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*Searching the*  
**SCRIPTURES**

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FIND THE NOURISHMENT  
YOUR SOUL NEEDS

**CHARLES R.  
SWINDOLL**

*Chuck Swindoll*

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# INTRODUCTION

## *A Testimony from the Chef*

FOR MORE THAN SIXTY YEARS I have cultivated a love for the Bible and have pursued an understanding of it. My purpose in writing this book is to help you do the same.

First, I'd like to offer an explanation of how this love affair started. As early as my late teens, I was drawn to the truths of God's Word and captivated by its wisdom. My interest in the Bible can be traced in large part to the fact that I was reared by a mother and a father who believed in God and respected the Scriptures. They used the Bible's counsel as a guideline for our home, often quoting from its pages as my older brother, Orville; my older sister, Luci; and I were growing up. It was back then that the Bible first began to make sense to me.

Because scriptural truth served as our domestic foundation, ours was a home where respect for authority was expected and lovingly enforced. At the same time, my parents allowed for open discussion and gave us the freedom to speak our minds. Disagreements in our home didn't fester and lead to unending arguments; rather, they were resolved quickly and correctly, just as the Bible teaches. Ours was not an uptight, frowning family marked by harsh demands or mindless rules and regulations. On the contrary, while my parents

## INTRODUCTION

honored, taught, and respected the Bible, they also encouraged lighthearted fun. In our home, laughter was loud and frequent, and the sounds of music—both vocal and instrumental—were heard every day. In that happy, balanced setting, I never felt abused or exploited by overbearing, obsessive parents who hammered us children with a long list of legalistic requirements underscored by Bible verses yanked out of context. On the contrary, grace flowed often and freely.

Having grown up in that type of environment, I was interested in cultivating a relationship with a woman who had standards similar to mine. I longed to find a life partner who loved the Lord and His Word; who found delight in free-flowing, in-depth conversation; who enjoyed music, lots of good humor, and laughter; and who was committed to deepening her knowledge of scriptural truth. When Cynthia and I met, I quickly realized that she was the one, which led to our being engaged—in one week(!)—and marrying eighteen months later. Throughout our courtship, we found a mutual interest in digging into the Scriptures. We regularly attended Bible studies together in order to establish our home on the rock-solid foundation of the Bible.

Less than two years after we married, my hitch in the Marine Corps resulted in my spending more than sixteen months apart from my wife on the Japanese island of Okinawa. Even there, I intensified my study of the Bible. Thanks to a man named Bob Newkirk, a representative of the Navigators serving on the island, I dug deeper into my understanding of God's Word, which included an extensive Scripture-memory program and a weekly Bible study with others who were serving in various branches of the military. As a result, it became clear to me that I should pursue an even deeper study of Scripture at a seminary, with a view toward entering full-time ministry.

This calling came as an unexpected surprise to me since it

represented a complete change of direction in my career. Cynthia was delighted with the decision. Within weeks after my discharge from the Marine Corps, in the summer of 1959, we were on our way to Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). We towed a small U-Haul trailer full of our belongings, smiling from ear to ear as we anticipated the excitement of learning and growing together. I cannot describe the sheer delight within me, knowing that my love for God would be enlarged and deepened, my mind would be stretched and challenged as never before, and my hunger for a deeper understanding of the Scriptures would begin to be satisfied. The next four years were nothing short of life changing.

It was during that time that I became acquainted with Dr. Howard G. Hendricks, who was the professor for my major and chair of the Department of Christian Education. While I took every subject he taught during those years of study, the one that proved most beneficial was his best-known course, at the time titled Bible Study Methods. Even though I had been a student of the Bible since my late-teen years, I began to realize how incomplete and inadequate my approach to the Scriptures had been. Though I had slowly grown in my knowledge of God's Word over the previous years, I didn't have a consistent method of studying those truths and interpreting them—one that would lead to insightful and accurate applications of the Scriptures. While I had been sincere and committed during those earlier years, my method of searching the Scriptures lacked a systematic, trustworthy approach. Thanks to what I learned in this magnificent course of study from "Prof" Hendricks at Dallas Theological Seminary, I finally discovered how to engage in a meaningful and reliable process of searching the Scriptures.

When my wife witnessed my excitement as I shared those principles with her, she invited Dr. Hendricks to teach them to the spouses of the seminary students as well. She organized a wives'

fellowship that gathered one evening each week, during which he taught them the same techniques he'd been teaching us. A contagious spirit of excitement swept across our campus as husbands and wives were involved in their own study of the Bible, many of them for the first time in their married lives.

The principles Cynthia and I learned in my early years of study at DTS are the same principles I have used since entering the ministry in 1963. Not a week passes without my returning to those tried-and-true guidelines I imbibed decades ago. To this day, I have not delivered a sermon, conducted a teaching session, released a broadcast or podcast, or given even a brief devotional without first putting those principles to use.

For me, opening up God's Word became like a banquet feast. What I learned from Prof Hendricks became nourishment for my soul. Because these principles have served me so well for more than fifty years of ministry, I want to pass them on to others—*including you*—on the pages of this book. As a result of your learning them and putting them into practice, you, too, can know the fulfillment of opening the pages of your Bible without feeling fearful or intimidated. You, too, can share confidently with others what you glean from your study of the Scriptures. If you are a minister of the gospel, an evangelist, a missionary, or one who teaches God's Word in any other capacity, you can be certain that what you are communicating is in keeping with what God has written. You can experience the joy of personal discovery, as well as the great satisfaction of helping others gain an understanding of God's truth.

The process of getting these principles into your head and heart is like passing a baton in a relay. Years ago I was handed these magnificent insights from one who modeled them, and it is now my delight to pass the baton from my hand to yours. This relay has been going on for centuries. The aging missionary Paul wrote these words to Timothy, his younger friend who was shepherding

a church in ancient Ephesus: “Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others” (2 Timothy 2:2). By the time you finish reading these pages, you will be well equipped to search the Scriptures on your own and well prepared to pass on the baton to others with great joy and quiet confidence.

Before we begin, I need to express my profound gratitude to my very capable colleague and keen-eyed editor, Rhome Dyck. He has faithfully worked alongside me from the starting blocks to the finish line. His creative mind and skillful hands have been of inestimable value in assisting me as we have honed ideas, shaped those thoughts into words, carefully planned the interior design, and then pulled everything together to create this book. My gratitude for this gifted man knows no bounds.

*Chuck Swindoll*

FRISCO, TEXAS





STAGE ONE

## Finding the Food







## SURVEYING THE SHELVES

*Understanding the Basic Story of the Bible*

PEOPLE ARE FRUSTRATED. Maybe you are one of them.

Here's the deal. You pick up a Bible, and you've got this big, thick book with thin pages and tiny print. You've been told that it's the all-time bestseller, that thousands—more like millions—of people have had their lives changed or their marriages transformed by what is written there. But as hard as you try, you still can't make heads or tails of any of it! Others may have been helped and comforted, but you're stumped. As a matter of fact, you're completely confused. As much as you want to understand all this, none of it makes sense.

What's wrong? What's missing? Even though you are fairly intelligent and are dedicated to going deeper with God's Word, why can't you get excited about it?

If the Bible were a gourmet meal, you'd certainly find yourself starving to death. Just as you need to know your way around the kitchen if you want to learn to cook, you need to know the basic

structure of the Bible and the main staples of the nourishment it provides. You'll also want to discover some of the unique flavors God's Word offers. That's what we'll try to do in this chapter. We'll first look at how the Bible is put together. Then we'll discover why we should take time to study it and learn what it can teach us. By breaking Scripture down into smaller sections, we'll get a better handle on what God is saying to us. Along the way, we will also begin to see the consistency, importance, and beauty of God's message. So let's get started!

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE**

The first thing we need to know is that the Bible includes a total of sixty-six individual books. Some of these books are personal letters, some are songs, and others are like journals or diaries; and then there are law codes and histories. The words of the Bible were breathed by God and recorded by approximately forty human authors over a period of approximately 1,500 years. As Paul explains to his protégé Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right" (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Bible is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament, which anticipates the coming of Jesus, the Messiah; and the New Testament, which presents Jesus as the Messiah and explains His ministry and purpose.

One surprising aspect of Scripture is that the books don't appear in chronological order. No wonder so many people are frustrated when they try to understand the Bible!

It's helpful to remember this: the Bible is put together much like a newspaper. Think of the way a newspaper is laid out. All the news stories are placed in one section, the sports reports and statistics are put in another section, the business or lifestyle stories are grouped together in yet another section, and the want ads are in another.

Likewise, in the Bible, the Old Testament begins with the books of ancient history—from Genesis to Esther. Following that section, the books of poetry appear together—from Job to Song of Solomon. Finally, in the last part of the Old Testament, we come to the books of prophecy—from Isaiah to Malachi. These three major sections representing three types of literature comprise the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. The New Testament is set up in a similar way. The Gospels include the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and tell the Good News of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Acts is a book of history, and it covers the establishment of the church. Then come all the letters, which are usually divided into the letters of Paul (Romans through Philemon), and the general letters (Hebrews through Jude). Finally there’s Revelation, which is a book of prophecy.

As we begin our brief journey through Scripture, we are able to see that God’s Word wasn’t designed to be just a pretty book sitting on a coffee table. Rather, we might think of the Bible as a delicious meal—in fact, as a feast meant to be enjoyed and savored. Each time we are hungry deep in our souls, we need to return to the Scriptures for our spiritual sustenance. Interestingly, the more we learn and grow from searching the Scriptures on our own, the better equipped we will be to teach others those tasty truths.

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**TYPES OF BOOKS IN THE BIBLE**

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<b>The Old Testament</b>	<b>The New Testament</b>
<p><i>Books of History</i> Genesis–Esther</p>	<p><i>The Gospels</i> Matthew–John</p>
<p><i>Books of Poetry</i> Job–Song of Solomon</p>	<p><i>Book of History</i> Acts</p>
<p><i>Books of Prophecy</i> Isaiah–Malachi</p>	<p><i>The Letters</i> Romans–Jude</p> <p><i>Book of Prophecy</i> Revelation</p>

## THE OLD TESTAMENT

### *The Books of History*

The first course of our literary banquet is served to us in the first section of the Old Testament. Often this historical section of Scripture is called *narrative* because God is communicating His Word as a grand story. However, since the first five books of the Bible contain the Ten Commandments and the laws for Israel to follow, they are most frequently referred to as the Law. The story begins in Genesis 1 with God creating all things. The crown jewel of His creation? You guessed it: Adam and Eve, who bore their Creator's image. Living in perfect communion with God, Adam and Eve were given the opportunity to obey their Creator. But barely into the story, in Genesis 3, they rebelled against and disobeyed God's command. Their sin fractured their relationship with their holy God.

From this point on in Scripture, we witness again and again the horrific results of sin. At the same time, we observe the grace and forgiveness of God, who carefully unfolds His plan to redeem His creation. In Genesis 12, God chooses Abram (who later becomes Abraham) and his wife, Sarai (Sarah), to be the parents of a special nation. Eventually this nation becomes known as Israel. Through Abraham and his offspring, all the families of the earth will be blessed. What an important and wonderful promise!

The rest of Genesis tells the fascinating stories of Abraham and the next three generations. Over time they grew into a large family and wound up in Egypt because of a famine. With a flip of the page, the book of Exodus continues the story four hundred years later, with Abraham's family having been blessed by God and having grown into a nation made up of twelve tribes. Fearing their potential power, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. When the Israelites cried out to God for relief from unfair and excruciating labor, He responded by raising up Moses to deliver His people from Egypt and to bring them to His special Promised Land.

The narrative continues, and on the way to the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites His law to follow and live by. These codes explain how God's people are to enjoy a loving relationship with Him and each other. When the twelve tribes finally arrived at the doorstep of the Promised Land, however, they ultimately didn't trust God to deliver them. The Promised Land was occupied by the formidable Canaanites, whom the Israelites assumed were impossible to conquer. Fear eclipsed faith. Consequently, that unbelieving generation was left to die off as they wandered in the desert for forty long years. Much of that wandering is covered in the last part of Exodus and through the book of Numbers.

The book of Deuteronomy is actually a message to the grown children of the unbelieving generation that died in the desert. God called Moses to repeat and underscore His laws to this new generation. The challenge to know and teach God's Word is clear:

These are the commands, decrees, and regulations that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you. You must obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy, and you and your children and grandchildren must fear the LORD your God as long as you live. If you obey all his decrees and commands, you will enjoy a long life. Listen closely, Israel, and be careful to obey. Then all will go well with you, and you will have many children in the land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when

you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

Notice from those words that Moses was charged with *teaching* the Israelites to obey God's Word. Also note that learning God's Word creates results—in this case, obedience. Furthermore, God told the people that obedience would allow them to *enjoy a long life*. These first few sentences of Deuteronomy 6 are saying, in summary, that obedience to God's Word results in God's blessing.

However, obeying God isn't automatic; it isn't accomplished by simply knowing His instruction. We learn here that wholeheartedly loving our great God includes teaching and explaining His Word to others. So what is the point God is communicating here? That parents have the responsibility to teach and remind their children of God's truths. This ancient command is to be obeyed today, just as when it was first given. Generation after generation is to learn, obey, and teach the truths of the Lord. Timeless passages like this apply to all generations—including our own.

This is a good time to point out that the study of God's Word is for everyone. While there is a specific role for the pastor-teacher, God doesn't limit the explanation of His Word to certain specialists. Rather, God's Word is to be learned, applied, obeyed, and passed on and on and on. Everyday people, including parents who teach their kids, are all part of His plan. Searching the Scriptures isn't restricted to any specialized group—the Scriptures are accessible to anyone and everyone.

By the way, the diligent study of God's Word isn't mentioned only in the book of Deuteronomy. It's a theme you'll find repeated throughout the Bible.

Now let's get back to the biblical story. The grand narrative progresses as God leads the new generation to conquer the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. But sadly, once the twelve tribes settled in the land, they struggled to faithfully obey their God. That led to a period when Israel was ruled by judges whom God raised up. God would deliver His people from their enemies only to have the people repeatedly fall into sin again. It was a wicked, tragic cycle! Eventually, out of rebellion against God, the people asked God for a human king so they could be like the pagan nations around them. He gave them their request, but they lived to regret it.

*The Books of Poetry*

The next part of the Bible's story takes us into the beginning of the kingdom of Israel, first under King Saul, then King David, and finally King Solomon. This collection of books is sometimes called *wisdom literature*, because it was written to impart God's wisdom to those who believe and obey God's Word.

The book of Proverbs is one of the books of poetry in the Old Testament. Written and collected mostly by Solomon, Proverbs explains and extols wise behavior in the eyes of the Lord. Consider the beginning of chapter 2:

My child, listen to what I say,  
and treasure my commands.  
Tune your ears to wisdom,  
and concentrate on understanding.  
Cry out for insight,  
and ask for understanding.  
Search for them as you would for silver;  
seek them like hidden treasures.  
Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord,  
and you will gain knowledge of God.

For the Lord grants wisdom!  
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.  
He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.  
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.  
He guards the paths of the just  
and protects those who are faithful to him.

Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair,  
and you will find the right way to go.

PROVERBS 2:1-9

In this passage, God is reminding us to hear and study and obey His instructions. Notice the diligence involved in the study of God's Word: we are to search for it as one would search for hidden treasure. I can vividly remember the determination and diligence with which I dug into the pages of the Bible when I got serious about my faith while serving in the Marines on the island of Okinawa. What treasures I found as I searched the Scriptures! I dug even deeper when I went to seminary.

Proverbs 2 explains what is gained from the study of Scripture: wisdom to find the right course of action for one's life. The Bible, as God's inerrant Word, gives us the insight we need. This is why people who have learned to study the Scriptures are some of the most joyful, peaceful people on the planet. It takes some effort to learn how to consistently draw truth from the Bible, but it is well worth the effort. As we get into the process involved in searching the Scriptures later in this book, you will discover how beneficial such study can be.

### *The Books of Prophecy*

God's persistent call to study His Word isn't always given as a positive command. Sometimes He confronts His people with the sin of ignoring Him and His commands. This is often seen in the books



of the prophets, which are contained in the third and final section of the Old Testament. Those prophets were a strong-hearted, tough-minded bunch!

**KINGS OF ISRAEL**

**The United Kingdom**

Saul  
David  
Solomon

**The Divided Kingdom**

*Kings of Israel*

Jeroboam I  
Nadab  
Baasha  
Elah  
Zimri  
Omri  
Ahab  
Ahaziah  
Joram/Jehoram  
Jehu  
Jehoahaz  
Joash/Jehoash  
Jeroboam II  
Zechariah  
Shallum  
Menahem  
Pekahiah  
Pekah  
Hoshea

*Kings of Judah*

Rehoboam  
Abijah/Abijam  
Asa  
Jehoshaphat  
Jehoram/Joram  
Ahaziah/Jehoahaz  
Athaliah (queen)  
Joash/Jehoash  
Amaziah  
Uzziah  
Jotham  
Ahaz  
Hezekiah  
Manasseh  
Amon  
Josiah  
Jehoahaz  
Jehoiakim  
Jehoiachin/Jeconiah  
Zedekiah

The books from Isaiah to Daniel make up the five *Major Prophets* in the Old Testament. They are called Major Prophets simply

because their writings are longer. Then there are twelve *Minor Prophets* who wrote shorter books: Hosea through Malachi. A prophet's job was to speak for God. He communicated God's clear, firm, and often confrontational message to direct the reigning king and the people in the ways of the Lord. In one sense, this was the highest office in the land of Israel—even more important than the king. However, the prophets were often ignored, mocked, ridiculed, and even put to death by the kings or the people.

After the first three kings of Israel (Saul, David, and Solomon), the kingdom split over the issue of taxes. The northern ten tribes united and kept the name *Israel*. The southern two tribes joined forces under the name *Judah*. This period of the divided kingdom lasted until the end of the Old Testament. (Note that it's always a good idea to pay close attention when reading in 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles, as sometimes the writer is addressing events in the northern kingdom and other times, the southern kingdom.)

Each kingdom had its own kings. God raised up prophets during this time to speak to the kings and the people. Here are three simple points to remember about the role of a prophet:

- > As a mouthpiece for God, prophets were primarily concerned with restoring the relationship between God and His people.
- > Prophets constantly called for repentance and warned of impending judgment.
- > Prophets offered a message of hope as they foretold of a future when God would restore His people.

Despite the warnings from the prophets, however, no less than twenty successive kings ignored the word of the Lord, and judgment came for the northern ten tribes. In 722 BC, the powerful

nation of Assyria attacked and captured the kingdom of Israel and integrated the nation into its own wicked empire.

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**KEY DATES IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY**

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- 931 BC The kingdom divides after Solomon's death.
- 722 BC Assyria captures and exiles the northern kingdom (Israel).
- 586 BC Babylon destroys Jerusalem and exiles the southern kingdom (Judah) for seventy years.
- 4 BC (?) Jesus is born in Bethlehem.

The southern kingdom didn't fare much better. The nation had an occasional righteous king, but for the most part, it, too, was marked by disobedience. Approximately 150 years after the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, the southern kingdom was attacked by Babylon and taken into exile in 586 BC. Like the Assyrians, the Babylonians were a ruthless, cutthroat people. They destroyed everything in their way, including the capital city of Jerusalem, its walls, and the Temple that Solomon had built for God.

The prophet Jeremiah lived in the tumultuous days leading up to Judah's Babylonian exile. God's message through him is an example of a judgment from the Lord that was typical of the prophets. The Lord's words were sharp, as His people continued to ignore Him:

“My people are foolish  
and do not know me,” says the LORD.  
“They are stupid children  
who have no understanding.  
They are clever enough at doing wrong,  
but they have no idea how to do right!”

JEREMIAH 4:22

How's that for telling it like it is? God's prophets didn't hold back; they declared truth without fear.

This judgment against disobedience serves as an important reminder to all people, including us today. God has made Himself known through His Book, the Bible. We are foolish if we don't make a careful study of His Word. Here's a good motto to remember: no study, no stability. There is no shortcut to maturity. It comes slowly but surely to those who search the Scriptures.

The disobedience of the people of Judah ultimately led to their exile in Babylon. However, God wasn't silent. He continued to raise up various prophets such as Daniel and Ezekiel to call the people to repent of their sins. Those prophets also predicted a coming Messiah, who would ultimately save Israel from their sin.

After seventy grueling, lonely years of captivity, the Persian Empire under King Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire and let the captives return to their homeland. But many captives had become comfortable in Babylon and Persia, so less than half the people returned to the Promised Land. The Old Testament closes with Israel as a mere shadow of its former self. The remnants were struggling to reestablish themselves after rebuilding the protective walls of Jerusalem and a very modest version of Solomon's Temple. They longed for their coming Messiah to restore their land.

The story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem is told in the historical books of the Old Testament, Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as through the prophets. This is why readers of the Bible can get confused when reading about the events that occurred during the time of the divided kingdom. There are two sets of kings, one in the north and one in the south, and there are at least two books where the story is being explained—the historical narrative and the account through the mouth of God's reigning prophet. Small wonder so many people stop reading through their Bibles when they come to the era of the two kingdoms!

Now that the basic plot of the Old Testament has been laid out for you, it's like having a recipe for the main dish you're about to prepare. You can familiarize yourself with the ingredients and the steps needed so you can get the full nourishment and enjoyment from the meal. The study of God's Word is neither optional nor occasional. It is the source of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding for daily living—both in ancient times and today. The longer you search the Scriptures, the more you'll see how relevant the Bible is. It is as timeless as it is true.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

### *The Four Gospels*

Let's press on in our scriptural banquet. Some four hundred years after Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, we come to our second course: the New Testament, which offers the long-awaited hope promised by the prophets of God. The first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are often referred to as the *Gospels*. *Gospel* is a term that simply means “good news.” The good news presented in these four books is that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Each of the four books tells the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each writer shows his particular audience how God has offered salvation to us all through His Son, Jesus.

Jesus' ministry was marked by a unique style of teaching that we need to become familiar with. He frequently taught people using *parables*, or short stories that conveyed a specific point. Consider Jesus' words at His first and most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount:

Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though

the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.

MATTHEW 7:24-27

The imagery in this story is clear. Listening to—and obeying—the words of Christ is equivalent to building a home on a solid, rocklike foundation. But ignoring those teachings is the same as building a house on a shaky, shifting foundation. Regardless of the foundation we've built our lives upon, all of us will face difficulties . . . and those who are not grounded in the truth of Christ's teaching "will collapse with a mighty crash."

Jesus' message is powerful and timeless. Though some words and principles of the Bible may seem intimidating at first, we can't allow that to stop us from digging in. The results of ignorance are absolutely devastating. The four passages we've looked at in this chapter offer a consistent message: studying the Bible is not only possible but doable. This habit is indispensable for life and ministry. There is no substitute! Searching the Scriptures yields a richness in life unlike anything else.

### *One Book of History*

After the first four books in the New Testament (the Gospels), we come to a single book of history called Acts, or the Acts of the Apostles. This exciting narrative picks up the story of Jesus where the Gospels end. It begins with Christ's ascension to heaven, followed by the coming and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Acts then tells the story of the start of the church, as Jesus-followers share the

good news of Jesus' death and resurrection with others, and then begin planting churches all over the known world.

### *The Letters of Paul*

The remainder of the New Testament is made up of letters written by several of Jesus' followers who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to record reliable truths to live by. They explain the meaning of the Savior's life, death, and resurrection. The first set of letters is written by the apostle Paul, starting with Romans all the way to Philemon. Included in this group are two letters that Paul wrote to his younger friend and understudy in ministry, Timothy. The second letter to Timothy, written at the end of Paul's life, includes this charge:

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

Paul's challenge to Timothy was to "work hard," or study, so he would be able to explain the Bible accurately. Sound familiar? Just as God said in Deuteronomy 6, learning and obeying God's Word always leads to the teaching of God's Word. Paul wanted to ensure that Timothy understood this formula as the primary goal of his ministry. That same charge is passed down to us today. Our call is to correctly explain the Scriptures to others . . . but that will require careful and diligent work on our part. The Bible does not yield its truth to lazy minds!

### *The General Letters*

After Paul's letters, the New Testament includes various letters written by other followers of Jesus—the books of Hebrews through

Jude. Similar to Paul's letters, they call followers of Christ to lives of faithfulness, discipline, purity, and service to others. These letters help us understand the purpose and structure of the church and the ministries it is to carry out—regardless of the time or era in which the church exists.

### *One Book of Prophecy*

The final book of the New Testament is Revelation, which offers a prophetic look at the end of human history. It tells of the glorious return of our Savior, the judgment of sin, and how Christ will make all things new.

These four sections of the New Testament—the Gospels, history, letters, and prophecy—complete our multicourse meal through all sixty-six books of the Scriptures. Hopefully you have begun to realize that searching the Scriptures not only is commanded by God but can be done, with some assistance. We can do this together. It will be my joy to help you learn the Scriptures yourself and then learn to explain God's truth to others. Are you salivating for God's Word yet?

Long before books as we know them were invented, the Bible was a collection of scrolls written on rolled-up parchment (see the insert at the back of this book). The shelves represent the categories the books of the Bible can be divided into. This is the way our Bibles are arranged today, except that the individual scrolls are now found in one large book.

As we dig into various passages in the next section, "Your Turn in the Kitchen," I hope you are working up an appetite to devour the spiritual food that we will feast upon. God's Word promises us knowledge, understanding, and wisdom for living. It's going to be a delicious meal, but as Solomon told his son and as Paul told Timothy, it's also going to take some hard work.

I am grateful to mentors such as Bob Newkirk on Okinawa,



Prof Hendricks at Dallas Seminary, Ray Stedman at Peninsula Bible Church, and many others along the way for teaching me diligence in the study of God's Word. The persistence they required of me has shaped my life and ministry for more than sixty years. Now, in turn, I want to pass the baton to you. I urge you to take hold of it.

This book will help you feast and be satisfied at the table of Scripture. In the process, I hope you will also learn to prepare delicious meals for others. This is the meal of a lifetime, and it deserves our best effort. Are you ready to dig in?



## YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

When it comes to cooking, it's not enough to read about it or watch someone else do it; you have to actually get in the kitchen, roll up your sleeves, think about how much you will enjoy fixing your own meal, and then give it your best effort! The same is true when it comes to studying the Bible. So now it's time to roll up your mental sleeves and spend some time in the Scriptures on your own. Here are a few exercises for you to try.

1. Turn to the table of contents in your Bible. Using the labels on the scrolls (see insert), divide the list of books into sections and label each section with the appropriate title (law, history, poetry, etc.). This way every time you look at the table of contents in your Bible, you will be reminded of how the books are arranged thematically.
  
2. In your own Bible, reread the five passages that we discussed in this chapter:

- > Deuteronomy 6:1-9
- > Proverbs 2:1-9
- > Jeremiah 4:22
- > Matthew 7:24-27
- > 2 Timothy 2:15

Create a list of God's commands in the above passages. Use the exact words from your Bible.

3. Create another list of God's commands using two additional passages. The first is Joshua 1:7-9, where God gives the leadership of Israel over to Joshua after Moses' death. The second passage is Ezra 7:10, where Ezra, a scribe, returns to Jerusalem from Babylon to lead the people.

What can you learn about studying the Scriptures from these two passages?

4. There are many Scripture passages that review events from previous times in biblical history. When we read about these events slowly and carefully, we begin to understand and picture the overall story of the Bible. Carefully read Acts 7:1-53, where Stephen reminds his countrymen of their history of unfaithfulness. In a sentence or two, summarize what Stephen says about each of these biblical figures:

## SURVEYING THE SHELVES

- > Abraham
- > Joseph
- > Moses
- > Aaron
- > Joshua
- > David
- > Solomon

5. Learning is truly mastered when we can explain what we've learned to someone else. Find a family member, a colleague, or a close friend who may be interested in what you're learning about the Bible. Tell this person why you have become excited about studying the Scriptures and why the Bible has become so important to you. Select a couple of the sections of Scripture you read earlier and read them to this person. Briefly explain what you've read, and then share some of the insights you noted in the previous questions.