

Chapter 1

Words to Grow By

When the Lyon, on which John Eliot was a passenger, sailed into Boston Harbor, the young Englishman leaned over the railing, feasting his eyes on the green shoreline. Watching, Eliot saw something that he never had seen in England. A canoe manned by Algonquin Indians was skimming across the water toward the Lyon. John was fascinated by their bright feathers and clothing made of skins.

When the Lyon docked, Governor Winthrop greeted John warmly, assuring him that a church and congregation were awaiting his services. John served the people faithfully as their pastor, but he could not forget the Algonquins. He invited a young brave, Job Nesutan, to live with him, and from the Indian he learned the difficult Algonquin language. In October 1646, John preached his first sermon to the Indians. From then on, he met with them each week.

Because the Algonquins had no written language, John Eliot spent years developing one and teaching them to read it. About twenty years after first preaching to the Indians, John completed translating the Bible into the Algonquin language. This was the first Bible printed in the Western Hemisphere. It is said that before Eliot died at age eighty-six, he could repeat the entire Bible from memory.

Today, most of the world's people have the Bible, or portions of it, in their own language. But possessing a Bible and actually studying it are two different things. A Gallup poll indicates that 85 percent of Americans have a Bible, but few read it regularly. The conclusion is that the people of the United States are becoming Bible-loving biblical illiterates. The best way to assure that you spend time with the Word of God is to dust off your Bible and study it every day.

“Our daily bread”

What a privilege it is to hold the Word of God in our hands! But even more, what a privilege it is to read it, to study it carefully, and to discover the truths it contains!

We know that we have to continue to eat nourishing food on a daily basis if we are to stay alive and healthy physically. In the same way we cannot expect our Christian experience to be meaningful and growing unless we eat the food of God's Word. But once we learn to

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partake daily of the Bread of Life, we develop a taste for it and find ourselves malnourished without it.

One of the major excuses for neglecting the Bible is that it takes too much time to study it in the way it should be studied. Is this true? Stop and consider how much time it takes to prepare and eat your daily food. In figuring, be sure you count the hours spent in the supermarket. Somehow we seem to be able to find time to satisfy our physical hunger. Perhaps finding time for Bible study depends on how hungry we are for the Word of God. It also is a question of priorities.

It has been said that “life stripped to its essentials is freedom.” Perhaps that is one reason Jesus said, “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). When we set aside a specific amount of time each day for Bible study, we find that we truly are free - free from self and free from many of the problems that we learn to leave with God.

In *The Pilgrim’s Progress* John Bunyan describes the experience of the man with the muck rake. This fellow was so busy removing the dirt around him that he never looked up to see an angel above him holding a crown of gold. The angel was patiently waiting to give the crown to the muckraker, but he was never ready to receive it. Why not? Because he was so preoccupied with what he was doing that he never turned, or lifted up his eyes. We need to take time each day to turn our eyes of thought heavenward.

Where the Bible came from

Because He loves us far more than we realize, the God of the Bible has done all He can to reveal Himself to us. After sin came into this world, God did not leave us alone in our lost state, alienated from Him. Through the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit, He comes to us, showing us His character, revealing His will, and urging us to accept the salvation He has provided in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In giving us the Bible, God did not use human secretaries to take word-for-word dictation. Instead, He inspired the Bible writers with His thoughts. The prophets then wrote these revelations in their own words. Thus, while God used many people to produce the Bible, it has just one Author.

Even those who wrote the Bible understood that they did not originate the messages that they transmitted. The apostle Paul recognized the writings of the prophets before him to be the “holy scriptures” (Romans 1:2) and the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2).

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For that reason, the Bible claims to be inspired. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16, KJV). The New International Version of this verse says, “All Scripture is God-breathed.”

Bible comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which means “book.” Actually the Bible is a collection of sixty-six books - thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament in most Bibles. The Old Testament, originally written for the most part in Hebrew, contains the five books of the law, followed by (in order) the historical books; the “writings,” or poetic books; the major prophets, and the minor prophets. These do not necessarily follow a chronological sequence. The New Testament, written in Greek by Christians of the first century A.D., can be divided into four categories: (1) the history of the church of the first century, including the four Gospels and the book of Acts, (2) Paul’s epistles (letters), (3) the general epistles, the rest of the books through Jude, and (4) the book of Revelation.

Although other books are sometimes included in published Bibles, those mentioned above have been accepted generally as the canon, the collection of the sacred books that are considered as inspired and sacred and as possessing divine authority.

Why Bible study is essential

The chief reason for reading the Bible is to become better acquainted with its Author. The ultimate purpose of Bible study is to lead us into a personal relationship with the God who loves us and to an acceptance of the salvation provided through Christ’s sacrifice. Studying the Bible makes a difference in our lives. If we will let it, the Bible will become the instrument the Holy Spirit can use most effectively to enable us to become all that God makes possible.

God’s Word is valuable to us. Scripture is given for:

1. doctrine.
2. reproof.
3. correction.
4. instruction in righteousness (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

Its ultimate objective is “that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17, RSV).

The main reason people do not enjoy studying the Bible is because they find things there that cut across their desired way of living. But after all, that’s the purpose of the Bible, isn’t it? God’s Word wouldn’t be much good to us if reading it didn’t make us better people. The one

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thing we have to grasp is that better isn't bitter! God wants us to have the very best life possible in a sin-drenched world.

The realization that all God's commandments are promises that will enable us by His grace to get the most out of life should change our attitude toward the Bible. Instead of ignoring God's requirements and hoping that they'll go away or somehow won't apply in our case, we'll long to search them out, take delight in them, and put them into daily practice.

Power in the Word

There is tremendous power in the Word of God - creative power. Psalm 33:9 tells us, "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

Two missionary couples were dining out in a hotel restaurant in Tokyo. One of the men, a fun-loving individual, was intrigued by some of the magic-stunt gadgets for sale in Japan and had just purchased a little receptacle attached to a spool of string that would wind up quickly. This would cause an item placed in the receptacle to apparently disappear. He had this gadget mounted under his coat. While the group waited to be served, the fun-lover called the waitresses to come over and watch. He stuffed his napkin in the little receptacle, then threw his hands into the air to distract their gaze while the napkin disappeared. However, the stunt backfired. Somehow the string caught on one of the buttons of his coat, and the giggling waitresses pointed to the napkin - still in plain sight.

We cannot picture the Creator in that kind of situation. We cannot imagine Him saying, "Now, all right everyone. Gather around and watch this." Then He cries out, "Let there be light!" but nothing happens. If such a scene could take place, we might imagine the Creator getting a little frustrated as someone begins to giggle - "I said, let there be light! Come on, light, what are you waiting for?"

There is absolutely no way that could happen, is there? Yes, it can happen. How? Where? The rebellious human heart alone can stymie the all-powerful Word of God. That Word pronounces that He wants to bring light and life into the darkness of every heart. But the waste and void of sinful human nature is the only thing in all the universe that can resist the all-powerful Creator's command.

However, if we are willing to lay aside our Creator-proof armor, then when He speaks, it will be done. He commands, and the sinful dust of our human nature is surely shaped anew in the image of God.

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Then His Spirit breathes into the old dead bones of our carnal nature, and suddenly, through His all-powerful word, the new creation comes to life.

God speaks through His written Word, and it is done. Just as His word upholds and sustains our physical lives, His written Word upholds and sustains our spiritual lives. The power of the Bible to change human hearts and to sustain spiritual development is one of the great evidences that it is what it claims to be - the Word of God.

Another evidence of its inspiration is that God's Word endures forever (see Isaiah 40:8). It is "settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89), and so will we be if we allow Christ to take over our lives. God's Word heals, and we are whole again. Think of what can happen, both now and in the future, if we let the Holy Spirit fill us with the power of God's Word!

Finding hidden treasure

Under the sponsorship of wealthy Lord Carnarvon, Howard Carter engaged in off-and-on archaeological explorations in the area of ancient Thebes beginning in 1908. The two men had been responsible for several interesting discoveries, but World War I nearly stopped their exploration. From 1919 to 1921 Carter worked over the entire section of the Valley of the Kings between the tombs of Merneptah, Ramses III, and Ramses IV. Still no important discovery was made, and the concession to dig there had only a few more weeks to run.

Carter had just about given up hope of making any major discovery in that area, when on the morning of November 4, 1922, he found a rough-hewn step below the entry to the tomb of Ramses IV. Following this lead, he uncovered the entrance to another royal tomb - one that was to prove more fabulous in the richness of its contents than any other Egyptian royal sepulcher uncovered in modern times. As he came to the last barrier across the passageway, Carter was able to read the hieroglyphic inscription, which indicated that the occupant of the tomb was the long-sought Tutankhamen.

Excitedly, Carter summoned Lord Carnarvon from England. The wealthy patron and his daughter arrived in Alexandria on November 20, and on November 25 the first stone was removed from the tomb wall, allowing Carter, Lord Carnarvon, and Carnarvon's daughter, Lady Evelyn Herbert, to catch the first breathtaking glimpse of the strange golden animals, statues, and furniture that are now world famous. The

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treasure they discovered that memorable day is said to be one of the greatest single discoveries ever of concentrated wealth.

But there is an even more valuable concentration of treasure waiting for our discovery in the Bible treasure chest. In the Palestine of Christ's day, it was not uncommon to find treasure hidden in a field. Because there were no bank vaults in those days, persons with valuables to preserve frequently buried them either in the earthen floors of their houses or somewhere in their fields. If the owners were killed in an invasion or carried away into exile, the place of concealment might soon be forgotten. Later, someone plowing such a field might uncover the buried treasure.

Imagine the joy that would follow such a discovery! Jesus told a story about a man who came across buried treasure in a field he was plowing. But he did not own the field! To buy the field and make the treasure his, he had to sell everything he possessed. But, because the treasure was worth far more than all he had, he did not hesitate to do so.

Jesus did not tell this story to teach us how to take advantage of our neighbors. His point was that when we find the treasure of the kingdom of heaven we should be more than happy to give all that we have, and are, for it. The parable also illustrates the tremendous joy that comes from discovering the hidden treasures of the Word of God. The reward we receive as we study is worth far more than the effort it takes to discover the truths that are placed there for us to find. And the effort itself becomes joyful, just as it was with the man in the parable who gladly sold all that he had in order to obtain the treasure.

Words to grow by

Knowing the Word and will of the Lord is not enough. We must be willing to follow it completely. In this we have the example of Jesus:

The Son of God was surrendered to the Father's will, and dependent upon His power. So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 208).

What it takes to respond this way is a total commitment to God's will and such a love for Him that everything we do, say, or even think may be the simple outworking of His will for us.

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If our spiritual diet is impoverished, if we try to feed our souls on the husks of the commonplace and uninspired, our minds and souls will become dwarfed and cheapened. Peter counsels, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). Jesus informed the devil, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

One of the laws of nutrition is that we are what we eat. This law is true in the spiritual sense too. In order to grow spiritually, we must have daily spiritual nourishment. Through a return to careful, daily Bible study, we can find a heaven in our hearts now and actually partake, even before we go to heaven, of the healing leaves of the tree of life (see Revelation 22:2).