a problem no one can fix; it has spread through and corrupted everyone."

"Yes, and God has revealed to us where it came from," I told her. "Original sin entered humanity through the disobedience of Adam, the first man, against the holiness of God. Adam bore a unique responsibility: he received a command directly from God and acted on behalf of the whole human race." As the apostle Paul writes:

> *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned* (Romans 5:12).

"All sinned?" my wife wondered, sensing the weight of sin. "Even the prophets?"

"Yes," I replied. "The Bible confirms that all humans, including prophets and apostles, have sinned; no one is without sin. For this reason, it says that all need a Saviour."

Sin has become the very identity of fallen humanity in a world full of evil. Left unchecked, it grows and multiplies within the human heart, and in the end it leads to destruction. For sin gives birth to more sin—often becoming more selfish, destructive, and deceptive. It blinds people's minds, leading them to believe that they can free themselves from sin through their own efforts—even though those efforts come from the same sinful nature that God will judge.

"Do you see, my beloved wife? As we read the Word of God—starting from the Book of Genesis—we observe how sin spreads through the human race like a virus: evil, hateful, and deadly. It is a problem humanity cannot solve. Only Jesus Christ can. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. Only He came down from heaven, to become human (God revealed in the flesh), and He is the only one who ever lived without sin."

> *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4:12).

FOUAD

from Morocco

Poem



Photo by Okaykat

The Word and the Soil

To those with eyes, yet without sight,
walking in the darkness of night,
they think they see, yet remain blind.
“Let there be light,” the LORD declared,
at Your command, O LORD, night became day.
A lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.

Through ages past, and time to come,
to them of old, and us now, a mighty revelation.
Before ink touched parchment, or paper was formed,
Your Word lived, Your Word breathed, eternally.
A call to the hungry: O taste and see,
bitter and sweet—yes, this is Truth.

Sweet, to all who receive the news of life,
bitter, to all who bear the cost,
no hiding beneath this revealing light.
The seed is true, yet the soil must receive it too.
Through ages past, and time to come,
Your Word remains—unchanging, living, true.

Be careful to whom you listen, dear beloved,
The Word of God is One, from beginning to end,
It pierces the soul, yet heals the wounded.
Obedience to the Word surpasses sacrifice.
The Word stands true, may your heart receive it too,
Be careful, for what you hear becomes your doing.

—

Temi Cotek — church member in Ras Al Khaimah

Reflective Questions

1. The seed is true, yet the soil must receive it too. What kind of soil does your heart most resemble right now (Mark 4:3–20)?
2. What are you regularly hearing, reading, or watching that is shaping your actions?
3. After reading this poem, what is one specific truth from God’s Word you need to obey rather than merely acknowledge? Meditate on James 1:22–25, Luke 6:46–49 and the Bible story on page 72.
4. Why is obedience to God better than any sacrifice? Read also 1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, John 14:15.

RELIABLE

TRANSLATION

MANUSCRIPT

COPY OF COPY

TIME SPAN

VARIANTS

CONFIDENCE

ACCURACY

ORIGINALS

Theology

The Reliability of Scripture and the Ending of Mark's Gospel

I recently concluded a two-year sermon series through the Gospel of Mark, ending at Mark 16:8. As a pastor committed to expository preaching and serving at a church that is committed to the full verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture, why did I not preach Mark 16:9–20?

You might notice that in most of your English Bibles these verses are bracketed off, separated from the main text with the notification, for example, "SOME OF THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE 16:9–20" (as in the ESV). This note reflects the overwhelming consensus of faithful, Bible-believing evangelical scholars, Bible translation committees, and pastors that the verses that follow likely do not belong to the original text of the Gospel of Mark.

This may come as a surprise to you. As with all matters, we should honestly examine the evidence and the arguments and understand the reasons for the beliefs that we hold. We should strive to be Christians who think biblically and carefully and use our minds in the service of God, for His glory.

Perhaps you are wondering: "*If Mark 16:9–20 probably was not part of the original Gospel, does that mean our Bible has been changed? Can we still trust Scripture?*" Part 1 of this article will seek to answer that question; Part 2 explains why the Gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8.

Part 1
Can I Trust My Bible?

If the ending of the Gospel of Mark is not original, then does that mean that the Bible has been changed? Can we trust our Bibles?[1]

The answer is a resounding yes! You can absolutely trust your Bible. The fact that we can clearly discern that the Gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8 is actually a strong argument in favour of the Bible's reliability. This should increase our confidence in Scripture all the more.

We don't have the original "autographs" of any book of the Bible—that is, the original manuscripts produced by the biblical authors. These have been lost in history. However, *the inspired text* they wrote has been *transmitted* to us by numerous carefully preserved copies called "manuscripts." In God's grace and providence, faithful Christian scribes copied and preserved the text of Scripture. Through their labour, God ensured the transmission of the biblical text to us in the form of manuscripts.

As evangelical Christians, we shouldn't be anxious or nervous about passages like the end of Mark's Gospel, where there is a question about the text. Instead, we can think and speak honestly and clearly about the evidence and come to clear conclusions. We can confidently and accurately reconstruct the original text of the Bible from the manuscript copies through which the text was transmitted. The scholarly discipline that focuses on studying manuscripts in order to reconstruct the original text of documents from the ancient world is called "textual criticism."

In the science of manuscript studies and textual criticism, two factors are the most significant to ascertain the reliability of a text: (1) the number of manuscript copies available, and (2) the length of time between the original writing and the first available manuscript. The more manuscripts we have, the more witnesses we have by which we can reliably reconstruct the original text. The shorter the time period between the original and the first copies, the more confident we can be in the text's reliability. With that in mind, look at this comparison between the text of the New Testament and other ancient documents:

Author	Approximate original-to-copy time span	Number of Copies
Plato	1200 yrs	7
Herodotus	1300 yrs	8
Caesar	1000 yrs	10
Tacitus	1000 yrs	20
Aristotle	1400 yrs	49
Homer (Iliad)	500 yrs	643
The New Testament	Within decades to a century for the earliest fragments	5,800+ Greek manuscripts

Source: adapted from Greg Gilbert, Why Trust the Bible?

When ancient translations of the New Testament and quotations of the New Testament by the Church Fathers are included, the textual witnesses to the New Testament text number well over *20,000*. Truly, the Bible has *no parallel* in the ancient world in terms of the number of witnesses and the wealth of manuscript evidence for its text! As F. F. Bruce famously put it, "there is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."[2]

At times, I've illustrated it this way: If you stacked the surviving manuscripts of most classical authors, you'd have only a modest pile, in many cases no more than knee-high. But if you stacked the surviving manuscripts attesting to the text of the New Testament, you'd have a tower as high as the Burj Khalifa. No ancient book is even close in terms of textual attestation.

Sometimes, Bible sceptics or non-Christians make the misleading claim that there are over 400,000 "variants" between the various copies of the New Testament. A "variant" is any point at which there is a difference in the text between two or more manuscript copies. Four points may be made in response: [3]

- First, if we consider the fact that these 400,000 variants are spread out across over 25,000 manuscripts, ancient translations, and ancient quotations of the Bible, it only amounts to about 16 variants per manuscript.
- Second, the way these "400,000 variants" are counted is as follows: if one manuscript says "the Lord Jesus" and ten others say "the Lord Jesus Christ" in the same place, then all eleven count as "variants."
- Third, most variants are concentrated and clustered in the same places, rather than being spread throughout the New Testament.
- Fourth, more than 99% of all variants are insignificant and do not affect the meaning of the text. In most cases, we can quickly explain how a variant arose during copying and easily reconstruct the original text. For example, consider these modern "scribal errors" (i.e., typos) and see if you can figure out the original text:
  - 1etters that looked similar miqht be switcheb for another;
  - one word might be substituted for another won that sounded the same;
  - words might skipped
  - words or lettters might be be doubled
  - spelling conventions may vary: color / colour, check / cheque.
- The remaining 1% of variants are significant, but they don't affect any key doctrine of the Christian faith! Moreover, even in these cases, the original text can be determined through the application of logical reasoning and the established principles of textual criticism.

Among these 1% of "significant" variants are the ending of the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:9–20) and the story of the woman caught in adultery in John's Gospel (John 7:53–8:11). For both these passages, by applying the principles of textual criticism and contextual and linguistic analysis, we can ascertain with a high degree of certainty that these portions of text were added later to the Gospel. Part 2 of this article will demonstrate the evidence for seeing Mark 16:9–20 as a later addition.

Our ability to accurately and confidently reconstruct the original text of Scripture should bolster our confidence in the reliability and trustworthiness of the Word of God. You can trust your Bible, and you can trust the sovereign, majestic, and gracious God who has revealed Himself to us in the Bible and has providentially preserved His Word for us!

> "The words of the LORD are pure words,
> like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
> purified seven times" — Psalm 12:6.

[1] I want to acknowledge my indebtedness in this article to the excellent book by Greg Gilbert, Why Trust the Bible? (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). The data and the examples have been adapted from Gilbert.

[2] F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 19.

[3] These examples are from Gilbert, *Why Trust the Bible?*, 52.

Part 2

Why Mark's Gospel Ends at Mark 16:8

In part 1 of this article, I sought to show that we can have great confidence in the reliability of the text of Scripture that has been transmitted to us. The science of textual criticism enables us to faithfully and accurately reconstruct the original canonical text of the Bible from the manuscript copies we have. Here, I will present in more detail the evidence and arguments for seeing the Gospel of Mark as ending at Mark 16:8.

The three arguments that most strongly persuade me that the Gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8 are the manuscript evidence, the testimony of the early Church Fathers, and the internal evidence. Each will be examined.

1. Manuscript Evidence

Our earliest and best manuscripts of the New Testament do not contain Mark 16:9–20. These include Codex Sinaiticus, which is the earliest complete copy of the New Testament that we have, dating back to the mid-4th century (AD 325–360). Codex Sinaiticus ends the Gospel of Mark clearly at Mark 16:8, with a clear line, an end notation giving the Gospel's name ("The Gospel According to Mark"), and much of the remainder of the column left blank before Luke begins in the next column.[1]

"Codex" refers to a book made from sheets or pages bound together, rather than a scroll.

Codex Vaticanus, another highly important, very early



Codex Sinaiticus, 4th century, Mark 16:1–8. British Library, Add MS 43725, f. 228r.

A fourth-century copy of Mark's Gospel
This page comes from Codex Sinaiticus, which contains the earliest complete surviving copy of the New Testament. The Greek text is written in narrow columns of capital letters, without the word spacing and verse numbers familiar to modern readers. Near the top of the second column, Mark 16:8 ends with ΕΦΟΒΟΥΝΤΟ ΓΑΡ (ephobounto gar), meaning "for they were afraid." Mark then stops. Much of the column below is left empty, apart from the closing title ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΡΚΟΝ (euangelion kata Markon), meaning "The Gospel According to Mark". At the top of the next column appears ΚΑΤΑ ΛΟΥΚΑΝ (kata loukan), meaning "According to Luke", and Luke's Gospel begins.

manuscript containing the Gospel of Mark, also does not contain verses 9–20 of chapter 16. In this crucial manuscript as well, the Gospel ends at verse 8, with an end notation giving the Gospel's name and a blank column after it.[2]

In addition to these crucial early manuscripts, the earliest manuscripts of translations of the Gospel of Mark into other languages also end at Mark 16:8 and do not contain verses 9–20. These include translations of Mark's Gospel into Latin, Syriac, Sahidic, Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian, and Georgian, all of which do not contain verses 9–20.

It is true that the longer ending (vv. 9–20) is present in the majority of manuscripts (~95%). However, in determining what the original text is, textual criticism involves not just counting the number of manuscripts, but also examining the *quality* and *date* of the manuscripts being considered. The larger number of manuscripts agreeing could simply indicate that they all came from the same (later) copy. It does not mean that they tell us what the original is.

We should also note that many of the copies that include Mark 16:9–20 also include notations that indicate uncertainty about whether the passage is original. For example, several of the copies that include verses 9–20 also have a note after verse 8 that says, "The End. In some copies the Gospel writer ended here, but in many this also was found," before including verses 9–20. This is similar to the notation and brackets we see in our English Bible text for this passage.

When this evidence is considered cumulatively, it means that the shorter ending of Mark's Gospel, which ends at Mark 16:8, has the strongest support in the earliest and best manuscripts and versions with a wide geographic spread, most likely indicating that it is original.

Moreover, when Bible scholars do the work of textual criticism to reconstruct the original text based on manuscript copies, a key aspect in determining the original is asking which reading is easier to explain logically.

As a simple example, consider the following two versions of a sentence that might be found in two different copies of a handwritten note:

WE GATHERED FOR WORSHIP AT THE CHURCH TODAY.
WE GATHERED FOR FOR WORSHIP AT THE CHURCH TODAY.

By looking at these, we might deduce that the second version arose from a copyist's error ('typo') in which the word 'FOR' was copied twice.

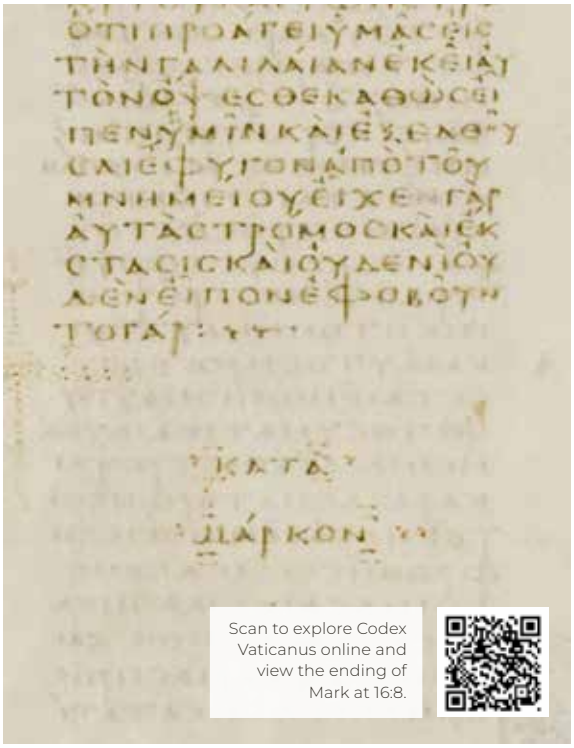
Similarly, scholars of textual criticism use a number of logical rules to determine which version represents the original text. In the case of Mark's Gospel, it is highly unlikely, and nearly impossible, that a scribe copying the text would look at verses 9–20 in the original before him and decide to omit them, ending the Gospel at verse 8. It is hard to imagine any reason why a scribe would make such an omission.

On the other hand, it is quite easy to imagine that later Christians, looking at the surprising and unresolved way

that the Gospel ends at Mark 16:8, decided to add some material by summarising details from the other Gospels and the book of Acts to give the Gospel of Mark what they felt would be a more fitting conclusion.

This idea is further supported by the fact that a few other manuscripts also add a couple of other endings, different from Mark 16:9–20, to the Gospel of Mark. Therefore, logical analysis of the manuscript evidence also strongly points in the direction of the shorter ending being the original ending that Mark wrote. The longer ending (vv. 9–20) was added much later by well-meaning Christians in an attempt to round off Mark's surprising ending.

Perhaps you are wondering how these verses, if they were not original to Mark, made their way into our Bibles. The answer is that somewhere around the fifth century, the longer ending began to gain greater favour in the manuscript tradition. Although verses 9–20 were already in circulation before that, their authenticity was disputed. Around the fifth century, Victor of Antioch published a highly influential commentary on Mark. Victor acknowledged that "very many copies" of Mark ended at Mark 16:8, but concluded that the manuscripts containing verses 9–20 were more accurate. Probably through this commentary's influence, verses 9–20 became more firmly established in the later manuscript tradition.[3] These later manuscripts formed the basis for many printed editions of the Greek New Testament and thus found their way into our modern Bibles. However, with the discovery of more ancient manuscripts over the past two hundred years, it has become clear that verses 9–20 do not belong to the original text of Mark.



Codex Vaticanus, 4th century, Mark 16:8. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1209, p. 1303. © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

Another fourth-century copy of Mark's Gospel
This page from Codex Vaticanus, one of the earliest surviving Greek manuscripts of the Bible, also shows Mark ending at 16:8. ΕΦΟΒΟΥΝΤΟ ΓΑΡ (ephobounto gar), meaning "for they were afraid." No verses 9–20 follow. Beneath the text appears ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΡΚΟΝ (kata Markon), meaning "According to Mark", marking the close of the Gospel.

2. Testimony of the Early Church Fathers

In addition to the manuscript evidence, it is also important for us to consider the testimony of the early Church Fathers.[4] Two of the most important and significant Church Fathers with respect to the text of the Bible, Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. AD 260–339) and Jerome (ca. AD 342–420), both attest to the shorter ending of Mark as being original.

Eusebius was a historian of the early church. His testimony is enormously significant because he was commissioned by the Emperor Constantine and had great access to manuscripts of Scripture in the East, particularly through a massive and critically important library in Caesarea that housed numerous manuscripts. Concerning the ending of Mark, Eusebius wrote:

> "The accurate copies conclude the story according to Mark in the words … 'they were afraid,' because in this way the Gospel according to Mark is ended in nearly all the copies" — *Quaestiones ad Marinum* I.1

Jerome was one of the most important textual scholars in the ancient world. Not only was he a keen student of the text, but he was also responsible for the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible. Jerome therefore had access to scores of manuscripts in the West because he was commissioned by the Bishop of Rome to create the Latin Vulgate translation. Jerome says concerning the ending of Mark:

> [The longer ending is found in] "scarcely any copies of the Gospel—almost all the Greek codices being without this passage" — *Epistle* 120.3 [To Hedibia].

These testimonies are extremely important because they come from two of the most significant scholars of the biblical text in the early church. They had access to more biblical manuscripts than almost anyone else in their day. Moreover, they operated in two different centres of Christianity, representing a wide geographical spread across East and West.

3. Internal Evidence

"Internal evidence" is the term used in textual criticism to refer to clues that are within the text itself, such as an author's style and vocabulary, the surrounding context, the author's argument, the narrative flow, and other such features. The internal evidence of the Gospel of Mark also strongly supports the shorter ending at Mark 16:8.

For two years I carefully translated and studied the Gospel of Mark in Greek in preparation for preaching through it. Moreover, this was not my first time reading through this Gospel in Greek. I did so carefully in a class on the Gospel of Mark as a seminary student, and I have done so on multiple occasions since then. I have grown familiar with the style, language, and vocabulary of this be-

loved Gospel writer. As I read Mark 16:9–20 in the original language, it is very clear to me that these verses come from a different author than the man who wrote the rest of the Gospel.

Although reading the passage in English tends to smooth out these differences, the original Greek text makes them very clear.

Daniel Wallace, who serves as Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary and is the founder of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, is one of the most respected conservative evangelical scholars of Greek grammar and New Testament textual criticism today. He notes concerning the longer ending of Mark's Gospel:

> "There is not a single passage in Mark 1:1–16:8 comparable to the stylistic, grammatical, and lexical anomalies that we find clustered in vv. 9–20."[5]

Although reading the passage in English tends to smooth out these differences, the original Greek text makes them very clear.

Not only are the language and style of verses 9–20 uncharacteristic of Mark the Gospel writer, but there are also some unusual contextual features that indicate that these verses come from another source. For example:

- Mark 16:2 already gives a time marker at the beginning of the chapter, "very early on the first day of the week." This fits with the time markers that have preceded it throughout the previous chapters (14:1; 14:12; 14:17; 15:1; 15:25; 15:33; 15:42). In none of these do we have the same time marker repeated twice. But Mark 16:9 has an additional time marker giving the same time already recorded in 16:2, a deviation from Mark's style indicating that this section most likely was added later.
- Mary Magdalene, who was already introduced in 15:40, 15:47, and 16:1, is again introduced in 16:9, this time as if she is being introduced for the first time.
- Mark 14:28 and Mark 16:7 predict a meeting with the risen Jesus in Galilee, but no such Galilean rendezvous takes place in Mark 16:9–20.
- The content of verses 9–20 seems to be a summary of Jesus' resurrection appearances and the story of the early church drawn from the other Gospels and the book of Acts.

One of the common arguments in favour of the longer ending (vv. 9–20) is that it is highly unusual for Mark to end his Gospel with the Greek word *gar* ("for"), and especially for it to end in such an abrupt and open-ended way at verse 8. This is a fair observation. However, scholars have observed that although such an ending is unusual, it is not unprecedented—other works of Classical Greek and Jewish literature end in an open-ended way, and we also have an example of a significant Classical Greek philosophical treatise that ends with the word *gar*.[6] Moreover, we have another biblical example of an open-ended ending in the Old Testament: the book of Jonah ends on a cliffhanger with God's question to Jonah! Therefore, while Mark's ending at verse 8 is surprising, it is certainly not so unusual that we should conclude that the original Gospel continued beyond verse 8. In fact, this ending fits perfectly with Mark's themes of irony, fearful and failing disciples, and the call to faith.

Conclusion

Each of these arguments by itself is weighty, but cumulatively, *the evidence is overwhelming*. For these reasons, it is the widespread consensus view among most Bible-believing conservative evangelical scholars and pastors that Mark 16:9–20 is not original to the Gospel writer Mark.

Instead, Mark ended his Gospel at verse 8 with a surprising and ironic ending, in which the themes of irony and of failed disciples gripped by fear are repeated one more time. Verses 9–20 were added much later by well-meaning Christians as a summary ending to round out the abrupt and surprising ending written by Mark himself. Hence, verses 9–20 are not the inspired Word of God and should not be treated as such. Rather, we should treat these verses like any other non-inspired writing from early church history. They give us a helpful historical glimpse into how early Christians summarised the resurrection appearances of Jesus and the early advance of the gospel. But these words are not inspired, and therefore not authoritative and certainly not "without error."

As evangelical Christians who believe in the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of Scripture, we need not be nervous about passages like Mark 16, where there is a question about the text. Instead, we can think honestly about the evidence and come to clear conclusions.

Perhaps this discussion leaves you with one final question: *How am I supposed to learn all this?* Do I have to learn Greek or go to seminary in order to know how to read and trust my Bible? Not at all. You simply need to do what faithful, Bible-believing Christians have always done: live as a committed member of a healthy local church, under pastors who faithfully preach the Bible expositionally. Out of their love for the Lord and their deep love for you, faithful pastors devote themselves to studying these things so that they can equip you with the knowledge of the truth. ■

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by **Aubrey Sequeira** — Senior Pastor in Abu Dhabi; Adjunct Professor, Gulf Theological Seminary.

[1] View Codex Sinaiticus online at: https://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx

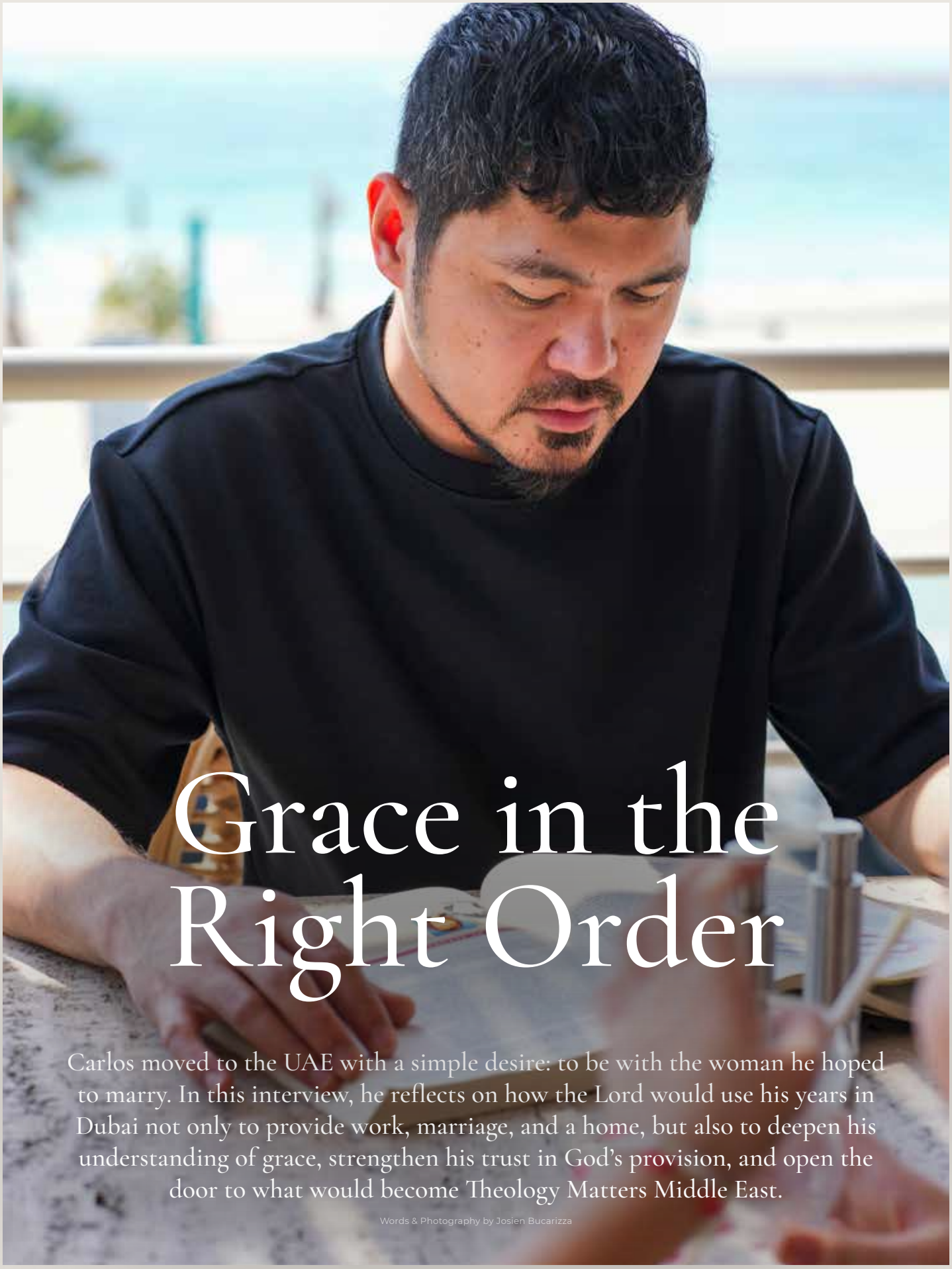
[2] View Codex Vaticanus online at: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209

[3] Daniel B. Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel," in *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: Four Views*, edn. David Alan Black (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 30–31.

[4] For a helpful discussion, see Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion," 28–30.

[5] Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion," 30–31.

[6] For a helpful discussion, see Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion," 38–42.



Grace in the Right Order

Carlos moved to the UAE with a simple desire: to be with the woman he hoped to marry. In this interview, he reflects on how the Lord would use his years in Dubai not only to provide work, marriage, and a home, but also to deepen his understanding of grace, strengthen his trust in God's provision, and open the door to what would become Theology Matters Middle East.

Words & Photography by Josien Bucarizza

Interview

On a quiet summer's Saturday, I joined Carlos and his family for drinks on the beach. Books covered the table before our smoothies arrived, naturally drawing our conversation towards the pages. But Carlos, who now owns a Christian bookstore, had first come to Dubai in pursuit of something quite different.

Carlos, why the UAE?

"After my then-girlfriend and I graduated from a university in the Philippines, she moved to the UAE to join the rest of her family. I wanted to be with her and eventually marry her, but finding work in the UAE was not easy at the time. So, I ended up working in the Philippines for two years before I landed a job with my current employer. That was fifteen years ago."

That is a long time.

"Yeah, the Lord is faithful! He has provided and sustained me here. I arrived in 2011, and married within a year."

Had you been to Dubai before?

"No, I never had. Honestly, I thought Dubai itself was a country!" We both laughed, recognising a common misunderstanding many people have before moving to the region.

Were you a believer when you moved to the UAE?

"When I was only a baby, my father worked in Saudi Arabia, and while he was there, he was introduced to the Christian faith and was converted. When he returned home, he led our family to the Christian faith as well.

Growing up, I assumed I was a Christian simply because I belonged to a Christian family and attended Bible studies. I thought that was it! At thirteen I understood the gospel more clearly and professed belief. Looking back, though, I'm not sure if that was the moment of my genuine conversion. By the time I reached college, my lifestyle looked nothing like the faith I claimed to hold."

When did that realisation come?

"It was here in Dubai, when I was exposed to expositional preaching in a healthy church community. Week after week, as the Word was carefully unpacked, I started to see that maybe I was not a Christian at all. Perhaps, I was only professing to be one because I did not want to disappoint my family. At home, I was one person, but when I was out, I lived a completely different life."

How did you find this healthy church?

"Initially, I joined the church my wife was already attending here," Carlos recalls. "The people there were helpful in our Christian walk. They loved Jesus and were passionate about evangelism. But over time, I felt a burden growing within me. Serving had become a duty. Spiritual maturity was measured by outward compliance. Holiness was reduced to outward appearance, dress codes and lifestyle rules. Although salvation by grace alone was preached, it felt like you still had to keep up with their extra-biblical "standard" of holiness, and any expression of Christian freedom was discouraged. Most of the Christian disciplines had just become a checklist of things to get done."

Carlos's conviction grew as he listened to more gospel-centred preaching, and he began to see the difference more clearly. "So, my wife and I prayed about it. I remember telling her that staying might mean violating our conscience—we could stay for the relationships, but our hearts would be far from what we truly believed. Then we sat down with our pastor and shared honestly how we were feeling. It was one of the saddest decisions we've had to make, but we left that church gracefully."

Around that time, Carlos attended a conference in Dubai where John Piper was speaking. There, he had a conversation with someone about the church that person attended. "What he shared made me very curious, but he did not even invite me to visit!" Carlos adds with dry humour, "I looked it up anyway, found it, and we ended up attending and eventually became members there. After five years, we joined one of their church plants—a Tagalog-speaking church, where we now serve."

Which book has had the greatest impact on you?

"The number one, apart from the Bible, is *The Holiness of God* by R. C. Sproul. That book has been life-changing. Understanding more of the holiness of God changed how I see myself before Him."

You still attend church weekly and stay spiritually active, so why does this not feel legalistic, even with many of the same rhythms?

"In our new church, my burden was lifted," Carlos simply states. "The gospel was clarified as not *just* an invitation to a new life in Christ but also a message of joy about who God is. Now that I'm saved by grace, the pressure to perform is gone. Works have their proper place: after grace, not before. When works come before grace, it is no longer grace; and salvation becomes something you try to achieve by your own effort. Ephesians 2:10 says that good works are what the Lord has prepared for us to walk in." Carlos notes that this comes after Paul's reminder in verses 8–9 that salvation is a free gift of grace, received through faith, and not something earned by human effort. "The Christian life is not about doing works for ourselves, or even for the Lord, as if He needs them, right? Our works are not a way to earn God's favour; they are a response to the favour already given in Christ." ▷

How has being part of a church strengthened your faith?

"Hearing the Word of God faithfully preached every week, verse by verse and book by book, completely changed the way I approach the Bible," Carlos explains. "Before I was exposed to expositional preaching, most of the time, I approached the Bible almost like a horoscope. Well, maybe that is not the right comparison, but I would read it mainly asking, 'What is God's will for me today?' or 'How can I be comforted today?' I did not really consider the context of a book or verse. Who wrote it? Why was it written? To whom was it written? What was God actually saying through that text?"

Carlos speaks with gratitude as he shares how expositional preaching taught him to read the Bible more carefully and to understand better what God is really saying. "It protects me from false teaching, including the danger of mixing grace and works. When I hear God's Word more clearly, my daily life changes. I have more peace, clarity, guidance, assurance, joy, wisdom, love, and steadfastness in faith."

What does that kind of peace and faith look like in real life?

"When our son turned one, my wife and I decided she would stay home full-time so we could be hands-on in raising and discipling him. For thirteen years now, we have been managing on a single income. There have been moments when we reached the end of our resources and could no longer afford to stay in the UAE. We prayed and were ready to go, trusting that God would provide and take care of us either way. Moving back would have been difficult; we would have given up the comforts we enjoy here." Carlos pauses, "but God did not call us to comfort in the first place, right? It is already a privilege that we have been able to experience life in the UAE. And if God is calling me back to the hardships I grew up with, then I praise Him."

But you did not leave.

"At the very brink of leaving, which happened three times," Carlos emphasises, "each time, it was already 'game over' for us. We had exhausted our options; we were ready to go home. But then the Lord provided in the most surprising ways. God will provide everything according to His will. But His provision is often not how we would have done it. Not in our timing, not in the way we expected. Looking back, I can see that He was teaching us to depend on Him completely, not on our own plans or abilities." As a husband and father,

"And if God is calling me back to the hardships I grew up with, then I praise Him."

Carlos admits it has never been easy to watch his family walk through hardship. "There were seasons when I questioned whether I was leading my family well. Seeing my wife and children face difficulties, financial pressures, uncertainty about our future. I also know it has been hard for my wife to sacrifice her career. So, trusting God is full surrender. It means letting go of your own understanding."

Do you worry less when you trust in God?

"Having experienced His faithfulness over the years, I worry less. I do not know how God will work, and I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but I have learned to worry less, trust God more, and surrender it all. I have also learned to give thanks for the privileges He has given us and to use what He has provided to serve Him. But when I was a young believer, worry and 'trust' often slept on the same pillow."

Your wife is a full-time homemaker. Why?

"I am incredibly grateful to my wife for being a true helpmate, faithfully and joyfully managing our household and our children. It is because of her dedication that I am able to pour myself into ministry. And through the counsel of the people who walked alongside us, during the early years of our marriage and parenting, we learned to be intentional about our priorities. It is our true desire and privilege to take every opportunity to point our children to the gospel because we do not assume they are already Christians. By God's grace, we want to make the most of this limited time to serve the Lord in their lives."

You founded Theology Matters Middle East. How did that happen?

"During the pandemic, I had the idea to sell Christian merchandise, like printed T-shirts and tote bags." Carlos explains in detail that turning this idea into reality proved difficult. "We looked around for cost-effective suppliers, but quickly found out that we could not afford to print 100 shirts. So we put the idea on hold for a while.

Around that same time, our family was going through the Baptist Catechism together. We were using a version with commentary on each question, available on DesiringGod.com. I wanted to print a copy, just for myself," Carlos recalls. He redesigned the layout, and thought others might like it too. "So I wondered, why not make it available? I reached out to the publisher, received permission, got an ISBN, the UAE Media Council reviewed and approved it, and that is how Theology Matters Middle East began. If you had told me five years ago where we would be today, I would have said it was impossible."

Today, Theology Matters Middle East holds a commercial licence to sell Christian books online. Through partnerships with around 30 publishers and imprints like Crossway, Tyndale, Moody, and Banner of Truth, they are able to make faithful biblical resources available, serving churches and Christians across the UAE and the region.

"Praise God for taking a small idea and turning it into something unthinkable."

What encouragement would you give to fellow Christians in the UAE?

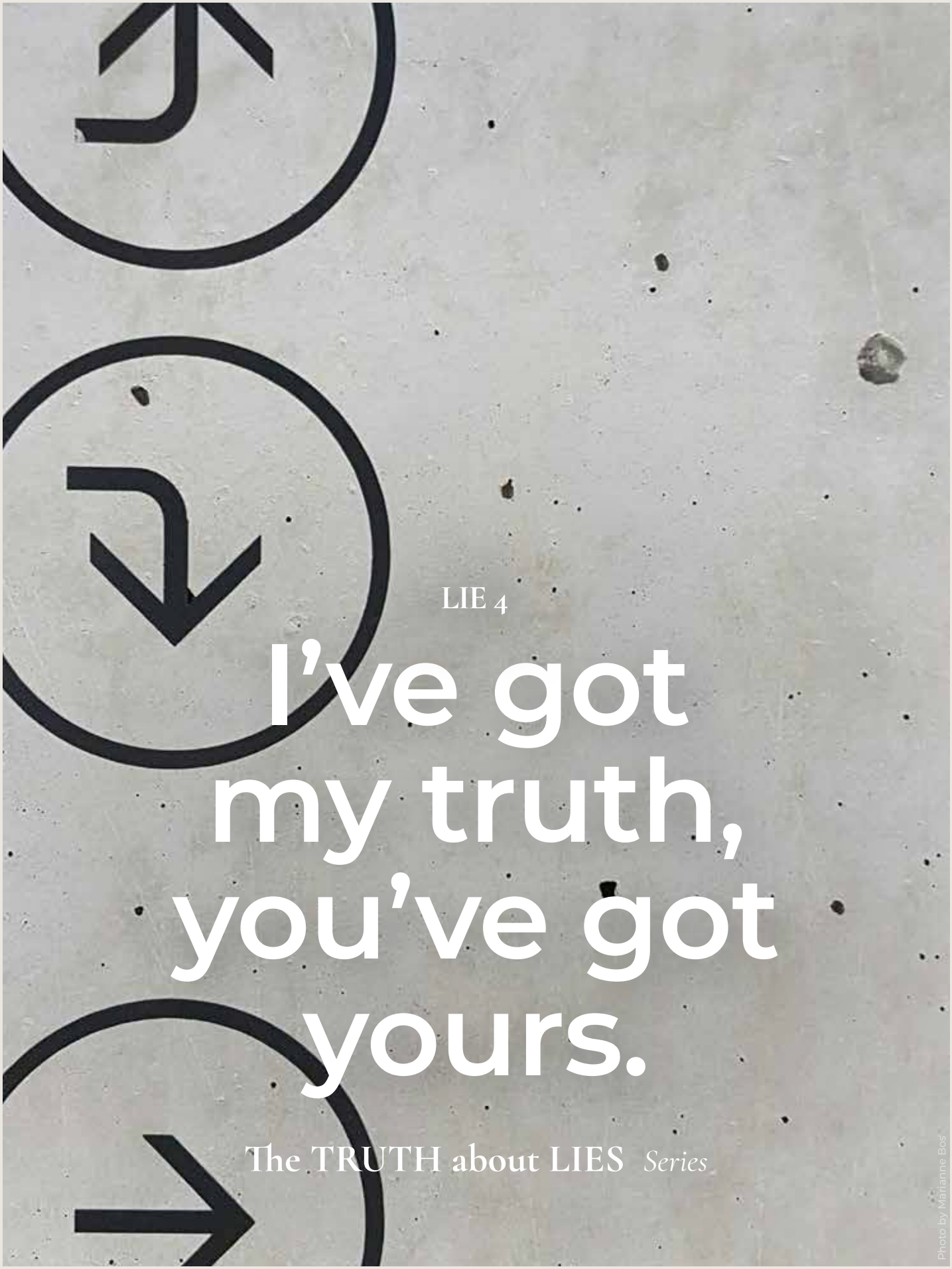
"We are truly blessed with religious tolerance here, and we praise God for the UAE government. Going to church is illegal in many places not far from here. So my encouragement is to treasure this privilege and go to church. Become part of a healthy local church, as the Lord has called us to. We cannot live the Christian life alone, especially as expats, right? We are not here forever. A healthy local church is God's ordinary means of grace for our spiritual growth and sanctification." Carlos smiles as he adds, "And also read good theological and practical books!" ■

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LIE 4

I've got my truth, you've got yours.

The TRUTH about LIES *Series*

Photo by Marianne Bos

Scriptural Reflections

It's Friday morning, just hours before the execution of Jesus. The religious authorities have finally managed to get Jesus arrested and in their spite and jealousy, they insist the Romans murder Him in their famously brutal manner.

Many things angered them about Jesus, but they knew which charge would interest the Romans: Jesus claimed to be king—the king of the Jews. He'd rebelled against Caesar's rule. So Pilate, the Roman governor of the province, interrogated the troublemaker:

"Pilate … summoned Jesus and asked Him, 'Are You the king of the Jews?' 'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about Me?'

'Am I a Jew?' Pilate replied. 'Your own people and chief priests handed You over to me. What is it You have done?'

Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from another place.'

'You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.'

'What is truth?' retorted Pilate" (John 18:33–38).

ABOUT

The Truth about Lies

Series

Each series covers a chapter of the book *The Truth about Lies* by J. Mack Stiles which focuses on an individual encountering Jesus from the New Testament. During each interaction Jesus exposes a lie that many of us have been brought up to believe as self-evident truth. Every exposé contains a common thread: The truth is more relevant to your life than may feel comfortable.
The encounters all come from one of four Bible books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. These accounts are biographies recording Jesus' time on earth—the same story captured from four unique perspectives. And what they show runs to the heart of what it means to be human. For you. For me. Jesus meets our greatest need.

For Pilate, truth was not a fixed reality to which he must adjust. Truth could be ignored, dismissed, or moulded into something more convenient. He considered himself to be in charge, even in charge of the facts.

Reality was what he said it was. After all, he was the ruler; the soldiers of Rome came under his command and he'd got the power of life and death over this penniless preacher. Jesus was a condemned man with no defence, money, position, or army.

Pilate held all the aces. This should have been easy, but on that Friday we see Pilate twisting every way, trying to bend the truth to his convenience. He ends up trapped, as do all who manipulate the truth.

Pilate knew that Jesus wasn't stirring up a rebellion against Caesar. He knew it was the religious leaders' self-interest which motivated their accusations and their actions. Pilate could "find no basis for a charge against Him" (John 18:38). Despite this, Pilate was thrown into a series of failed negotiations rather than simply acquitting an innocent man.

If only Pilate had believed in truth and right and wrong, things would have been very different. Instead, he stood in stark contrast to the man. Jesus was unwilling to bargain. Jesus came "to testify to the truth" though it cost Him His life. Despite Pilate's best efforts, the crowds screaming "Crucify!" wouldn't stop. The religious leadership wouldn't be diverted from their course no matter what political game Pilate tried to play. Rather than accept the truth of the situation and do the right thing, Pilate frantically fought to keep the angry crowds from rioting and the leaders from undermining him by any means he could. Finally, rejecting truth and justice, "Pilate handed [Jesus] ▹

over to them to be crucified" (John 19:16).

It's hard to sympathise with Pilate, but I wonder if we're all prone to want the truth to suit us at times, or to ignore it altogether. We're not aiming to destroy lives, of course. But not wanting to dictate what's right and wrong for others, we too might be tempted to ask "What is truth?" Or perhaps even if we have a sense of what's true, it feels much more compassionate and non-judgemental to say *you've got your truth and I've got mine*.

Some things in life are matters of taste. Music styles, preferred holiday, film genre. This kind of variety between people is God-given. But we would never bring that attitude into medicine: *Yellow pills just aren't for me; I prefer the look of the blue ones*.

What's true for me shouldn't be forced on others. What's true for you certainly shouldn't be forced on me. Surely?

You've Got Your Truth, I've Got Mine?

Some things in life are matters of taste. Music styles, preferred holiday, film genre. This kind of variety between people is God-given. But we would never bring that attitude into medicine: *Yellow pills just aren't for me; I prefer the look of the blue ones*. We would never take it into engineering: *I know it's a load-bearing wall but I prefer to demolish it*. And we should not bring it into our spiritual lives either: I know what Jesus says but I prefer to see things like this …

The truth is not infinitely flexible. There is a way things actually are and however much we'd like to, we cannot wish or force reality away.
When a doctor diagnoses your condition, you can disagree with the X-rays and test results. You are free to tell her "your truth" about how continuing to smoke will be the perfect treatment. You are free to question her credentials, her judgement, her motivations. You can ignore everything she says. But if you do not adjust to reality, you will suffer the consequences.

I know exclusive claims make us uncomfortable but Jesus was not afraid of making them. He says:

> "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" — John 14:6.

If you want salvation, Jesus says, if you want to be forgiven of your sin and become part of the family of God, there is just one option. Him.

Shortly after declaring Himself the only way to God, and just hours before He stood before Pilate, Jesus knelt before His Father in prayer. In anguish, with sweat falling like drops of blood, Jesus pleaded with God not to go to the cross.

> "…He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. 'Abba, Father,' He said, 'everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will'" — Mark 14:35–36.

There was no other way. Only Jesus could ransom people, and it would take dying in their place to pay the fee. At this point, we all have a choice to make. Is Jesus the only way to know God as He claims, or is He lying?

We can accept His words; if we want to know God, we must trust Him. Or we reject His words, calling Him a liar. Two options—Jesus' truth *or* my truth. We can't both be right.

Truth Has a Name

There are truths in this world that are fixed, no matter how we might *like* things to be. Actions have consequences. There's a grain to the universe; if you go against the grain like Pilate, you will get splinters. Truth matters.

Some think talk like this is to prohibit fun times. Maybe it sounds like that to you? But my goal is to point you to the truth that guarantees maximum joy! There is a way the universe works, but it's not a stark unyielding force. Fundamentally it's *Jesus* that lies at the heart of this world. The same Jesus who stood before Pilate and allowed Himself to be led away to execution.

This is His world and He entered it to save it. His purpose was to rescue people, His mission soaked in love for the very people mistreating Him. And soaked in love for us too. That means that behind and beneath the physical hard facts of the world

“What is truth?” It’s one of the most important questions you could ever ask, and Pilate addressed it to the person who could answer it best. But this Roman governor never stuck around to hear the response. He should have.

there is something even more profound: there is a Person who loves you—a truth that has a name, Jesus!

When Jesus calls Himself “the truth” it’s not an abstract proposition. He says it in the context of being “the way” (that is, the way to God) and “the life” (that is, an abundant life that lasts forever). Jesus is the truth that opens the door to a relationship with God and an eternity that is out of this world.

“What is truth?” It’s one of the most important questions you could ever ask, and Pilate addressed it to the person who could answer it best. But this Roman governor never stuck around to hear the response.

He should have. Subsequent events of that Friday give us the most incredible answer. Most fundamentally the truth is that there is a God who will stop at nothing—not even dying on a cross—to love us, to ransom and restore us. This is the truth—not *my* truth or *your* truth but *the* truth. ■

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Extract from *The Truth about Lies* by
J. Mack Stiles — former pastor in Iraq, author and international speaker
10 Publishing, 2023—a division of 10ofThose.com

Reflective Questions

1. In which areas of your life are you treating the truths from God’s Word as personal preferences rather than authoritative?
   - ☐ In relationships, when I choose bitterness, pride, or unforgiveness instead of love and reconciliation.
   - ☐ In my use of time, when I don’t prioritise prayer, Scripture reading, worship, or fellowship.
   - ☐ In my speech, when I excuse gossip, exaggeration, complaining, or careless words.
   - ☐ In sexual purity, in singleness, dating or marriage.
   - ☐ In how I raise my children, not shaping their hearts, habits, and values according to His Word.
   - ☐ In my church involvement, when I attend only when convenient or avoid accountability.
   - ☐ In my attitude at work, when I allow pride, laziness, resentment, or impatience towards my team or colleagues.
   - ☐ In what I want most, when I choose comfort, popularity, success, money, or getting my own way instead of putting God first.
   - ☐ In my view of Jesus, when I want Him as Saviour but resist Him as Lord.
   - ☐ I am not sure, but I will pray for God to show me where my heart is resisting His truth.
2. When someone hears your message about Jesus and replies, “That might be true for you, but it’s not for me,” how can you continue the conversation in a way that shows genuine love while still upholding the truth of Jesus?
3. How does Jesus show us that truth and love are not enemies? Think of His death and teachings.
4. Who in your life needs to hear the truth of Jesus, and what would be a loving way to begin that conversation?

Conversation Starter

Jesus warned us that following Him will be difficult, unpopular, and costly. When you are with family or Christian friends, ask: “What habits, practices, or disciplines would help you grow in love for God and obedience to His truth?”

Prayer of Confession

The Secret Place Neglected

Our Father, I humble myself before You to confess my sin. I confess that, unlike the Messiah who remained hidden and despised for a long time, **I am quick to put myself in the spotlight.** Unlike Him who said, "I do not receive glory from people," and "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me," I have preferred to serve in the sight of others, pursuing my own will and boasting with a heart full of self-righteousness and pride. **I have spent far more time in public ministry, meetings, work, and outings than in the secret place of prayer and devotion.** I have flaunted my theological knowledge to be praised by others rather than to build others up. Lord, **I have learned more theology than I have actually obeyed.** On Sundays I have been godlier than during the week, showing greater concern for the opinions of people than for Your glory.

I confess that, unlike the Messiah who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame, **I try to avoid suffering, shame, and loss**, **failing to believe that You are faithful to reward.** I have shown far more diligence in pleasing employers than in pleasing You, who will judge the living and the dead. Forgive me, for I am quick to think that You have forgotten me, even though in Your love You were crucified on a cursed tree for us.

I confess that, **in light of the great promise of salvation to the ends of the earth, I am not as concerned as I ought to be.** I am quick to faint in unbelief when I see the idolatry around me. I have spent little time in prayer and have believed more in the powers of the UAE than in the power of God who saves sinners. Rather than devoting my mind, thoughts, and time for the advancement of Your kingdom, **I have been content with merely keeping some religious duties, lacking true passion.** I have doubted that You are able to make the nations bow down in worship before Your Son. Forgive me for using Your sovereignty as an excuse for my lack of faithful prayer, my neglect of gospel opportunities, and my failure to reflect the character of Christ.

Lord Jesus, You told us to "come out" from the prison of sin and darkness. Forgive me, for I have returned to it. Forgive me because, although You have provided pastures along the way for me to feed upon, I have sold my heart cheaply for that which does not satisfy. As soon as my heart hungers, I turn to social media. As soon as my heart thirsts, I turn to empty conversations and entertainment. **I have viewed prayer as a painful duty rather than a place where I may drink from the fountain of life. I read my Bible to tick a box, rather than feeding upon Your Word as the bread of life for my soul.** I have allowed my heart to be captivated by clothes, cars, and the glitter of Dubai. Forgive me for despising Your grace and love. Forgive me, for my heart so often seeks comfort, joy, and satisfaction in the same things that unbelievers do.

Forgive me, Lord.

Thank You that Jesus has been given as the covenant through whom sinners are reconciled to God. He was rejected and crucified, yet trusted You perfectly and rose again from death, securing salvation to the ends of the earth. Help me to turn from my sin and to live in a manner worthy of the grace I have received. In His precious name I pray. Amen.

by Georges Abdallah — church member in Dubai

Testimony

The Gospel I Could Recite But Not Receive



I knew the gospel before I knew God. Sunday services, prayer meetings, mid-week sermons, Scripture memorisation—these filled my childhood. I developed a reasonable understanding of the gospel. Yet there was a painful disconnect between what was taught and how Christianity was lived out around me. In fact, the gospel was not represented.

In my home, rules were curiously flexible. Christmas was forbidden, yet Onam, a Hindu cultural festival, was celebrated. More painfully, my father physically abused my mother and quoted the Bible to defend it. He twisted Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman, taking "go and get your husband" to mean that Jesus would not give living water to a married woman except through her husband. In his mind, God wouldn't even hear my mother's prayers unless he was present. The god I saw reflected in my father was not loving; he was controlling, conditional, and cruel.

That hypocrisy drove me away. I concluded that Christianity was a religion for the narrow-minded to control others, and my father's God could not be real. Yet I could not shake the sense that a Creator existed—the alternative, that there was no God, seemed even more unlikely. So I began a quiet, casual search through other faiths.

Hinduism felt illogical in explaining God and the world as it is. Catholicism made Christ's death seem insufficient, as if something more were still needed. Another religion initially attracted me with its simplicity, but its emphasis on performance-based righteousness—where one never really reaches perfection—and its view of human nature left me with no hope. Looking back, I see the Holy Spirit's hand—graciously keeping me from walking away from Christ.

In college in Dubai, I met a non-South Indian Christian—my first real encounter with a believer outside my narrow world. Curiosity brought me to his church, where they were preaching through Galatians. I began to understand the gospel with a clarity I had not experienced before. My nagging questions finally found answers.

Someone there invited me to study the Bible. As we read together, he challenged me not to treat Christianity merely as something intellectual, but to examine my own heart. That challenge became especially real at a student conference on the Gospel of Mark. Jesus' words in Mark 8:34—"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"—shattered my intellectual detachment. I loved theology, but my life did not revolve around Christ. I was a student of Christianity, not a follower.

Over time, I came to see the difference between knowing the gospel and actually trusting in Christ. Being a Christian is not simply knowing the right theology and trying to be a good person. True believers know God personally, growing in intimacy with Him through His Word. Their confidence for eternity rests entirely on what Jesus has done on the cross, not on their own goodness. And their motivation flows from who God is and what Christ has accomplished. I was later baptised and became a member of the church on the profession of my faith.

The gospel is not a checklist for securing heaven. It is an invitation to repent and experience the joy of a restored relationship with our Creator—the One we rejected, who gave Himself for us so that we might have true life in Him.

by

Immanuel



Photo by Seljan Salimova

Article

Family & Relationships

THE BIG STORY OF MOTHERHOOD

Cultures across the globe recognise that motherhood is honourable. I can't count all the times I've been out and about and received special treatment from people simply because I am a mother. When I am pregnant, my husband particularly enjoys when waiters give us a free dessert "for the baby".

Yet even as we make much of motherhood, some statements we hear about it tend to sound insincere and trite. I remember acutely feeling this way as I struggled to change an explosive nappy (diaper) on my lap on an airplane, and the older gentleman next to me commented, "Isn't motherhood such a blessing?" *If motherhood is a gift, then why does the true blessedness of motherhood elicit in us such scepticism?*

I think one of the reasons I wrestle with this is my sin. I need to be transformed by the renewing of my worldly mind so that I can discern God's good and perfect will (Romans 12:2). Without God's work of sanctification in

my life, I would be left in my sinful thinking that both idolises and despises motherhood. I can easily turn motherhood into something that's all about me or even downplay it to the degree that it is pitiable.

The Bible describes motherhood as neither a diminishing of a woman's personhood nor the sum of her personhood; motherhood, ultimately, is about a different person altogether. Likewise, womanhood, ultimately, is about a different person altogether. The highest aim of womanhood is being conformed to the image of Christ. The multifaceted goal of motherhood is to trace the image of Christ onto our lives.

The highest aim of womanhood is not motherhood; the highest aim of womanhood is being conformed to the image of Christ.

When we make motherhood (or anything else) all about us, we eventually get bored. Motherhood was never meant to fully satisfy us. When we get bored we get cynical. Some women lament that if God ever gives them children, they will be devastated. Some women lament that if God never gives them children, they will be devastated. Should Christian women just take a dose of cynicism and chase it down with a glass half full of gratitude as the world might suggest? It is crucial to remember what the Bible says when we battle our feelings of apathy or idolatrous desire regarding the gift of motherhood.

By the power of His word, Jesus sustains the universe, including every child who has ever been conceived. Motherhood is God's conception—He ordained it and sustains it to the praise of His glorious grace. Life serves God's glory alone.
Above and beyond the gift of physical life, which none of us deserves, our sovereign Lord Jesus holds out to us the hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began (Titus 1:2). When we trust in Christ, He joins us to Himself, and He gives us this eternal life.

What Is the Goal of Motherhood?

Motherhood is a piece of evidence of God's triumphant agenda to give life despite the curse of death. It is a gift that points us to Jesus.

With Adam and Eve's sin in the garden, all their progeny along with them were justly indicted and condemned to death. Despite their grievous sin, God not only allowed life but facilitated it and sustains it still today. The mercy shown to us at the cross of Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of God's lavish grace.

Even while we steal God's glory and insist that motherhood exists to serve our egos and our reputations, God gives us more mercy still. Even while we wring our hands anxiously over God's timing for our families, God graciously continues to fulfil His eternal purposes in creating each and every member of our families. Relieved of our self-oriented passions, we can rejoice in the reconciliation we receive through Jesus, embrace God's purposes in our motherhood, and smile at the future as we look forward to the future grace that is ours in Christ Jesus. God designed motherhood to highlight His great mercy and point us to who we (and our children) were made for: the eternally satisfying risen Christ (John 17:24). The joys of today's motherhood are true joys, but they are like shadowy reflections in a mirror. At the end of every day—chaotic and mundane alike—motherhood is about the adoration and enjoyment of our great God.

The next time something blasé happens, like the laundry filling up (again), or discovering what's left of (another) tissue box your toddler has curiously disembowelled, let your groaning turn into hallelujahs: "Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol Him, all peoples! For great is His steadfast love towards us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 117:1–2). Remind yourself of the truths in God's Word and be astonished as the Spirit reminds you of what your faith-eyes have seen.

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Reflection

If being a mum is a gift, then why does the true blessedness of motherhood elicit in us such scepticism? The overarching reason is sin. Our sin skews our perspectives and focuses us inward rather than outward and upward. But scepticism drowns under the flood of God's grace and mercy as we view our calling through the lens of Scripture.

1. What we fixate on can shape the course of our life, which is why God's Word calls us to govern our thoughts. Read Romans 12:1–2. How are we transformed and renewed, and for what purposes?
2. "The highest aim of womanhood is not motherhood; the highest aim of womanhood is being conformed to the image of Christ." What happens when we seek to define ourselves by our motherhood? How have you experienced the reality of this in your own life?
3. What is the overarching purpose of motherhood? How does this purpose alter your outlook on the daily aspects of parenting?
4. Motherhood is meant to direct our hearts to worship. Study Psalm 145, and list everything the Lord is praised for.

Christian Living

THE OTHER SIX DAYS

HOW FAITH SHAPES THE WEEK FOR FOUR BELIEVERS

Faith can be easy to talk about on Sunday, but what does it look like the rest of the week? The week can be busy and demanding, and living openly as a Christian amid everyday pressures is not always easy. Meet four Christians who share how they live out their faith during the other six days.



GOD PROVIDED THE MEETING ROOM

For more than thirty years, Okello believed he was a Christian. That changed after he moved abroad to Dubai. "I would attend church every Sunday and, week after week, the church would simply explain the Bible and preach the gospel. It was there, under the ordinary preaching of God's Word, that I realised I had assumed I was a Christian. When I evaluated myself according to the Bible, I realised I was not." Okello repented from his sin and put his trust in Christ alone to save him.

Not long after that, Okello began attending Bible studies, wanting to understand the Bible more deeply and learn what it meant to live according to it. As his understanding deepened, something else began to grow in him. "While I was learning so much, a burden grew in me to help other people who, like me, wanted to understand the Bible more clearly. Those Bible studies became a good training ground for me. I paid close attention to how they were led, and I prayed for opportunities and guidance."

When Okello shared this desire with one of the church elders, it was not long before he was invited to lead his first Bible study. He spent hours preparing with a Christian friend.

Around the same time, another opportunity appeared—this time at work. "On our company's communication platform, Slack, I discovered a channel called 'Room Christianity'. When I opened it, I saw that it had been dormant for a long time. I thought: 'Let's dust this off!'" Okello laughs. He sees God's hand both in discovering the channel and in the fact that it existed at all. "There was no other space for religion in any of the social activities or off-site events of our company. But God provided this meeting room!"



WHEN LITTLE BECOMES ENOUGH IN GOD'S HANDS

For Mercy, faith lived out in everyday life often looks like making room: a meal, a spare bed, an open door. Christian hospitality can easily seem like a ministry reserved for the naturally gifted—those with beautiful homes, confident cooking skills, and a budget for generous meals. But Mercy has learned otherwise: it begins simply with sharing what we have and trusting God with the rest.

"As a child, I observed my parents serving God by opening their home," Mercy recalls. "Especially on Sundays, my mum made sure to prepare extra food with the expectation that there would be an opportunity to serve. Visiting pastors and missionaries appreciated an invitation to a home-cooked meal."

That example stayed with Mercy. After she married and moved to Dubai, she and her husband began hosting a small-group Bible study in their home. "Most of them were young people who would appreciate a hot meal after a long day at work." There was just one small challenge: Mercy did not know how to cook. "I used them as my guinea pigs, trying out different recipes! I made some serious blunders!" she laughs. "But I didn't give up. Even now, I'm no master chef; I'm still reading and trying recipes I find online. My husband has always encouraged me and has been my constant support."

Still, like many people, Mercy sometimes worried that what she had was too modest to offer others. "I often felt that my home was not good enough. Our first place was a one-bedroom flat, and I was upset. It took time to surrender and say, 'Whatever I have, I will serve the Lord with it.'"

Another season also shaped their hospitality. For the first fifteen years of their marriage, they did not have children. During those years, God brought people from many backgrounds and cultures into their home—missionaries, church workers, and others needing a place to stay. "I believe everyone who came to our home was sent by God. He used their visits to make us focus on others instead of ourselves." Over time, Mercy and her husband began making hospitality part of the way they planned their life together. "We looked for a home ▸

Soon, Okello posted his first Bible study invitation, and the response was positive. "Ever since then, we have done studies on John 3, Mark, Galatians, Jonah and the book *Who Is Jesus?*"

"I really hoped the study would not become an argument, a contest or an intellectual show-off"

At first, Okello was nervous that the study could turn into a debate. "My colleagues are very smart and hold all kinds of beliefs. I really hoped the study would not become an argument, a contest or an intellectual show-off, but would remain focused on seeking to understand the gospel."

Okello's friend helped him learn how to guide difficult conversations. "It is quite easy to start jumping around the Bible and referencing different verses to make a point." He laughs as he explains how the phrase "Let's go back to the text" has become an inside joke meaning, "Okay, guys, let's regroup." "But even when we stay with the text, we can distract ourselves by talking about other people—the 'bad people'. No, the Bible is a mirror to reveal our own hearts."

Each series follows its own schedule, meeting once a week for six or eight consecutive weeks. Anyone interested can opt in, and the study then appears in their work calendar. Okello has seen many colleagues discover the true meaning of a Bible passage. "It is very encouraging, even just to realise that I'm not the only Christian in my company. But other times, I wait on the call for twenty minutes and nobody shows up. It is just me. That is painful. I always dedicate time to prepare well. It has humbled me. This is not my work; it's God's work."

For Christians who have a similar desire to share God's Word in their workplace, Okello's encouragement is simple: begin with prayer. "Don't be surprised if you encounter hostility. Jesus said this would happen. Be faithful. Pray and seek counsel. Seize opportunities to grow and to share the gospel, and rely on Him alone. It is His Kingdom."

Name has been changed for privacy. Image used for illustrative purposes only.

Photo by Charlesdeluvio

with an extra bedroom so we could make room for others whenever there was an opportunity to serve God through hospitality. And there was never a shortage of opportunities! Church interns, missionaries, and Christians in need have continuously filled our home and hearts with great joy."

> **"Don't base your serving on what you have, but on what God calls you to do. Look for a new believer or a new family in your church and invite them home."**

Through these experiences, Mercy has seen something of what Jesus meant when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). "The Holy Spirit fills me with joy when someone experiences the provision of God through the little we have. Our guests' testimonies have also encouraged us and strengthened our desire to serve God. God has been working in us and through us, building our faith."

Hospitality has also taught Mercy to trust God when there seemed to be little to share. Her answer is simple: "God provides!" There were times when the natural response would have been to hold tightly to what they had, but Mercy learned that obedience sometimes means giving even when it feels costly. "There is a beauty in joyfully sharing the little we have, because in God's hands, 'little' is never insignificant. That trust was sometimes tested in very practical ways, but God's provision came unexpectedly, abundantly, and always on time. Sometimes our home even overflowed with food. Neighbours who knew we enjoyed giving would bring us food, so we had even more to share. Living in this place of dependence has allowed me to experience the faithfulness of God in deeply personal ways." For Mercy, hospitality has become as much a lesson in trusting God as in serving others. "When we trust Him fully and obey willingly, He does far more than we could ever ask or imagine."

That is what Mercy now wants to encourage in others. Hospitality does not have to begin with a large gathering, an impressive home, or an elaborate meal. It can begin simply by noticing someone who may need friendship and making room for them. "I would urge you, even with a small space, to open your home, share your table, and give your time. Don't base your serving on what you have, but on what God calls you to do. Look for a new believer or a new family in your church and invite them home. It can help them feel loved and welcome as family, because in the body of Christ, we are one family. As you step out in faith, you will discover that God supplies all you need and fills your home with His presence. When we open our homes for His purposes, He blesses not only those who enter, but our own hearts as well."

Mercy's story shows that Christian hospitality is not a performance or a showcase. It is an offering—an ordinary home, meal, room, or evening placed in God's hands for the good of someone else and for His glory. ■



WHEN THE WORKING WEEK *FINALLY* ENDS?

For expats in the UAE, retirement can easily become the reward we keep looking forward to. It can be the thought that helps us push through long working days, traffic, office politics, stress and limited freedom. We tell ourselves that one day we will finally slow down, live somewhere beautiful, travel more and spend our time doing the things we enjoy. Rest is biblical. But the Bible also warns us against making comfort and ease the main goal of life (Luke 12:16–21).

For Daniel and Jeanie Ough, who lived in Dubai for seven years, the usual idea of retirement was never the goal. "Most of us have built up a wealth of experience that organisations and individuals can still benefit from," Daniel explains. "So why would we stop using what God has given us? Jeanie and I decided that kind of retirement was not for us. If you think of retirement as saying, 'I have arrived,' I am not quite sure where you have arrived. Certainly not in heaven yet! Yes, the Bible allows for retirement from a career, but you do not really retire from your Christian calling."

Jeanie agrees. She points out that fruitfulness does not end with age, and that older Christians still have an important role to play. "The Bible expects older men and women to remain active and fruitful. They can model godliness, encourage others and teach younger believers (Titus 2:2–5; Psalm 92:12–15; Numbers 8:23–26). God has given each of us skills, talents and passions, and He delights when we use them. What better way to glorify God than by using the gifts He



THE TECHNICIAN WHO INVITES COLLEAGUES TO CHURCH

For Samuel, a technician, being a Christian shapes how he talks about church, handles his responsibilities, and treats the people around him. His colleagues know that he is a Christian, and Samuel is glad to talk about it. "Sometimes after church, people see me with my Bible and ask where I have been. I tell them I attended church, and I will ask if they would like to join for fellowship." Sometimes the conversation ends there. Other times, someone shows interest, so Samuel exchanges numbers and follows up with a message or a call. One colleague now attends regularly. "He enjoys it so much. At work I even hear him singing his favourite song: 'I am bound, I am bound, I am bound for the promised land!'"

Attending church is important to Samuel. But not all church events are easy to attend. "For example, to attend Christmas carols, I have to ask permission to leave work early. It takes me an hour by metro to get to church. I do not feel nervous about asking, because I *have* to. From the beginning, I have been open about my faith and my church attendance. As believers, we need to understand what following Christ really means—and what it looks like on the job."

For Samuel, however, being open about his faith also means taking his responsibilities at work seriously. He does not believe that asking for flexibility to attend church events should come at the expense of doing his job well. "I am there to work and to make sure I meet all my KPIs. It is not right to be lazy at work and then ask permission to go to church. I work faithfully, and generally my boss responds positively. Praise God."

Samuel's faith also shapes how he responds when work becomes difficult. Bad language is common in his workplace. But when it is directed at him, he does not simply accept it. "I point out that we need to speak respectfully. We come to a mutual understanding and resolve things in a friendly way—no abusive words, foul language, or shouting." For Samuel, that is nothing especially heroic. "It is the right thing to do."

> **"It is not right to be lazy at work and then ask permission to go to church"**

Prayer is also part of Samuel's everyday work life. When he occasionally eats with colleagues, he usually prays quietly before his meal. "I ask God in my heart to bless my food. Maybe I should pray a little more openly. But then the food might be finished by the time I am done praying!" Samuel laughs.

There have also been times when work felt much harder. "At first, it was very difficult, and I was alone—I had no church family, no Christian brothers or sisters to talk to. I prayed for God to help me. I began searching online for a church and eventually visited one close to where I live—a church centred on Christ. I started attending regularly and became a member. The steady preaching has encouraged me so much."

Samuel is open about belonging to Christ, encourages others to come with him to church, works hard, and relies on God in prayer. For Samuel, following Christ is not just a Sunday matter; it begins Monday morning at work and continues wherever the week takes him.

has given us? That is what we have tried to do. We love doing what we do, and we believe God has given us that love. So we keep going."

> **"But when you get older, you have less time left. So maybe I should speed up!"**

When Daniel and Jeanie left Dubai, they found an unusual way to continue serving. Instead of settling into a permanent home, they chose a more flexible life, focused on coaching and volunteering. "We were not sure exactly where we should live, so we prayed, trusted in God's provision and took action. Rather than buying or renting a home, we started house-sitting. Through our own website and different Christian house-sitting platforms, we have had the opportunity to serve in more than 50 locations. From Pakistan to Texas, and from the Philippines to Botswana, we have served churches, hospitals, schools, mission organisations and many others."

"Some people have asked us, 'Should you not be slowing down?'" Daniel laughs. "But when you get older, you have less time left," he says. "So maybe I should speed up!" As Daniel and Jeanie laugh together, there is a genuine joy in the way they speak—a joy for life, but even more, a joy in using life for God's glory. Their view of retirement is not about stopping. It is about entering a new season with different opportunities.

"To anyone thinking about a different kind of retirement, we would say: do not see retirement as the finishing line. Think of it as standing at the starting line, ready to run a new race. For us, house-sitting has given us the freedom to respond more easily when God opens a door to coach ministry teams around the world. For someone else, it may look very different. The point is to see retirement as a new season to keep bearing fruit for God, using the gifts He has given you to encourage, teach and serve others—whether they are around the corner or around the world."

Photo by Akshay Y

Church Life & Practices

Loving Genealogies

THE PAPER TRAIL OF GRACE

Raise your hand if you read past or skip genealogies. Well, I would not blame you. I used to do the same! Genealogies are often the parts of the Bible we are most tempted to skip. We see long lists of unfamiliar names, many of them difficult to pronounce. Sometimes they seem repetitive and disconnected from the story. So, what are genealogies doing in the Bible? Are they simply interruptions in our Bible reading?

Not at all. Genealogies are not random lists of names. They are the breadcrumbs of God's grace. We see many of them in the book of Genesis, and that matters because Genesis is one unified story of God's saving plan. From the beginning, God's desire has been to dwell with His people forever: He will be our God, we will be His people, and He will dwell with us forever. The genealogies show us how God works through history to bring that promise to fulfilment.

My goal here is to persuade you to fall in love with genealogies. And as you begin to understand them, I believe they will transform the way you read your Bible.

Genealogies Trace the Promised Seed

When I first started reading the Bible, I did not understand genealogies at all. We moved to Dubai in 2014, and at the time I was not a Christian. We started attending a small Filipino church, and one of the things that eventually led me to faith was something that my pastor repeatedly challenged us to do: "Read the Bible for yourself. Be like the Bereans—go home and search the Scriptures." So that is what I did. I downloaded a Bible app and began reading the Psalms. But, honestly, none of it made much sense to me. It was poetry, and I could not follow the logic.

Then I thought, "Why not start from the beginning—with Genesis?" So I did. I had a great start because Genesis was a much easier read. There was a story. There was a plot. I read about creation, Adam and Eve, and the Fall. But then I started seeing all these names in Genesis 5. I was so confused: "This guy begets this guy… and another guy begets this guy…." I remember thinking, "What are all these names? What am I supposed to do with this?" And where is Jesus? I thought, "We are Christians, but I do not even see the name of Jesus here." So I skipped ahead to the very first book of the New Testament: Matthew. And if you know your Bible, you know what Matthew 1 begins with. Another genealogy!

Only after much study did I begin to understand how these genealogies connect to the promise God gives in Genesis 3:15. After the Fall, God declared:

> "I will put enmity between you and the
> woman, and between your offspring and her
> offspring; He shall bruise your head,
> and you shall bruise His heel."

Here God announces a cosmic battle between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The serpent would bruise the heel of the woman's Seed, but the woman's Seed would deliver a decisive and crushing blow to the head of the serpent. The rest of the Bible develops this conflict. We see it immediately with Cain and Abel, and then with Seth right in the next chapter.

The Seed of the woman finds its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). The serpent bruised His heel when Jesus was crucified and died on the cross (Genesis 3:15; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). Yet death could not hold Him.

Jesus rose from the grave, delivering a crushing blow to the serpent and triumphing over the powers of darkness (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8). And when Christ returns in glory, Satan's defeat will be complete and final (Romans 16:20; Revelation 19:11–21; 20:10).

When we read Genesis 5, humanity seems to be spiralling down. Yet while the world is moving further into sin, God is quietly preserving the line of the promised Seed for His own glory.

The genealogies help us follow this line of promise through redemptive history. Think of it this way. My son, Bram, sometimes skips through the parts of a television programme he thinks are boring. He fast-forwards through the chit-chat and stops when he reaches the action. Genealogies are like that. They do not always give us every detail of a family tree. Instead, they "fast-forward" through redemptive history—highlighting important people and pausing when the story reaches key figures.

For example:

1. Genesis 5 traces Adam → Noah
2. Genesis 11 traces Noah → Abraham
3. Ruth 4 traces Perez → David
4. Matthew 1 traces the line → Jesus

The genealogies are tracing the line of the promised Seed. And they are not random. They are meticulously written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Notice, for example, how several important Old Testament genealogies lead us to major covenant figures. Genesis 5 is a ten-generation genealogy tracing from Adam to Noah and then the narrative pauses to tell Noah's story. Genesis 11 gives another ten-generation genealogy from Noah's son Shem to Abraham, after which the story focuses on Abraham. Ruth 4 gives a third ten-generation genealogy from Perez to David, leading us towards the story of Israel's great king. So in these genealogies, you see Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David—key figures in the line of the promised Seed, as they are the ones who received the covenants. They are the covenant heads.

Then Matthew opens his Gospel with another carefully structured genealogy. Matthew arranges it into three sets of fourteen generations: from Abraham to David, David to the Exile, and the Exile to Jesus.

The point is clear: genealogies are tracing God's promise through history until we arrive at Jesus.

Genealogies Reveal God's Faithfulness

When we read Genesis 5, humanity appears to be spiralling downwards. Yet while the world is moving further into sin, God is quietly preserving the line of the promised Seed for His own glory. The genealogy repeatedly tells us, "and he died." It can feel repetitive. But even here, in this seemingly boring section of Scripture, God is showing us something important: He has not forgotten His promise. God has been faithful for thousands of years to His people, and nothing is going to change that today.

Think about the world at the Tower of Babel, working to build a name for themselves. Yet while people try to make a name for themselves, God is quietly preserving the line through which He will accomplish His promise. Genealogies remind us that God is working even when the story seems slow. If He ordained all of this throughout history, then we can trust that He is still at work today—even in the tiniest details of our lives—bringing about His sovereign purpose for His people and, ultimately, for His glory. The genealogy is a reminder that God never forgets.

Genealogies Help Us See Jesus

So in these seemingly boring parts of the Bible, we actually see God moving through history to bring about His promise in Genesis 3:15. This is why genealogies are crucial for understanding the Bible. Yes, maybe we do not get every single name, but these long lists of names form the paper trail of God's grace. You might think you are being "theology-heavy" or weird for enjoying this. But that is a good kind of weird. It means you are digging deeper into God's living and true Word. And the deeper you dig into the Word, the more clearly you begin to see the face of Jesus. The more clearly you see Him, the more your affections for Him grow, because you see more clearly how deep His love is for you. So do not skip the names.

When you encounter a genealogy, do not simply ask, "Who are all these people?" Ask instead, "What is the text trying to show me here? Who is it tracing?" Once we begin asking those questions, genealogies become much more than lists of names. They become another way of seeing God's plan of salvation unfold through history. Behind those names is a God who keeps His promises. Behind that genealogy is His sovereign hand at work through generation after generation. And at the end of that long trail is Jesus.

——

by Allen Mandap — Senior Pastor in Dubai

Catechism

What is a catechism?

In a Christian context, it means to teach biblical truth and often this is done in an orderly way with questions, answers and biblical support.

Why?

A catechism helps believers and children, understand the Bible more clearly through interpretation, selection, organisation and completeness:

Interpretation: It provides a big-picture understanding of how individual Bible verses fit together within the larger message of Scripture.

Selection: It highlights the most essential parts of Scripture for knowing God and living faithfully, helping believers prioritise what to focus on.

Organisation: It arranges biblical truths in a logical, progressive way, preventing confusion that can come from learning disconnected verses.

Completeness: It ensures a more comprehensive grasp of the "whole counsel of God", offering a solid foundation of truth.

As we are required to continue in the faith, stable and steadfast (Col. 1:23), we are urged to "attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, … so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:13–14), as many deceivers will come (1 John 2:26).

Let's continue!

In the previous editions we had a look at the first twenty-eight questions, to study and memorise them with family and friends. Let's continue with the *New City Catechism* from The Gospel Coalition (available at newcitycatechism.com, in app and book format, in languages including Hindi and Urdu).

As with memorising the Bible itself, God's truth will equip you as a Christian for daily life.

NEW CITY CATECHISM

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ENGLISH

Question 29
How can we be saved?

Only by faith in Jesus Christ and in his substitutionary atoning death on the cross; so even though we are guilty of having disobeyed God and are still inclined to all evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of our own but only by pure grace, imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ when we repent and believe in him. EPHESIANS 2:8–9

Question 30
What is faith in Jesus Christ?

Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel. GALATIANS 2:20

Question 31
What do we believe by true faith?

Everything taught to us in the gospel. The Apostles' Creed expresses what we believe in these words: We believe

TAGALOG

Tanong 29
Paano ba tayo maliligtas?

Sa pamamagitan lamang ng pananampalataya kay Jesu-Cristo, at sa Kanyang sapat na kamatayan doon sa krus ng kalbaryo. Gayundin naman, sa kabila ng ating mga pagsuway sa Diyos at patuloy na pagkakasala, ang Diyos, sa Kanyang hindi matumbasang biyaya at hindi dahil sa ating mga sariling mabuting gawa, ay pinagkakalooban tayo ng perpektong katuwiran mula kay Cristo, kung tayo ay magsisisi at sasampalataya sa Kanya. EFESO 2:8–9

Tanong 30
Ano ang pananampalataya kay Jesu-Cristo?

Ang pananampalataya kay Jesu-Cristo ay ang pagkilala sa katotohanang inihayag ng Diyos sa Kanyang Salita, pagtanggap at pagtitiwala lamang sa Kanya para sa kaligtasan na Kanyang iniaalok sa atin sa Ebanghelyo. GALACIA 2:20

Tanong 31
Ano ang pinaniniwalaan natin sa pamamagitan ng tunay na pananampalataya?

Lahat ng itinuro sa atin sa Ebanghelyo. Ang Kredo ng mga Apostol ay nagpapahayag ng mga bagay na ating

ARABIC

سؤال ٢٩
كيف يُمكننا أن نخلُص؟

فقط من خلال الإيمان بيسوع المسيح وبموته الكفاري البديلي على الصليب؛ لذلك، فبالرغم من أننا مُذنبون لأننا قد عصينا الله ولا نزال نميل إلى كل ما هو شر، إلا أن الله بدون أي استحقاق في ذواتنا، ولكن فقط بسبب النعمة الخالصة، يحتسب لنا البرّ الكامل للمسيح عندما نتوب ونؤمن به. أفسس ٢:٨،٩

سؤال ٣٠
ما هو الإيمان بيسوع المسيح؟

إن الإيمان بيسوع المسيح هو الاعتراف بأن كل ما أعلنه الله في كلمته هو حق، وكذلك، هو الثقة بيسوع المسيح، وقبوله والاتكال عليه وحده للخلاص كما هو مُقدّم لنا في رسالة الإنجيل. غلاطية ٢:٢٠

سؤال ٣١
ما الذي نقصده بالإيمان الصحيح؟

كل شيء يُعلِّمه لنا الإنجيل. ويُعبّر قانون إيمان

in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. JUDE 3

Question 32
What do justification and sanctification mean?

Justification means our declared righteousness before God, made possible by Christ's death and resurrection for us. Sanctification means our gradual, growing righteousness, made possible by the Spirit's work in us. 1 PETER 1:1–2

Question 33
Should those who have faith in Christ seek their salvation through their own works, or anywhere else?

No, they should not, as everything necessary to salvation is found in Christ. To seek salvation through good works is a denial that Christ is the only Redeemer and Saviour. GALATIANS 2:16

Question 34
Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God's Word?

Yes, because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit; so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God; so that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits; and so that by our godly behaviour others may be won to Christ. 1 PETER 2:9–12

Question 35
Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from?

All the gifts we receive from Christ we receive through the Holy Spirit, including faith itself. TITUS 3:4–6

Question 36
What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?

That he is God, coeternal with the Father and the Son, and that God grants him irrevocably to all who believe. JOHN 14:16–17

Question 37
How does the Holy Spirit help us?

The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, comforts us, guides us, gives us spiritual gifts and the desire to obey God; and he enables us to pray and to understand God's Word. EPHESIANS 6:17–18

sinasampalatayanan sa pamamagitan ng mga salitang ito:
Sumasampalataya ako sa Diyos Amang Makapangyarihan sa lahat na Lumalang ng langit at lupa.
Sumasampalataya ako kay Jesu-Cristo, Kanyang Bugtong na Anak na ating Panginoon; na ipinaglihi sa kapangyarihan ng Espiritu Santo at isinilang ni birheng Maria, nagdusa sa ilalim ng paglilitis ni Poncio Pilato, ipinako sa krus, namatay at inilibing; nanaog Siya sa kinaroroonan ng mga patay; at sa ikatlong araw ay nabuhay na mag-uli; umakyat Siya sa langit at naluklok sa kanang kamay ng Diyos Amang Makapangyarihan sa lahat; at mula roon ay babalik Siyang muli upang hatulan ang mga buhay at ang mga patay.
Sumasampalataya ako sa Espiritu Santo, sa banal na iglesyang pangkalahatan, sa kapulungan ng mga banal, sa kapatawaran ng mga kasalanan, sa muling pagkabuhay ng katawan, at sa buhay na walang hanggan. Amen JUDAS 3

Tanong 32
Ano ang ibig sabihin ng pag-aaring ganap at pagpapabanal?

Ang pag-aaring ganap ay ang paghahayag sa atin na tayo ay matuwid na sa harapan ng Diyos, at ito'y ginawang posible sa pamamagitan ng kamatayan at muling pagkabuhay ni Cristo para sa atin. At ang pagpapabanal naman ay ang ating unti-unting paglago sa katuwiran at kabanalan sa pamamagitan ng Espiritu Santong gumagawa sa ating buhay. 1 PEDRO 1:1–2

Tanong 33
Nararapat ba na ang mga sumampalataya kay Cristo ay maghanap pa ng kaligtasan sa kanilang mga sariling gawa, o sa kung saan pa man?

Hindi, hindi dapat, sapagkat ang lahat ng ating kailangan para sa kaligtasan ay matatagpuan lamang natin kay Cristo. Kaya ang paghahanap ng kaligtasan sa pamamagitan ng mabubuting gawa ay tahasang pagtanggi sa kasapatan ni Cristo bilang tangi nating Manunubos at Tagapagligtas. GALACIA 2:16

Tanong 34
Dahil nga tinubos na tayo sa biyaya, sa pamamagitan lamang ni Cristo, dapat pa ba tayong gumawa ng mabuti at sundin ang Salita ng Diyos?

Oo, dahil nga kay Cristo, na Siyang tumubos sa atin sa pamamagitan ng Kanyang dugo, at sa Espiritu ng Diyos na nagbabago sa atin; kaya naman dapat nating maipakita ang ating pagmamahal at pasasalamat sa Diyos; at sa pamamagitan nito'y napasisiguro rin natin ang ating kaligtasan dahil sa bunga nito; at sa pamamagitan ng ating maka-Diyos na pag-uugali ay maakay rin natin ang ibang mga tao kay Cristo. 1 PEDRO 2:9–12

Tanong 35
Dahil nga tinubos na tayo sa biyaya, sa pamamagitan lamang ng pananampalataya, saan naman galing ang pananampalatayang ito?

Ang lahat ng kaloob na tinanggap natin ay mula kay Cristo, sa pamamagitan ng Espiritu Santo, pati na ang ating pananampalataya. TITO 3:4–6

Tanong 36
Ano ang sinasampalatayanan natin patungkol sa Espiritu Santo?

Na Siya ay Diyos, walang hanggan tulad ng Ama, at ng Anak, at Siya ang tatak ng Diyos sa lahat ng sumasampalataya. JUAN 14:16–17

الرسل عمّا نؤمن به في هذه الكلمات: نؤمن بالله الآب القدير، خالق السماء والأرض؛ وبيسوع المسيح ابنه الوحيد ربنا، الذي حُبِلَ به بالروح القدس، ووُلِدَ من مريم العذراء، وتألّم في عهد بيلاطس البنطي، وصُلِبَ، ومات، وقُبِرَ. ونزل إلى الجحيم. وفي اليوم الثالث قام من الأموات. وصعد إلى السماء، وهو جالس عن يمين الله الآب القدير؛ وسيأتي من هناك ليدين الأحياء والأموات. نؤمن بالروح القدس، وبكنيسة جامعة مقدسة، وبشركة القديسين، وبغفران الخطايا، وبقيامة الأجساد وبالحياة الأبديّة. يهوذا ٣

سؤال ٣٢
ما معنى التبرير والتقديس؟

يعني التبرير إعلان برّنا أمام الله، الذي أصبح ممكنًا بموت المسيح وقيامته لأجلنا. يعني التقديس نمونا التدريجي في البرّ، الذي أصبح مُمكنًا من خلال عمل الروح القدس فينا.

١ بطرس ١:١،٢

سؤال ٣٣
هل ينبغي على مَن لديهم إيمان بالمسيح أن يسعوا للخلاص بأعمالهم الخاصة، أو من خلال أي شيء آخر؟

لا، لا ينبغي أن يفعلوا ذلك، لأن كل شيء ضروري للخلاص هو موجود في المسيح. فالسعي للخلاص من خلال الأعمال الصالحة هو إنكار أن المسيح هو الفادي والمخلّص الوحيد. غلاطية ٢:١٦

سؤال ٣٤
حيث أننا خلصنا بالنعمة وحدها، من خلال المسيح وحده، فهل مع ذلك يجب أن نعمل أعمالًا صالحة ونطيع كلمة الله؟

نعم، لأن المسيح، بعد أن فدانا بدمه، أيضًا يجدّدنا بروحه، حتى تُظهر حياتنا محبة وامتنانًا لله، ولكي نتيقّن من إيماننا بالثمار، وأيضًا لكي يُربحوا الأخرين للمسيح بسلوكنا التقي.

١ بطرس ٢:٩،١٢

سؤال ٣٥
حيث أننا خلصنا بالنعمة وحدها، من خلال الإيمان وحده، إذًا من أين يأتي هذا الإيمان؟

إن كل العطايا التي نستقبلها من المسيح، نستقبلها من خلال الروح القدس، بما في ذلك الإيمان نفسه. تيطس ٣:٤،٦

سؤال ٣٦
ماذا نؤمن عن الروح القدس؟

أنه هو الله، سرمدي مع الآب والابن، وأن الله يعطيه بلا ندامة لكل من يؤمن. يوحنا ١٤:١٦،١٧

سؤال ٣٧
كيف يُساعدنا الروح القدس؟

يُبكّتنا الروح القدس على خطايانا، ويُعزينا، ويُعطينا مواهب روحية، وكذلك الرغبة في طاعة الله؛ وهو يمنحنا القدرة أن نُصلي وأن نفهم كلمة الله. أفسس ٦:١٧،١٨

A Good Place to Get Stuck

Reflections from a Church Anniversary in Ras Al Khaimah

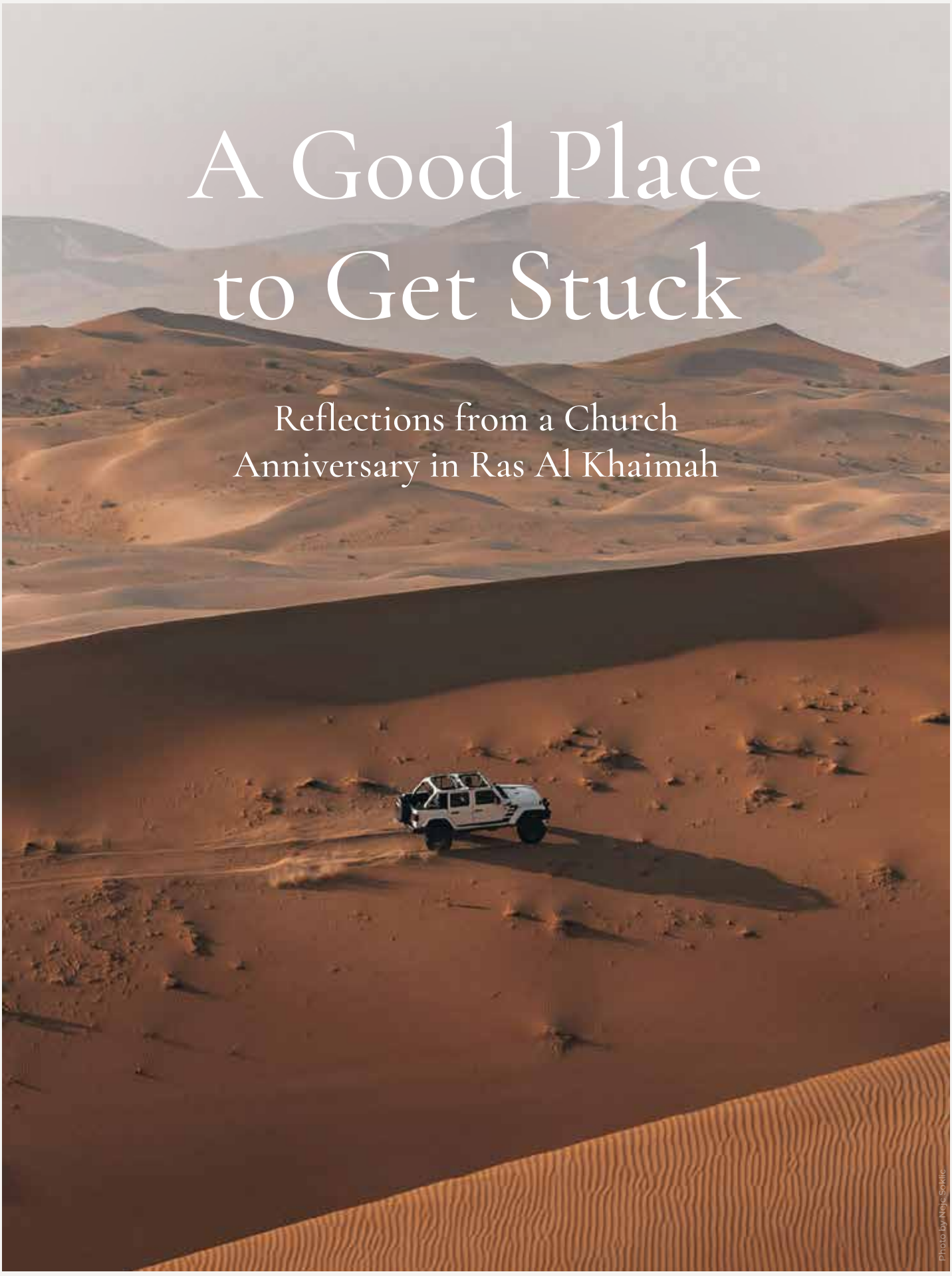


Photo by Nejc Soklic

Church Life & Practices

It is usually not a good thing to get stuck, especially when you are off-roading in the deserts of Ras Al Khaimah. I was the fortunate companion of three other friends. Our plan was to stargaze far from civilisation. Instead, we got stuck in the sand and spent the evening digging and pushing—all within earshot of Arabic techno music and the bright lights of a nearby Bedouin tourist attraction. So much for stargazing in silence.

It is usually not a good thing to get stuck—unless you get stuck in the gospel.

Stuck in the Gospel

A few years ago, pastors from around the world gathered with us in Ras Al Khaimah to celebrate our church's 10th anniversary. It was a celebration made all the more remarkable by the fact that our church stands on land graciously granted by His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi.

You might have expected our celebration to emphasise the church, but we were stuck talking about the gospel. Stuck with a we-ain't-going-anywhere kind of stuck.

Church planter and Senior Pastor Josh Manley could have opened the evening celebration by talking about the church. Instead, he began with a simple declaration: "The gospel is glorious!"
After several testimonies from church partners and pastoral interns, guest preacher Greg Gilbert began to teach—not on his book *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, but on two foundational questions: What Is the Gospel? and Who Is Jesus? Greg joked with Josh, "Why ask me to teach on the gospel? Haven't you been teaching this for so many years now?" Later, he answered his own question: "What better way to mark this anniversary than to marvel again at the gospel? There is nothing better we can do than focus on what matters most and get stuck there."

Stuck in the gospel. The message of every speaker that night was the same:

Run to the cross, rest in Jesus, have unshakeable confidence in the gospel. Meditate not on how good your ministry is but on how good God is. Lead your church to the cross. Stay faithful to the gospel, grow in the gospel. The gospel will not fail. Remember what God has done and who He is and bow your head in humility, awe, and worship. Be so overcome by the grandeur of the gospel that you erupt in praise!

I do not know where your heart or ministry stands right now, but this is what the church anniversary in Ras Al Khaimah impressed on me: Drive everything deep into the gospel and get permanently stuck.

Stuck in the Desert

It is a good thing to get stuck in the gospel. And, as I learned in Ras Al Khaimah, it can also be a good thing to get stuck in a desert.

> "Things delight and excite us when they are bigger than us and we can't fully grasp them. That is why God is an inexhaustible source of delight. The end of theology is not to grasp God and pin Him down but to worship. To reach another peak and realise how much you don't know. And this brings delight."
> — Greg Gilbert, preaching on Romans 11:33–36

There is something humbling about the desert. One moment, the engine strains up a dune, barely making it over the peak, only to rush down the other side towards another endless rise. Then the wheels sink, the engine groans, and the battle against an ocean of sand begins. Dune after dune stretches beyond sight. It is something bigger than you, something you cannot master—and somehow, it brings delight. Deserts are desolate, yet they can shock a soul back to life.

Friend, when was the last time you drove your soul into the gospel as into something far bigger than yourself—something with the weight and wonder of immeasurable sand dunes? Or has it grown small in your heart—so familiar that it no longer thrills you, more like dust on a bookshelf than a desert that leaves you in awe?

It is possible for Christians—even those who cross continents to persuade others of the gospel—to lose sight of the gospel's glory and forfeit delight. If I had laboured alongside others for many hard years to plant and strengthen a church, would I have opened its anniversary celebration with "The gospel is glorious"? Would you?

by Tim Jackson — Associate Pastor in Ras Al Khaimah



Article

Spiritual Growth & Disciplines

CAN *I* REALLY UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?

The Clarity of Scripture

"It is an ancient book, full of parables, prophecies, symbols, names, and places, and you need an 'elite expert' to decipher it. How could I understand it?"

Sadly, this is one of the reasons many Christians do not enjoy and delight in reading the Bible. But this perception is far from the truth. The Bible is God's Word for His people. If you are a Christian, *the Bible is for you*, and you can understand it. Why would God give you a message you could not understand? Its message is clear enough for ordinary believers to understand. Yes, the Bible is an ancient book, but it is also a spiritual book, breathed out by the Spirit of God, who not only inspired it but also grants us understanding.

Yes, the Bible is an ancient book, but it is also a spiritual book, breathed out by the Spirit of God, who not only inspired it but also grants us understanding.

For example, when Jesus said,

> "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

He means exactly that. Jesus invites us to bring all our burdens to Him, for He is the only One who can give rest to our tired and weary souls.

So, if we can understand the Bible and God has a message for us in it, why would we not read it?

Let me give you some practical tools to help you understand the Bible more clearly and to encourage in you joyful, delightful fellowship with our Triune God through His revealed Word.

To begin, we need to know that God has ordained means of grace, both *personal* and *corporate,* to help His people understand His Word clearly.

Personal Means

Paul encouraged Timothy,

> "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything" (2 Timothy 2:7).

Reading and understanding the Bible involves prayerful wrestling with the text. In other words, we engage both the physical and the spiritual. We read, think, and ask questions as we try to interpret it in its historical, literary, and theological context, while depending on the Holy Spirit to help us see what the text is saying, and even to correct us when we get it wrong.

A challenge these days is that we pick a single verse, interpret it however we like, and then apply it wrongly to our own circumstances. This can lead to dangerous conclusions.

Let me offer a few suggestions to help us improve our personal Bible reading.

1. Read and re-read

There is no better way to understand the Bible than to make reading it a lifelong habit. It is not a book you read once, and then you are done. Make it a habit to set aside time each day to read God's Word. It could be first thing in the morning, during your lunch break, or sometime in the evening. I am sure you have heard many say that devotionals ought to be the first thing you do each day. Sure. But it is not a one-size-fits-all rule. As long as you are carving out time in your day to read the Word, that is already a good start. Do this every day for the next several years and see how your perspective in everything begins to be shaped by God's Word. Over time, Bible reading will be part of you, much like eating every day.

2. Read it in context

Do not just buy into the 'Verse of the Day' trend and call that your Bible reading for the day. No. Read whole books from beginning to end, in one sitting if you can. You could start with Philippians, Ephesians, or Galatians; each one takes less than half an hour to read. For longer books, read a couple of chapters each day, then continue where you left off the next day. Dare I say, you must read the Old Testament. Without it, our understanding of the New Testament will be shallow, if not incomplete. You can also follow Bible reading plans in Bible apps such as the ESV app or YouVersion.

3. Integrate audio Bibles

"Faith comes from hearing, and

> hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Technology has advanced exponentially from the time of the Apostle Paul, and today we can listen to the whole Bible at the touch of our fingertips. Instead of doomscrolling, why not use that time to listen to God's Word? Integrate audio Bibles into your day. Play them while doing your chores, working out, or commuting. As a bonus, there are plans that I would highly recommend because they include a portion with the BibleProject videos that either give you an overview of the book you are about to read or trace a theme that you will encounter in the passage. These include *One Story that Leads to Jesus and Biblical Storyline*. Note: I would highly discourage watching those videos while driving! But you get the point. Would you understand all of it just by listening? No. You still need to sit down and wrestle with the text. But by doing this, you immerse yourself in the Word of God.

4. Use a good study Bible

Many good study Bibles are available, both in print and online, including the *ESV Study Bible*, the *Reformation Study Bible*, and the *MacArthur Study Bible*. These are helpful resources because they include maps, charts, articles, and short study notes to help you understand the passage and bridge the gap between then and now. Instead of purchasing the latest gadget, why not invest in Bible study resources? The Theology Matters bookshop is just one WhatsApp message away!

Corporate Means

At the same time, God has not made us to be "solo" Christians; He made us to be part of the body of Christ, the church. We see this pattern even in the Old Testament, where God gathers His people, whether in the wilderness or at the temple, to hear the preaching of His Word.

> "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8).

In the New Testament, the apostles prioritised prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1–7), and Paul told Timothy to "preach the word in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). Furthermore, he said,

> "But 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 3:14–15).

In other words, much of our understanding of the Bible comes through the teaching of others, especially through the faithful proclamation of God's Word by our pastors when the church gathers.

So, how can we maximise our understanding of the Bible as we sit under the preached Word?

1. Be part of a gospel-preaching local church

Every Christian should be part of a gospel-preaching local church—not merely an online church—that prioritises expositional preaching. The preacher must read the text, explain it in its historical, literary, and theological context, and then bring it home to his listeners by appropriately applying its truths to the lives of his congregation. Topical sermons can be helpful, but if the preaching is always topical, you are not getting the whole counsel of God. In short, in an expository sermon, the text's message determines the sermon's message. God sets the agenda, not the preacher.

2. Reflect with others

One way to deepen our understanding of the Bible is to reflect on the sermon with others in the church. In our church, we spend about 20 minutes after the service in small groups to reflect, ask questions, apply, and pray in response to what we just heard. This often extends to our snack fellowship, and sometimes even to dinner. Remember, being a Christian means being part of the body of Christ. We are made to encourage one another by speaking (and singing) the Word to one another.

… we spend about 20 minutes after the service in small groups to reflect, ask questions, apply, and pray. … Being a Christian means being part of the body of Christ.

3. Set your heart to study, do, and teach the Word

This applies to all Christians, but for this purpose, I want to speak especially to my fellow pastors and preachers. Brothers, God has called us to be His mouthpiece. We dare not say, "Thus says the Lord," about anything that does not come from the mouth of the Lord. Therefore, we must give ourselves to study the Bible. We ought to labour over the text, think deeply, and pray humbly that God will open our eyes and hearts to see what He wants us to see. Not only that, but we should apply what we have seen from the Scriptures; otherwise, we will be like a noisy gong to our congregation. We need to exemplify what we teach.

> "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

In the end, it all comes down to what you love most. You will do what you love and prioritise what you value most. So, what do you love and prioritise most?

We can understand the Bible clearly through our personal Bible study and through the Word preached at our corporate church gathering. So, let us spend the rest of our lives in joyful communion with our Triune God through His Word.

———

by **Allen Mandap** — Senior Pastor in Dubai

Reflective Questions

1. Do you believe the Bible is important?

   ☐ Yes ☐ No
   ☐ Perhaps, I'm not sure yet / I need to study it more to decide

2. How much time do you spend reading the Bible each day?

   ☐ Less than 5 minutes ☐ Around 30 minutes
   ☐ Around 10 minutes ☐ More than 1 hour

3. What is your overall Bible reading strategy?

   ☐ I only read devotionals, because the Bible itself feels too difficult.
   ☐ I have a desire to read but I often don't make the time for it.
   ☐ I decide spontaneously what to read each time I open the Bible.
   ☐ I choose passages based on whatever I'm going through now.
   ☐ I plan some things, but not consistently.
   ☐ I follow my church's sermon series.
   ☐ I follow a fixed, structured reading plan.

4. How do you engage with what you read in the Bible?

   ☐ I read to complete my plan, but don't reflect on what I've read.
   ☐ I apply whatever seems to fit my situation right away, without much extra thought.
   ☐ I sometimes look for a hidden or symbolic meaning, without being concerned if it was the real meaning.
   ☐ I use a devotional or commentary that has done the study for me.
   ☐ I think briefly about the meaning and how it applies to me.
   ☐ I attend Bible studies that look closely at grammar, context and application.
   ☐ I regularly use a structured study method (e.g., SOAP, inductive, journaling).

5. Which resources would you be interested in to help you improve how you study the Bible?

   ☐ Interactive text study | desiringgod.org/labs
   ☐ Study Bibles | crossway.org/articles/esv-bibles
   ☐ Worksheet | dewarabia.com/bible-study-worksheet
   ☐ Bible book overview videos | bibleproject.com
   ☐ Courses & Workshops | simeontrust.org, gulfseminary.com/fy, study.bible
   ☐ Study books | See pages 16-18 for different resources
   ☐ Study notes, commentaries, language tools, resources | blueletterbible.org, stepbible.org, esv.org
   ☐ Study with other Christians | Join a Bible study or small group at my local church, study with a more mature Christian

Bible Study Worksheet

Date: _____ Passage: _____

Before you begin, ask God to help you understand, and read the passage slowly at least twice. Write down verse numbers as you go. Keep your Bible open as you work. Check what you find with a study Bible or a mature Christian.

Observation

1. What Do I See?
   a. Who is in the passage, where are they, and what happens? Which words or ideas come up more than once? b. What does it show me about God, and about people? c. What surprises me, and what questions do I have? Include verse numbers.

2. How Is It Built?
   a. How is the passage organised? Mark where each new thought begins, with verse numbers. b. What clues helped me see where it divides, such as repeated words, linking words like "therefore" or "but," or changes of speaker, place, or time? c. What does this structure show me the author is emphasising?

Interpretation

7. What Is the Main Point?
   a. In one short sentence, what was God saying to the first readers through this passage? b. And what does it say to us today?

8. Then and Now
   What struggle, need, or question did the first readers have that we still have today?

9. How Does This Passage Point Us to Jesus?
   Does it include a promise that Jesus keeps? Does someone or something in it remind me of Jesus? Does it show me why I need Jesus? Is there a New Testament verse that links this passage to Him?

Context

3. Literary Context
   What comes before and after, and how does this passage move the book forward?

4. Biblical Context
   Does this passage quote or remind me of another part of the Bible? A cross-reference in the margin can help here.

5. Historical Context
   What was happening to the author and the first readers when this was written?

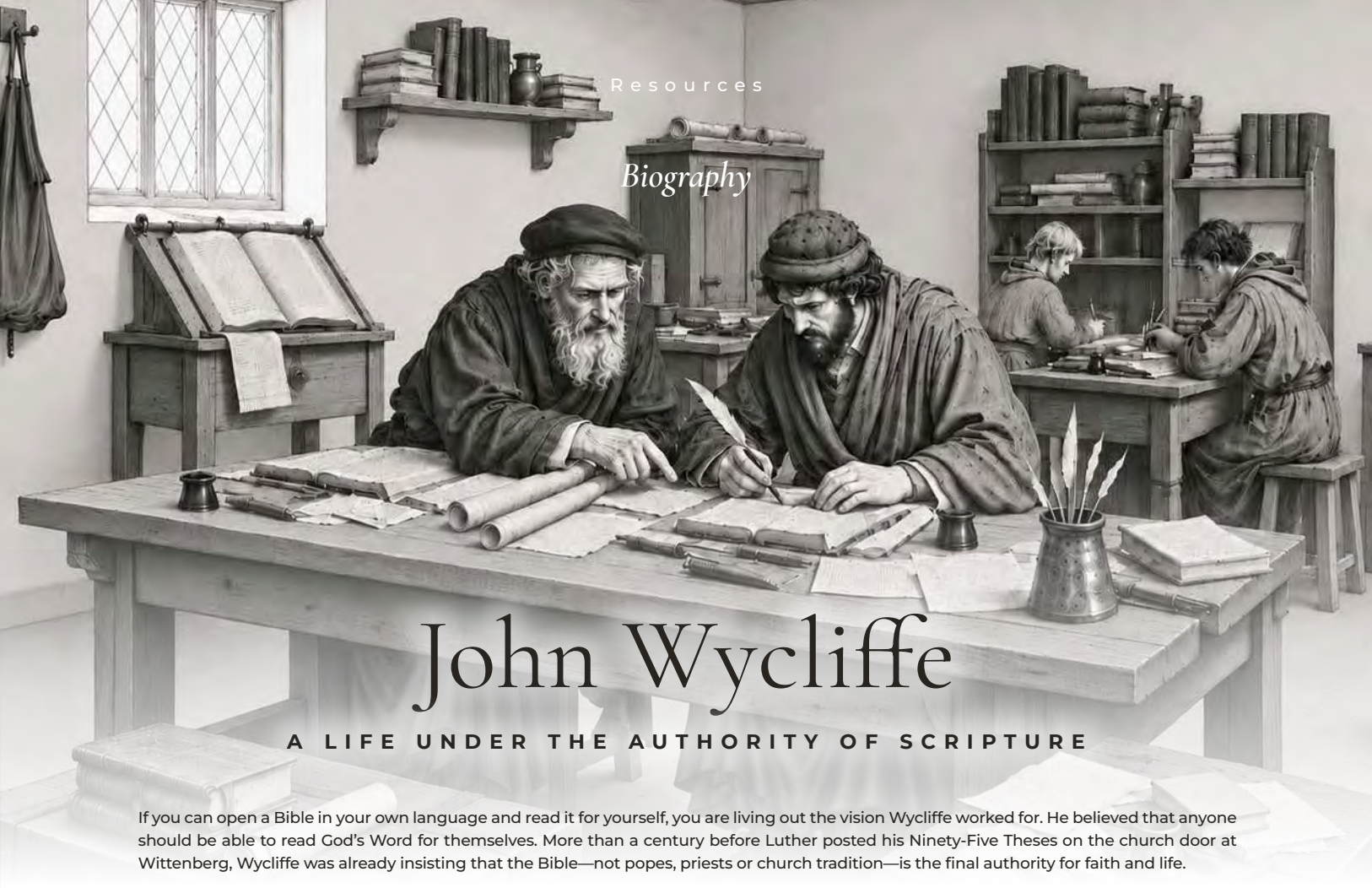
6. Cultural Context
   Is there anything about life in that time and place that I don't understand, such as a custom, a job, or a place? A study Bible can help here.

Response

10. How Will I Respond?
    a. Because of what God has done through Jesus, is there something I need to know, believe, repent of, or do? Complete the sentence "This week I will..." b. Write one thing to pray about and one person I could share this with. c. Do I still have any questions?

Download a version with extra space to write at dewarabia.com

Biography



John Wycliffe

A LIFE UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

If you can open a Bible in your own language and read it for yourself, you are living out the vision Wycliffe worked for. He believed that anyone should be able to read God's Word for themselves. More than a century before Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, Wycliffe was already insisting that the Bible—not popes, priests or church tradition—is the final authority for faith and life.

Can you imagine going to church, hearing the Bible read in a language you do not understand, and having to depend on others to explain God's Word to you? This was England nearly 700 years ago, in the world in which John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–1384) grew up. Church services and much of the Church's formal teaching were in Latin, although sermons for ordinary people could be given in English. You could not simply open a Bible in English and read it for yourself—because no complete English Bible yet existed. Wycliffe would help change that forever.

Wycliffe was first and foremost a scholar and began his academic career at Oxford, where he became known as a philosopher and theologian. The more he studied the Bible and theology, the more he began to question some of the Church's teachings and practices. Wycliffe came to see the Bible not merely as a religious text for church leaders, but as God's authoritative Word and the highest standard of truth.

He reasoned that if the Bible was God's authoritative Word, everyone should be able to read and understand it—not just priests and the educated. By the early 1380s, when Wycliffe was in his fifties, scholars at Oxford began translating the Latin Vulgate (the Church's official Latin Bible) into English. Whether Wycliffe translated a single verse himself, we cannot say. More than a century later, William Tyndale would begin translating directly from the original Greek and Hebrew.

His commitment to the Bible also gave him the courage to challenge teachings that contradicted Scripture. One such teaching was the doctrine of transubstantiation, which taught that during the Mass the bread and wine truly became the body and blood of Christ, even though they still looked and tasted the same. Wycliffe questioned whether such a teaching could be supported by the Bible. His insistence on testing Church teachings and practices against the Bible cost him much of his support and protection. Still, he continued to speak openly about what he believed the Bible taught.

Wycliffe died in 1384, but his call to return to the Bible lived on. He was eventually condemned as a heretic at the Council of Constance in 1415, with his remains dug up and burned in 1428, over 40 years after his death. Yet none of this could undo the influence of a man whose life was shaped by the conviction that the Word of God must govern the people of God.

What we can learn from John Wycliffe

1. Let the Bible be the highest authority in your life
   (Isa. 8:20; Mark 7:8–13; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:19–21) Wycliffe's study of Scripture was more than an academic exercise. The more seriously he took God's Word, the more willing he was to test his own beliefs, Church teachings, and the culture around him against Scripture. His life reminds us that the Bible is not simply something we read for knowledge; it is God's Word, and it should shape what we believe and how we live.

2. Know the Bible for yourself
   (Ps. 119:105; Josh. 1:8; Ps 1:1–2; John 5:39; Acts 17:11; Col. 3:16) Wycliffe believed we should not depend only on pastors or teachers to tell us what the Bible says. Pastors and teachers can guide and help us, but we should also read and study the Bible for ourselves. In doing so, we grow in faith, know God better, and learn to test what we hear against Scripture. Today, we have easy access to the Bible, yet we can still easily neglect it. Wycliffe's life reminds us to treasure God's Word, read it faithfully, and be thankful for the privilege of having it so freely available.

3. Correct false teaching with the truth of Scripture
   (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 4:2–4; Titus 1:9; Jude 3) Wycliffe was willing to challenge teachings and practices that had moved away from the Bible, even when it cost him influence and support. We too should have the courage to submit ourselves to the truth of the Bible and, with humility, challenge error when we encounter it—even when doing so is unpopular.

4. Share the Bible with others
   (Ps. 96:2–3; Luke 24:27; John 20:30–31; Rom. 10:14–17; 2 Tim. 3:15) Wycliffe's desire to make the Bible available in English grew from his deep belief in its importance. God reveals Himself through the Bible, and this should move us to encourage others to read it, understand it, and respond to it.

Testimony

The Gods I Kept—and The God Who Kept Me



Growing up in Gujarat, India, Christianity was nothing more than a two-page history lesson. Born into a devout Hindu family, I served the deities in our household shrine. Worship was transactional: demands made, gods freely adopted or discarded when they failed to deliver.

Yet Hindu scripture raised troubling questions. Why did our gods seem so angry, fearful, or ignorant? Around me, I saw people crushed by disease, death, and ruin. Human life was called precious, yet I saw no evidence of that value. When I questioned, I was only told to keep quiet.

My search intensified when we moved to Saudi Arabia. I read Islam's holy book, sensing that something vital was missing in Hinduism—but the lives around me reflected no god I would want to follow. Buddhism, too, offered no answers.

Later we moved to Dubai. Outwardly, my life looked perfect: my husband and I had dream jobs, wealth, and fame. Yet underneath lay an agonising emptiness; life felt meaningless, and I longed for a reason worth living for.

Then, in His mercy, God sent me a new colleague—unlike anyone I had ever met: kind, gentle, and untouched by worldly standards. Over two years, I saw that his life was anchored in the book he constantly read—his Bible.

One day I asked him about his God. He told me about Adam and Eve—how sin entered the world and ruined the world. The truth pulled me like a magnet; it was exactly what I had been searching for. Everything he shared was new to me; I didn't know Jesus had risen from the dead. He showed me why: God, holy and just, made us for Himself, but our sin left us cut off and under judgement. So, His Son, Jesus, became man, lived the sinless life we could not, died in our place, and rose bodily—defeating sin and death. All who turn from sin and trust in Him are forgiven and reconciled to God.

Within months, I was so convinced of this truth that I refused to celebrate the biggest Hindu festival of the year. Alarmed, my husband forbade any contact with my colleague, and a stormy decade of persecution followed. Effectively imprisoned at home, I was allowed only to commute to work. Every Bible I owned was destroyed. For years I was barred from church and fellowship, yet the Lord preserved me.

... imprisoned at home, I was allowed only to commute to work. Every Bible I owned was destroyed.

Eventually, God softened my husband's heart. Though still an unbeliever, he allowed me to attend church, and a colleague introduced me to the Evangelical Christian Church of Dubai.

Stepping inside changed everything. The members' selfless love startled me, and under expository preaching, Bible study, and discipleship from older sisters, my life was reshaped. I realised how stagnant my growth had been without the church. Over the six years since, I have grown more than I ever imagined. My love for my Lord, His Word, and His people has deepened, and my journey has come full circle: I now disciple new sisters, passing on the very love that saved me. I thank God for my local church; it is truly the family where I belong.

by

Purvi Gupta

Song

Speak, O Lord

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word
Take Your Truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
All Your purposes for Your glory

Teach us Lord, full obedience
Holy reverence, true humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of pow'r that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds
Help us grasp the height of Your plans for us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory

This song helps prepare us to listen to the Bible and the sermon so that we listen with open hearts, humble minds, and a readiness to obey. Churches have different ways of worship, but if a service does not open the Bible, or if we do not really listen, we miss the opportunity to hear from God. When you sing this song, you ask God to plant His truth deep inside you and shape how you live and what you believe. Jesus told a story to show how people respond differently to God's Word: some people will receive it with joy, but only for a short time; others allow worries and other things to take their attention away; but some listen to the Bible and allow it to shape the way they live and love God more fully. Reflect on Matthew 13, and ask yourself: What distractions do I need to say no to so that I can listen to God's voice more clearly? Am I really ready to obey what God reveals to me in the Bible, even when I find it difficult?

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Church Leadership & Outreach

THE PRIORITY OF PROCLAMATION

Proclamation is the priority of the missionary task because the gospel message is the power of God for salvation. The priority of preaching, teaching, and personal evangelism was modelled and commanded by our Lord and the apostles. Therefore, proclamation is the biblically mandated central task of the church and missions (Mark 1:38, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:13–15, Matthew 28:16–20).

As a young ministry intern, my boss took me to a large Central Asian city. We participated in a missionary training conference for those who had served on the field for over ten years. We heard a challenging exposition of Romans 10 about the power of preaching God's Word in Christian ministry, but it became clear that many in the room were upset with the speaker. During our small group time, I vividly remember some of the missionaries expressing their objections:

> "What the people here need is not a message, but just our acts of care."
>
> "Preaching or teaching the gospel is a Western ideology! What they need is our listening, not our teaching."
>
> "We must reach people in culturally sensitive ways; in this culture, that's not preaching and teaching."

Their reactions were particularly puzzling because I am an Indian national living in the Middle East, and a group of missionaries taught me the gospel. The Word of God they shared convicted me, and I became a Christian.

A few days later, the conference organisers repeated the same training with several local pastors from the same region. They heard the same talk from the same person, but the reactions couldn't have been more different! One pastor stood up as soon as the preacher finished and remarked,

> "We didn't know ministry was this simple! Missionaries explained that people from our culture would reject the gospel message if we tried to teach it directly and that explaining what is in the Bible is only for mature believers. But if God promises to save people through His Word, we should have no other method but to obey what is in His Word and preach His gospel!"

I couldn't agree more with that brother. And yet, I've seen more and more missionaries and Christian organisations choose not to prioritise the proclamation of the gospel. The number one reason for doing so is how the culture will react. According to them, anthropology must shape missiology. The Bible begs to differ. God's Word should primarily shape our missiology. We see God communicating His truth throughout the Bible.

The Power of God's Word

From the beginning of creation, God speaks. In His speaking of creation and humanity into existence, we see firsthand the incomparable power of His Word. We also know the clarity of His judgements through His Word when He judges Adam and Eve for their sin and banishes them from the garden. We see His grace described as He makes a covenant with His people and promises to rescue not just the people of Israel but the world. Then we see the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, come to fulfil the promise of God by ransoming a people unto God, paying the penalty for their sin by dying on the cross, and rising again to new life. In Jesus' commission to the apostles we read the promised assurance of His presence and the command to teach the nations all He commanded. The teaching and proclamation of the gospel were never limited to a few nations!

The book of Acts records the first fruits of obedience to the Great Commission. Peter proclaims the gospel in Acts 2 and 3,000 people believed. In Acts 4, the chief priests and elders charge Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. The two disciples respond,

> "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" — Acts 4:19–20.

Faithful Response

The faithful response of any Christian is proclaiming the message of salvation accurately and clearly so that others may hear the good news, repent, and put their faith in Christ. We may be opposed—Peter and John were brought before the elders and rulers of the people—but we listen to God and not to human dictates.

So, we should seek to obey the command in God's Word. The same God who worked through Peter, John, Paul, and many others in the New Testament is the same God who has worked through faithful saints throughout the ages to save people through the preaching and teaching of the gospel.

Romans 10:13–17 makes it clear that the gospel is a message that must be communicated in words to be heard by those who will respond in faith.

> "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ."

This passage was so obvious that I once wondered why Paul included it. But the longer I follow Christ, the more I see its importance for all believers, particularly missionaries.

Cultural Sensitivity

Missionaries' human tendencies can downplay the urgency of sharing the gospel ourselves; we can point to cultural anthropology or allow our fear of government authorities to silence us. We lack confidence in our ability to teach the gospel in a culturally relevant way. So we ignore the biblical commands.

I do believe we should strive to be sensitive to the culture. We should be wise as we consider the local governance and hone our evangelism skills. However, I still hold that two phrases from this passage speak clearly and notably to missionaries: "How are they to hear without someone preaching?" and "How are they to preach unless they are sent?" Missionaries are sent, and according to the Apostle Paul, we are sent because people can't hear unless someone who knows the gospel message comes and preaches it to them.

Proclamation is the priority because the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled without it. We must see people become Christians at the beginning of their discipleship, before baptism, before teaching them the commands of Christ, and before they come together to form a church, the ultimate goal in missions.

Missionaries can do many good things: hunger relief, healthcare, business development, supporting schools and education, and more. These things can point to the gospel and flow from the gospel, but they cannot save unless the gospel is explained to the people. Likewise, cultural sensitivity is invaluable, but when it precludes sharing the good news that Jesus offers forgiveness and reconciliation with God, we aren't loving the people of that culture; we're condemning them to eternity without Christ. Both sending churches and missionaries must make gospel proclamation a priority.

Practical Centrality

In closing, let me offer some practical recommendations on keeping gospel proclamation front and centre in missions:

1. **Emphasis on Evangelism**

   A missions-minded church best serves the missionaries they send by modelling what they desire to happen on the field (and because it's an essential part of their own mission as a church!). Evangelism should be emphasised and encouraged by the church leaders. The gospel should be preached regularly and taught consistently. Members should be urged to share the gospel in their communities.[1]

2. **Clarity on the Gospel**

   Missionaries should know the gospel and how to communicate it. I know this seems obvious, but it's often assumed. If you are considering missionary service, clarify what the gospel is (and isn't) and how to communicate it. Become someone who regularly shares their faith, either one-on-one or before groups. Seek opportunities to reach out to internationals in particular. If you aren't evangelising in your home culture, you probably won't do it in another culture when it's much more complicated. Church leaders should look for intentional evangelists who are solid on the gospel before affirming them as missionaries to be sent.[2]

3. **Like-Mindedness on the Team**

   Confirm that the team already on the field is committed to gospel proclamation. Joining a team that doesn't share the desire to preach and teach the gospel will only be a hindrance, and your efforts may be opposed.[3]

4. **Utilise Language Learning**

   In most situations, missionaries should commit to learning the language to communicate the gospel clearly. But language instruction itself can become a gospel opportunity. I know a missionary who would tell his non-Christian teacher he wanted to practise Arabic by reading the Bible aloud during their sessions. Don't wait to master the local language before sharing the gospel, but even through feeble attempts, entrust your efforts to God and look for ways to teach the gospel.[4]

One final encouragement: there will come a time when missionaries leave the country. What you leave those people with is what they will seek to emulate. Many have left my area with much clarity and joyful gospel preaching and teaching. There is a long legacy here of men like Samuel Zwemer who chose not to change the gospel message to make it palatable to the local culture, nor hesitated from sharing the gospel because it doesn't fit the local ideology. Instead, they have remained steadfast.

Churches should pray for, train, send, and be faithful gospel proclaimers.

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by Stephen Peterson — Pastor in Central Asia
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This article is available at greatcommissioncouncil.org

[1] *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* by Mack Stiles is an excellent book to encourage churches in this effort.

[2] *What Is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert, Marks of the Messenger by Mack Stiles, and Personal Evangelism by Mark Dever are helpful books to read.

[3] See GCC article *Who's Your Team? Navigating the Surprising Struggle for Missionaries.*

[4] See GCC article *Trade Language or Local Language?*



The Art of Building Flavour

The secret to a great curry lies in its layers of fresh herbs, aromatic spices, gentle heat and rich coconut milk, each building on the last. Do not be daunted by the long list of ingredients. Notice what each one adds, and how they create a vibrant, balanced curry.

Would you also like to share your favourite recipe? Email us at contact@dewarabia.com


Photo by Megan Bucknall

Recipe

CHEF GRACESON'S THAI CURRY

SERVES: 4–6 PEOPLE PREPARATION: 30 MIN COOK: 20 MIN

by Graceson John
former fine-dining chef in Dubai

INGREDIENTS

THAI GREEN CURRY PASTE: **Coriander Seeds** 8 g; **Salt** 4 g; **Cumin Seeds** 2 g; **Black Pepper** 2 g; **Lemongrass** 30 g; **Galangal** 10 g, peeled and sliced; **Fresh Turmeric** 10 g, peeled and roughly chopped; **Shallots** 20 g, roughly chopped; **Shrimp Paste** 10 g; **Makrut Lime Zest** 10 g; **Garlic** 10 g; **Thai Green Basil** 60 g; **Coriander Stalks and Leaves** 40 g; **Dutch Green Chillies** 40 g, seeds removed; **Bird's Eye Chillies** 10 g; **Water** as required
CURRY: Chicken Breast 170 g; **Thai Green Curry Paste** 100 g; **Thick Coconut Milk** 200 g; **Thin Coconut Milk** 100 g; **Thai Green Aubergine (Eggplant)** 120 g; **Baby Broccoli** 40 g; **Palm Sugar** 40 g; **Fish Sauce** 15 g
GARNISH: Fresh Thai Basil Leaves as required**; Sliced Red Chilli** as required

EQUIPMENT: Blender; Saucepan; Knife; Chopping Board

INSTRUCTIONS

Thai Green Curry Paste

- Place the cumin seeds, coriander seeds, black pepper and salt in a blender.
- Blend until the spices form a very fine powder.
- Add the galangal, turmeric and lemongrass.
- Blend until a relatively smooth paste forms, adding some water to help the ingredients blend smoothly.
- Add the shallots, shrimp paste, makrut lime zest and garlic and blend until well combined.
- Add the Dutch green chillies, bird's eye chillies, Thai green basil and coriander stalks and leaves last.
- Blend briefly until smooth. Avoid overblending, as this can oxidise the herbs and turn the paste brown.
- Transfer the paste to an airtight container.

Chicken and Vegetables

- Cut the Thai green aubergine and baby broccoli into 2–3 cm pieces.
- Bring a small pot of seasoned water to a gentle boil.
- Add the chicken and cook for 2–3 minutes, until partially cooked.
- Drain and set aside.

Coconut Curry

- Cook the thick and thin coconut milk in a saucepan over low heat for 10 minutes.
- Add 100 g of the green curry paste.
- Finely chop the palm sugar and add it to the saucepan with the fish sauce.
- Stir until the curry paste and sugar have dissolved into the coconut milk.
- Add the partially cooked chicken, Thai green aubergine and baby broccoli.
- Simmer for 7–10 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender and the chicken is completely cooked through.
- Add a small amount of water when necessary if the sauce becomes too thick.

Finish and Serve

- Taste the curry and adjust the seasoning with additional fish sauce or palm sugar if needed.
- Transfer the curry to serving bowls.
- Garnish with fresh basil leaves and red chilli.
- Serve with steamed jasmine rice.

TIP!

Store the Thai green curry paste in the refrigerator for up to 4 days or freeze for up to 1 month.

Word Search

Hidden below are the names of four kings and four prophets. Find all names, then match each king to the prophet he is connected to. The names can run in any direction and may intersect or share letters.

↑ ↓ ← → ↖ ↗ ↙ ↘

T U X L L Z J G L H U K Q
P N M O U E W I E H W O B
H E F M H A A H U A D G M
I E W U S X S H M M C I R
I L U Y D P M N A T H A N
O I C I T L D T S B X B G
B J V S A H S I L E W X Q
K A F D E I W B H E H O L
D H I F J H X Z M V G Y K

King		Prophet
_____	—	_____
_____	—	_____
_____	—	_____
_____	—	_____

Timeline Tangle

What happened first, next, and last? Write each letter in the boxes in the correct order.

A. Name change of Abram and Sarai
B. Jacob's dream at Bethel
C. Marriage of Isaac
D. Joseph is born
E. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
F. Jacob is blessed before Esau
G. Isaac is born
H. Death of Abraham
I. Rachel becomes Jacob's wife
J. Death of Sarah

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Structure Study

The book of Psalms is divided into five books:

I. Psalms 1–41
II. Psalms 42–72
III. Psalms 73–89
IV. Psalms 90–106
V. Psalms 107–150

1. How does each book end? Look up the last verse of Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106 and 150.

_____

2. Which psalm in Book II closely repeats a psalm from Book I? Which two psalms are they?

_____

3. The longest and the shortest psalm appear in Book V. Which ones are they?

_____

4. Which name for God is used most often in Book I, and which in Book II?

_____

Complete the Account

Can you complete these two accounts from Judges 4–5 and Judges 10–12?

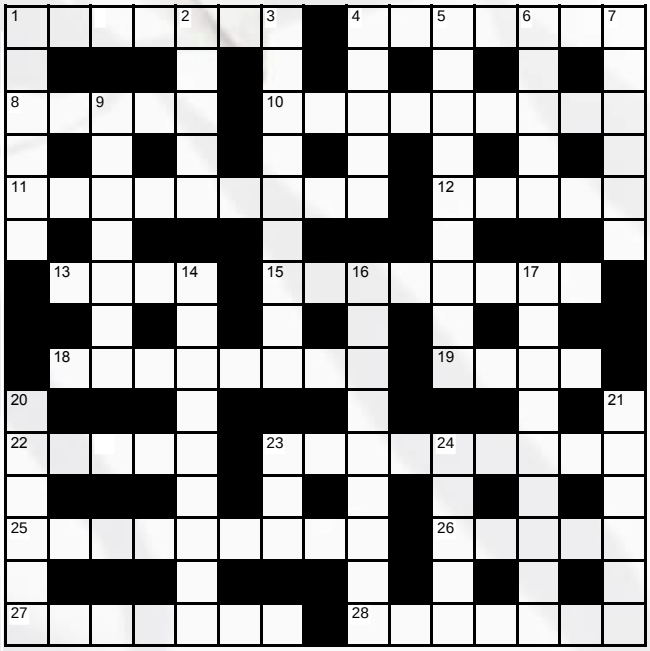
Deborah was the wife of _____. She sat under a palm between _____ and Bethel. When Israel was oppressed by King Jabin, Deborah summoned _____ and instructed him to gather an army. Israel went into battle against the army commanded by _____. His army was defeated, but he escaped on foot and took refuge in the tent of _____, who killed him with a _____ while he slept. Deborah and _____ sang a song of praise to the Lord.

Jephthah was a mighty warrior from _____. Before the battle against the _____, Jephthah made a _____ to God. If God gave him victory, he would give to God whatever came out of his house first to meet him when he returned. God gave him victory, but when Jephthah returned home, his _____ came out to meet him. She asked for _____ to go into the mountains with her friends and mourn because she would never _____.

Finished
all the puzzles?
Send your answers to
contact@dewarabia.com
for a chance to
win a book!

Crossword

Read the Across and Down clues and fill in the answers using the intersecting letters and word lengths.



by *Philologus* © BiblePuzzles.org.uk

ACROSS

1 Paul said, "We are perplexed, but not driven to ___" (7)
5 God, doing this on day 7 (7)
9 "You who are of ___ eyes than to see evil" (Habakkuk 1:13) (5)
10 One of Paul's letters (9)
11 Nehemiah asked why the house of God had been ___ (9)
12 An army surrounding a city (5)
13 Lamentation cry in Jeremiah (4)
15 "The Lord had ___ to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel" (2 Samuel 17:14) (8)
18 God is faithful and keeps His ___ (8)
19 In the last ___ there will come times of difficulty (4)
22 Colour in Ezekiel's vision (5)
24 "Father of the fatherless and ___ of widows" (Psalm 68:5) (9)
26 Creation owes this to God (9)
27 In hell people will weep and ___ their teeth (5)
28 Nadab and Abihu offered ___ fire (7)
29 Absalom's crime, joined by Ahithophel (7)

DOWN

1 Proverbs teaches us to trust in the Lord and not ___ on our own understanding (6)
2 "Day by day, as a ___ offering" (Numbers 28:3) (7)
3 What two must do to walk together (Amos 3:3) (5)
4 Noah was a ___ man (9)
5 Solomon ___ for forty years (5)
6 After Jesus fed the five thousand, everyone was ___ (9)
7 God created man and woman in His own ___ (5)
8 The good news about Jesus (6)
14 The neighbour who helped the injured traveller (9)
16 The manager in Jesus' parable was ___ (9)
17 Their chariots followed Israel into the sea (9)
20 Abraham's servant had ten of these when he went to find Isaac a wife (6)
21 Esther was an ___ (6)
23 "My tongue is like the ___ of a ready scribe" (Psalm 45:1) (3)
24 Bird used in Isaiah's picture of renewed strength (5)

Trivia Quiz

Explore the Bible as you answer and discover more.

1. Which books of the Bible are included in the Megillot?
2. What do the terms Tanakh and Septuagint mean?
3. In Psalm 19, what different terms are used to describe God's revealed Word?
4. Who in Acts needed help understanding Scripture? What passage and chapter was being read?
5. Where was the first Christian church established?
6. Hebrews 4:12 and Psalm 119:105 both use "word." Use an interlinear tool to find the original words in each. What are the two words? Why are they different?
7. When you look up one of the verses from question 6, why does it look like the words are out of order in the Blue Letter Bible interlinear tool?

Interlinear Tool

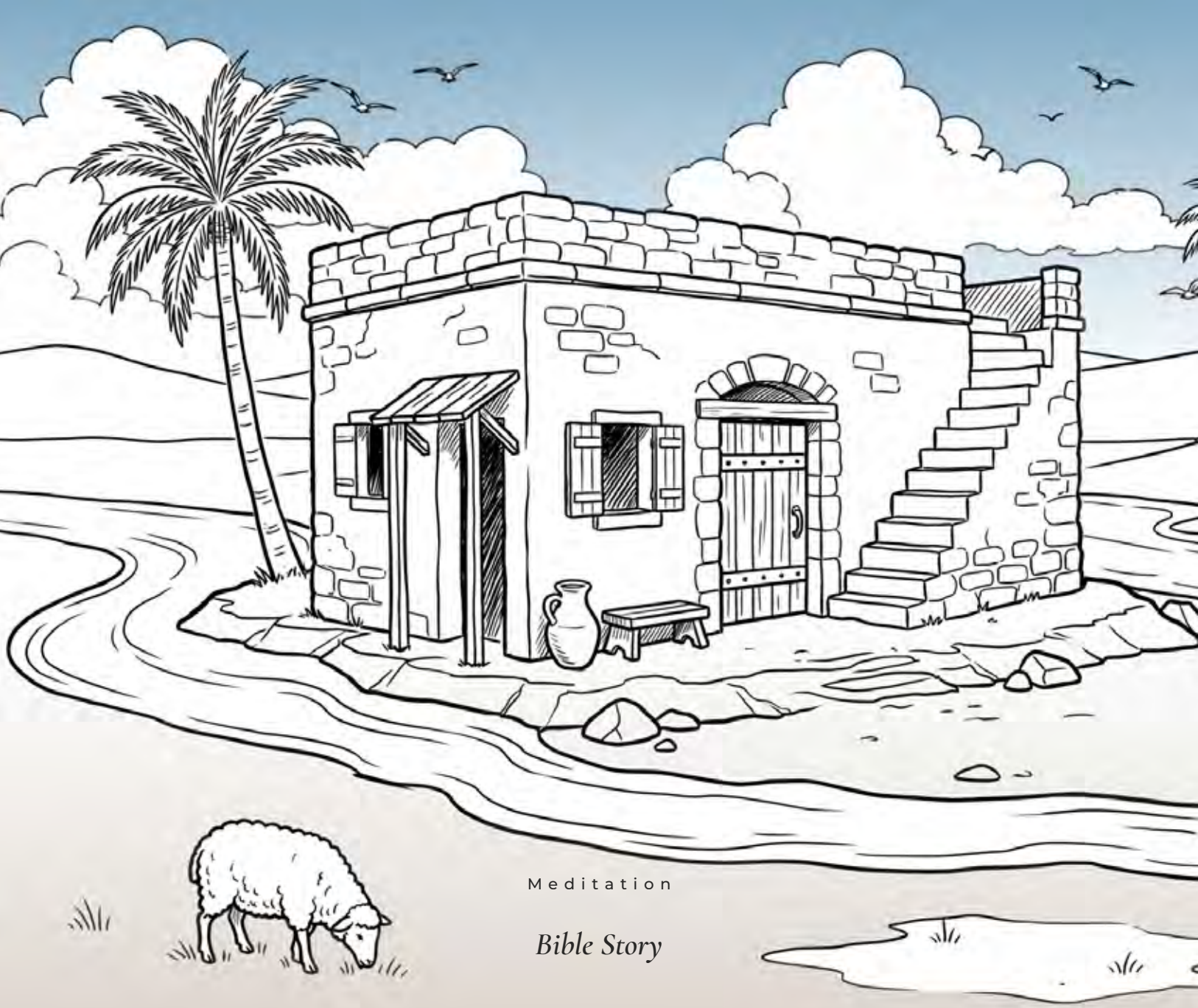
Visit *BlueLetterBible.org*. In the menu, click on Study, then on Inline Interlinear, or scan the QR code to jump straight to the page you can use for questions 6 and 7.

Know the Book

Which belongs to Proverbs, and which to Ecclesiastes?

	Prov.	Eccl.
"My son"		
The words of Agur		
"For everything there is a season"		
Thirty-one chapters		
"Remember also your Creator"		
"Vanity of vanities"		
"Go to the ant, O sluggard"		
Twelve chapters		

Answers at dewarabia.com after the next edition.



Meditation

Bible Story

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

5 [1] Then Jesus saw that crowds of people were following him. So he went up a hill and he sat down there to teach them. His disciples came near to listen to him. [2] He began to teach them (Matthew 5:1–2).

7 [24] Jesus then said, 'Some people listen to my message and they obey it. Those people are like a wise man who built his house on rock. [25] Then a storm came with a lot of rain and wind. The rivers rose up high. Strong winds blew hard against that house. But the house did not fall down because the man had built it on rock. [26] Other people listen to my message but they do not obey it. Those people are like a fool who built his house on sand. [27] Then a storm came with a lot of rain and wind. The rivers rose up high. Strong winds blew hard against the house. That house fell down. The storm destroyed it completely.'

[28] Jesus finished speaking. The crowds of people were very surprised at the things that he taught them. [29] When Jesus taught them, he showed that he had authority. That was not like the way that the teachers of God's Law taught people (Matthew 7:24–29 EASY).

Who Is Your Foundation?

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The Apostle Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). This means God's Word is good for us and should shape our hearts, minds, words, and actions. We don't just hear God's Word, try to understand it, and then go on with our lives. Instead, we listen to and obey it because we know that God is good and trust that



Colour me!

His Word is also for our good. Jesus would never ask us to do anything that would harm us.

Just like our parents. Do you think they will ever ask you to do something wrong? Sometimes it doesn't make sense to us to obey them; sometimes we don't feel like obeying them, right? Because we want to do our thing. But our parents want nothing but our good.

Here, Jesus says that as we listen to and *do* His word, we are like a wise man who built his house on the rock. No matter what happens, if our lives are rooted in God's Word, we will not fall because we are anchored in the Word of God.

God's Word is so important that Jesus Himself, the eternal Son of God and the Word of God, became flesh and dwelt among us—so He could live a perfect, sinless life, fully obeying His Father even to the death on the cross—so that you and I can be with Him forever. If you believe this and remain in God's Word, you are truly His disciple.

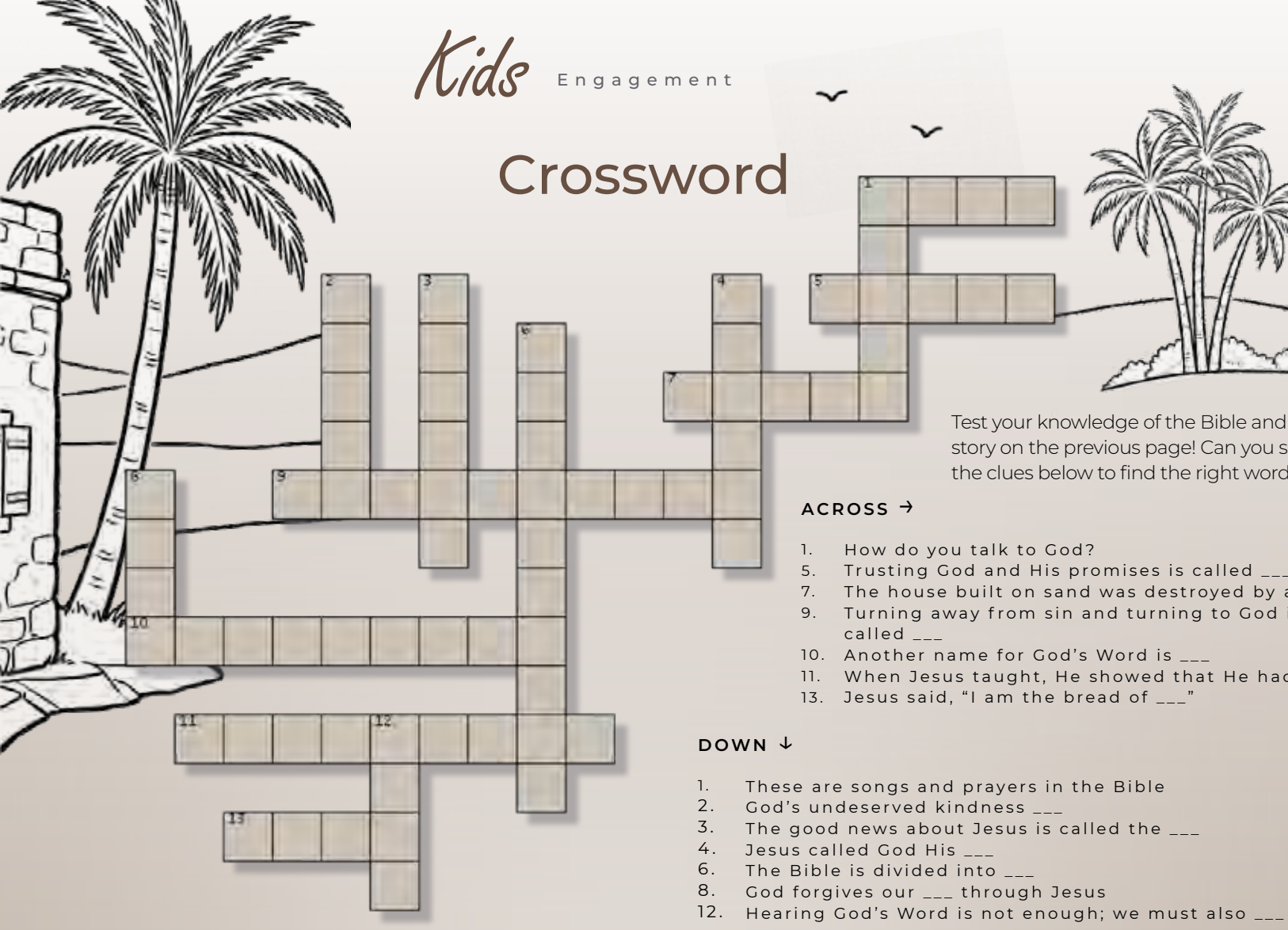
Reflective Questions

1. Can you think of a time you obeyed your parents, even when you didn't want to? How did it turn out?
2. Why can we trust that what Jesus tells us is good for us?
3. Can you think of something God tells us to do that you sometimes find difficult to obey?

A Prayer to Pray Together

Thank You, God, for speaking to us through the Bible. Thank You that You are good and that we can trust You. Thank You, Jesus, for becoming human and living a perfect life, then dying and rising again for us. Please help us, by Your Holy Spirit and through the Bible, to trust in You alone. Help us not only to hear Your words but also to obey them. Help our hearts to want to obey You more. Forgive us for the many times we have chosen not to listen to You and have gone our own way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Crossword



Test your knowledge of the Bible and
story on the previous page! Can you s
the clues below to find the right word

ACROSS →

1. How do you talk to God?
5. Trusting God and His promises is called ___
7. The house built on sand was destroyed by a
9. Turning away from sin and turning to God i
   called ___
10. Another name for God's Word is ___
11. When Jesus taught, He showed that He had
13. Jesus said, "I am the bread of ___"

DOWN ↓

1. These are songs and prayers in the Bible
2. God's undeserved kindness ___
3. The good news about Jesus is called the ___
4. Jesus called God His ___
6. The Bible is divided into ___
8. God forgives our ___ through Jesus
12. Hearing God's Word is not enough; we must also ___

Word Search

Can you find the words in the list below? And can you link each of these words with their matching pair?

W	G	Z	B	M	L	O	G	O	S	F	C
S	V	A	U	T	H	O	R	I	T	Y	T
N	P	R	O	M	I	S	E	U	J	O	R
C	R	E	A	T	O	R	H	Q	E	B	U
S	A	L	V	A	T	I	O	N	S	E	T
E	C	J	X	B	I	B	L	E	U	Y	H
N	F	R	O	C	K	U	W	I	S	E	X
J	H	O	E	D	L	I	S	T	E	N	W

→ ↓

AUTHORITY
BIBLE
CREATOR
JESUS
LISTEN
SERVE
OBEY
PROMISE
ROCK
SALVATION
TRUTH
WISE

Make a pair

- *attention*
- *being saved*
- *what is real*
- *help*
- *maker*
- *foundation*
- *power*
- *obeys Jesus*
- *God's Word*
- *Saviour*
- *assurance*
- *do*

Finished all the puzzles? If you're 12 or younger, email your answers to contact@dewarabia.com for a chance to win a book!

Word Scramble

Unscramble each clue word. Then use the letters to make the phrase that answers this question:

When Jesus taught, He showed that He had ...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	3	8

Does this mean we should ignore Jesus? _____

Or do whatever we want? _____

In Matthew 7:24, Jesus says if you listen to *His* words but don't do them, you are like a _____

YOEB

			8

COKR

6	5		

DASN

	1		

VEISRR

	7	3			

RSMOT

	3			

OEUSH

4		2		

Questions

1. In the story of the *Wise and Foolish Builders* on the previous page, Jesus says that rain, floods, and strong winds will come. What kind of hard things in life do you think He is talking about?

   _____

2. Jesus says the wise man "**hears**" His words and "**does**" them. Is it harder for you to listen to what Jesus says, or to actually do what He says? Why? (Wanting my own way, my phone, what others will think, laziness, anger, etc.)

   _____

3. Can you think of a time this week when you could have listened better to Jesus?

   _____

Find the Differences

Something's different! Can you find all 21 changes in the two pictures? Circle each one you discover!





Answers at dewarabia.com after the next edition.

Little Pilgrim's Progress

CHAPTER ONE

Little Christian Hears of the Celestial City

There once was a boy named Little Christian. He lived in a city called Destruction. The streets were full of children who loved to laugh and play all day long, especially in the summer when the sun was warm and bright. But on cold, rainy winter days, the children didn't feel as happy. On those days, they preferred to sit quietly and listen to stories.

Sometimes, a serious-looking man or a kind woman would visit the city. These strangers would make friends with the children and tell them stories. They would say:

"Far, far away from here, there is a beautiful country. It is ruled by a good and wise King who loves children very, very much. But the ruler of your city is mean and wicked, and he hates our good King. One day, the King will send His army to fight your ruler. This city will be destroyed, and everyone in it will be killed."

The children were scared. "What will happen to us?" they asked. The strangers would always answer, "You must leave this city now, while you're still young and strong. You need to travel to the King's country. In His Celestial City, you will be safe."

Little Christian heard this story many times and thought about it a lot. Sometimes he asked his friends, "Should we go to the Celestial City?" But they would laugh at him and say: "That's just a silly story! There's no better place than this city."

Little Christian, however, felt in his heart that the strangers were telling the truth. One day, he found an old, dusty book. Inside, he read the exact same things about the good King, the beautiful Celestial City, and the wicked ruler whose city would one day be destroyed.

When he showed the book to his friends, they laughed even harder. "That book is hundreds of years old!" they said. "It is not important anymore. The King's army has never come, and it probably never will. Let us just keep playing!"

But Little Christian did not feel like playing. He felt sad and worried. He sat down and wondered if he could find the way to the Celestial City all by himself. He was only a small boy, and the journey seemed long and scary. He opened his old book again and read about the King's own Son. It said that the Son had once visited the City of Destruction. He had been gentle with the boys and girls in the streets and told them, "Let the little children come to Me."

"If only He were here now," thought Little Christian, "maybe He would take me with Him. I cannot travel that long way alone."

Tears rolled down his cheeks and fell upon his clothes. As he wiped them away, he noticed how dirty and worn his clothes were. He had played in them so much that they were now old and thin. This made him even more sad. "Even if I find the Celestial City," he thought, "my clothes would be completely ruined by the time I arrive. How could the King ever want to welcome a little boy like me, looking like this?"

Feeling hopeless, he picked up his book and went home. His nanny could see he was tired and unhappy and asked what was wrong. He told her he wanted to go to the Celestial City. But she also laughed. "Don't be silly," she said. "There is no such place. If you go wandering off after those strangers, you will get lost."

So Little Christian went to bed, with tears rolling down his cheeks, until he finally fell asleep.

---

by Helen L. Taylor
From Little Christian's Pilgrimage, based on John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. Adapted into Modern English by Dew Arabia

Questions

1. The good and wise King in this story is God. Little Christian believed in the good and wise King, but his friends laughed. Do you believe in God?
2. Little Christian's friends and nanny laughed at him for believing in the good and wise King. Has anyone ever laughed at you for believing in God?
3. The old book Little Christian found is the Bible. His friends said it was old and not important anymore. Do you think the Bible is still important today? Why or why not?
4. Who do you think the King's Son is?

رحلة المسيحي الصغير

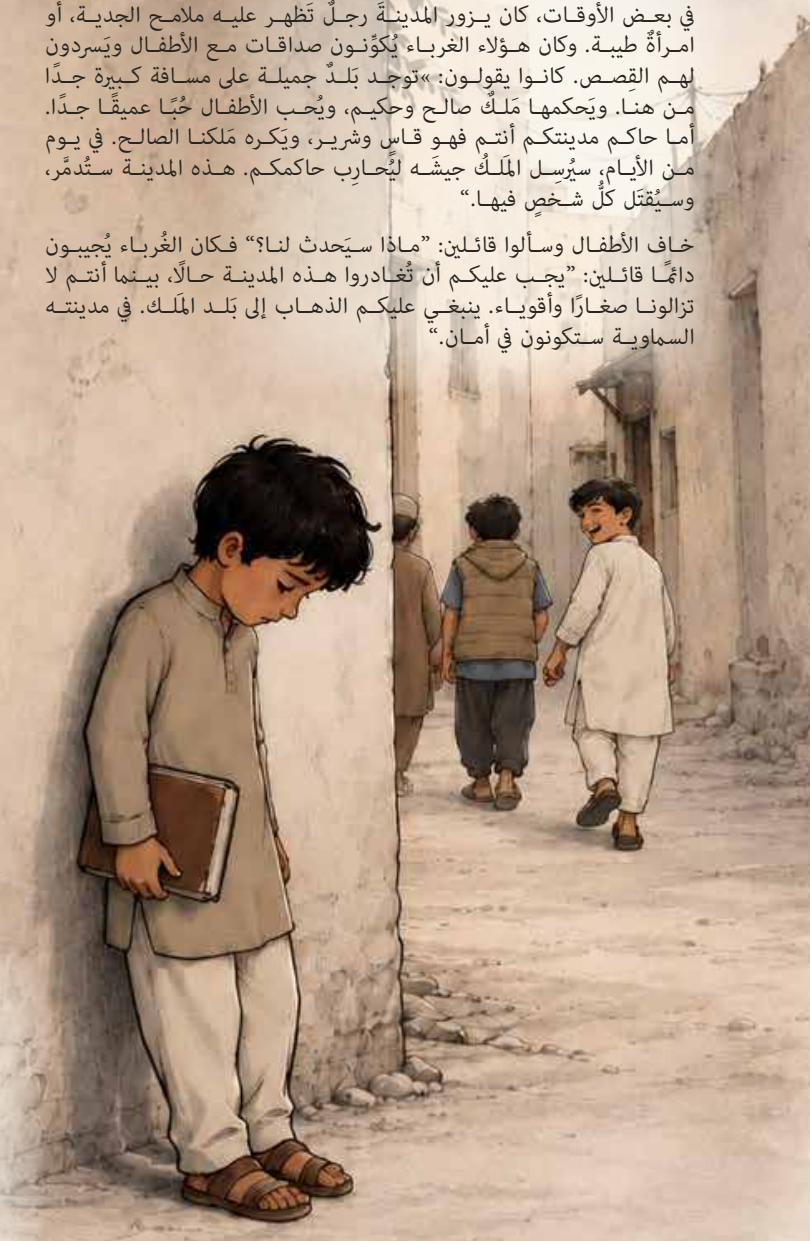
الفصل الأول

المسيحي الصغير يَسمع عن المدينة السماوية

كان هناك صبيٌ صغير يُدعى المسيحي. كان يعيش في مدينة كبيرة تُسمى الهلاك. كانت الشوارع ممتلئة بالأطفال الذين يُحبون الضحك واللعب طوال اليوم، خصوصًا في فصل الصيف عندما يكون الطقس دافئًا ومُشرقًا. أما في أيام الشتاء الباردة والماطرة، لم يكن الأطفال يشعرون بنفس مقدار السعادة. في تلك الأيام كانوا يفضلون الجلوس بهدوء والاستماع إلى القِصص.

في بعض الأوقات، كان يزور المدينةَ رجلٌ تَظهر عليه ملامح الجدية، أو امرأةٌ طيبة. وكان هؤلاء الغرباء يُكوِّنون صداقات مع الأطفال ويَسردون لهم القِصص. كانوا يقولون: «توجد بَلدٌ جميلة على مسافة كبيرة جدًا من هنا. ويَحكمها مَلكٌ صالح وحكيم، ويُحب الأطفال حُبًا عميقًا جدًا. أما حاكم مدينتكم أنتم فهو قاسٍ وشرير، ويَكره مَلكنا الصالح. في يوم من الأيام، سيُرسِل المَلكُ جيشَه ليُحارِب حاكمكم. هذه المدينة ستُدمَّر، وسيُقتَل كلُّ شخصٍ فيها.»

خاف الأطفال وسألوا قائلين: "ماذا سيَحدث لنا؟" فكان الغُرباء يُجيبون دائمًا قائلين: "يجب عليكم أن تُغادروا هذه المدينة حالًا، بينما أنتم لا تزالون صغارًا وأقوياء. ينبغي عليكم الذهاب إلى بَلد المَلك. في مدينته السماوية ستكونون في أمان."



سَمع المسيحي الصغير هذه القصة مرات عديدة، وفَكَّر فيها كثيرًا. وأحيانًا كان يسأل أصدقاءه قائلًا: "هل ينبغي أن نذهب إلى المدينة السماوية؟» لكنهم كانوا يضحكون عليه فحسب، ويقولون: «هذه مجرد قصة سخيفة! لا يوجد مكان أفضل من هذه المدينة."

مع ذلك، كان المسيحي الصغير يشعر في قلبه أن الغرباء كانوا يُخبرونهم بالحقيقة. وفي يوم من الأيام، وَجد كتابًا قديمًا يعلوه التراب. بعدما فَتح الكتابَ، قرأ فيه نفس الأمور عن المَلك الصالح، وعن المدينة السماوية الجميلة، وعن الحاكم الشرير الذي ستُدمَّر مدينته يومًا ما.

عندما أظهر الكتابَ لأصدقائه، ضحكوا كثيرًا وقالوا له: "إن هذا الكتاب عمره مئات السنين! لم يَعد مهمًا حاليًا. إن جيش المَلك لم يأتِ مُطلقًا، وغالبًا لن يأتي أبدًا. دَعنا نواصل اللعب!"

لكن المسيحي الصغير لم يَشعر أن يَرغب في اللعب، بل شعرَ بالحُزن والقلق. جلس وتساءل ما إذا كان يستطيع أن يَعثر على الطريق إلى المدينة السماوية بمفرده. كان لا يزال صبيًا صغيرًا، وكانت الرحلة تبدو طويلة ومُخيفة. ففتح كتابه القديمة مرةً أخرى، وقرأ عن ابن المَلك. كان مكتوبًا أن الابن زار مدينة الهلاك مِن قَبْل. كان لطيفًا مع الأولاد والبنات الذين في الشوارع وقال لهم: "دَعُوا الأَوْلاَدَ يَأْتُونَ إِلَيَّ."

فكَّر المسيحي الصغير قائلًا: "لو كان هنا الآن، ربما كان سيأخذني معه. لا أستطيع أن أقوم بهذه الرحلة الطويلة وحدي." سالت الدموع على خدَّيْه وسقطتْ على ثيابه. وعندما مسح دموعه، لاحَظ كم كانت ثيابه قذرة وبالية. كان يرتديها وهو يلعب كثيرًا لدرجة أنها صارت قديمة ومُهلهلة. تسبَّبَ حتى ذلك في ازدياد حُزنه. فكَّر قائلًا: "حتى لو وَجدتُ المدينة السماوية، فستكون ثيابي قد تَلِفتْ تمامًا عند وصولي. كيف يُمكن أن يُرحب بي المَلك وأنا بهذا المَظهر؟"

وبشعور من اليأس، حملَ كتابه وعاد إلى البيت. كانت مُربِّيته قادرة أن تَرى أنه كان مُتعبًا وحزينًا، فسألته عن السبب. قال لها إنه يريد الذهاب إلى المدينة السماوية. لكنها هي أيضًا ضحكتْ. وقالت له: "توقف عن المُزاح. لا يوجد مكان مثل هذا. إذا ذهبت متجولًا وراء أولئك الغرباء فإنك ستَضيع."

فذهبَ المسيحي الصغير إلى سريره، والدموع تَنهمر على خدَّيْه، حتى غلبه النومُ أخيرًا.

بقلم هيلين ل. تايلور

مقتبس من كتاب "رحلة المسيحي الصغير" لهيلين ل. تايلور، المستوحى من كتاب "سياحة المسيحي" لجون بنيان. أعادت ديو أرابيا صياغة النص بالإنجليزية المعاصرة.

أسئلة

١. إن المَلك الصالح الحكيم في هذه القصة هو الله. آمن المسيحي الصغير بالمَلك الصالح الحكيم، لكن أصدقاءه ضحكوا عليه. هل تؤمن أنت بالله؟

٢. ضحك أصدقاء المسيحي الصغير ومُربِّيته عليه لأنه كان يؤمن بالمَلك الصالح الحكيم. هل سبق أن ضحك عليك أحد لأنك تؤمن بالله؟

٣. إن الكتاب القديم الذي وَجده المسيحي الصغير هو الكتاب المُقدَّس. قال أصدقاؤه إنه كتاب قديم ولم يَعد مهمًا. هل تعتقد أن الكتاب المُقدَّس ما زال مهمًا اليوم؟ لماذا أو لماذا لا؟

٤. مَن تعتقد أن ابن المَلك هو؟

“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 4:7b