

Compelling Truth Series

***THE WORD
OF HIS GRACE***

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Preface

The “*Compelling Truth*” series is written for the express purpose of encountering believers to boldly face issues that are too often avoided for fear of offense. Each booklet addresses a critical, real-life issue impaction the church and the world around us. *The Word of His Grace* is the third of the series.

The Word of His Grace

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” Acts 20:32.

For purposes of bragging rights, many Christians often toss out the fact that the Bible is the best-selling book of all time. As uplifting as this makes might sound, the wind is taken out of our sails, when we discovered that very few read it regularly, and even fewer have read it in its entirety. Bibles are given as gifts at graduations, weddings, and other special occasions he finds its place on the family bookshelf wedge between *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*. The spine of its black leather binding, says HOLY BIBLE. It is viewed by many as a good luck charm to keep demons away. So why do so few read it? Could it be that we don't know the author and are therefore fearful about taking advice from a stranger?

The study before us is about the Word of God. Paul commends the Scriptures to us so that we might be built up. Believers have an invitation to drink deeply from God's eternal truth and to feast at His banquet to their hearts' content I selected this study's title because grace is our instructor, mentor, and friend—“*Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world*” (Titus 2:12). We don't read the Bible so we can master it; we read it so it will master us. To discover its truth is to discover who I am and why I exist. We will never know all about the Word, but the Word will forever know all about us.

The following thoughts about the Word of God, have been collected two years of study and meditation. The personal, I trust the truce will go beyond the bounds of my own life and benefit others. I believe that these expressions about his divine revelation are from his spirit, who promises to guide us into truth. My intentions for writing this booklet are threefold:

- To encourage believers to fall in love with God's Word.
- To help the believer prepared to hear from his Lord and experience a deeper intimacy with Christ.
- To show the believer how to graft more deeply, what is revealed in Scripture.

Approaching the Mountain

The standard cry from many who know Christ is that the Bible is just too hard to understand. "I don't get anything out of it when I read" is the most common refrain. The assumption is that I will go to church and have someone else explain the Bible to me. Though sympathy may run deep for those who make such statements, I can't help but wonder why Scripture would command us to study what can't be understood. First, let me note that the Bible is profoundly deep book with many baffling statements and difficulties. As we began studying,

we find ourselves at the base of a mountain. This is where Moses was before he was given the law. I believe there's a lesson to be learned here. We, too, must begin the upward climb. The higher we ascend, the greater the vantage point to understand what lies below. The view becomes breathtaking and the ability to climb to greater heights is supported by the strength we have gained through the exercise—precept upon precept. We had challenged intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally with every step. The journey is not easy. All who take this lifelong climb will experience the rugged terrain of "things hard to be understood," the dense forest of "things seen darkly," the cutting edge of a "two-edged sword," and the guiding light of a "lamp unto my feet." Certain skills are necessary to learn and to apply to our lives as we ascend to new elevations. Whether you're a new believer or a seasoned saint, I believe there is much here to feed upon because it is based on God's Word. Different skill sets are needed at each level, as every new elevation broadens the view of what lies below and draws us closer to what lies above. The general purpose of this booklet is to help prepare each hiker with the necessary skills set for the climb.

Preparing for the Climb

From a distance, we look at the Mountain in all its grandeur and assess its character and nature. The base is broad, secure, and nonthreatening and is accessible to the most inexperienced climber. Vegetation at its lowest level is nourished by water descending along gentle slopes. The foliage is green and thick, inviting the eye to study its varied forms. As the prospective climber scans the higher elevations, he notices a progression of thinning trees, small shrubs clinging tenaciously to rocks, and formidable ridgelines that lead to the summit. He is unsure of this challenge. The base of mountain seems safe, but if he does not proceed, the climber will never see beyond forest. The static view will become monotonous and boring. This example of the climber's first step also illustrates believer's approach to the Word. Some may never wish to move beyond the elementary principles of Scripture. They understand basic doctrine, but remain buried in the shadows of the fundamentals and never see light from higher elevations.

How to Approach the Word

When the believer turns to Scripture, he must be aware he is standing on holy ground. A teachable heart will enable the reader to learn and remove the string of boredom:

- Approach the Word with all the reverence of approaching God Himself. "*For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word*" (Isaiah 66:2).
- Approach the Word prayerfully. "*Make me to understand the way of the precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*" (Psalm 119: 27).
- Approach the Word with a pure heart. "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*" (Psalm 66:18).

- Approach the word with the expectation of hearing from God. "*Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*" (Psalms 119:19).
- Approach the word with the full understanding that you will obey what it says. "*Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart*"(Psalm 119:33-34).

This attitude of the heart will prepare the soul to receive the word as a Lord speaks to those desiring truth.

Four Methods of Learning God's Word

As I spend time in Scripture, there seemed to be for a basic learning a purchase, with each come pounding our understanding of God's revelation. The first approach is to **read**. "*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to execution, to doctrine*" (1 Tim 4:13). Reading is like walking through the woods. As we walk, we gain information about her surroundings. We noticed beautiful trees, ferns, moss, and streams meandering through the forest. When we read Scripture, we learn various truths. For example, we read the account of Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt, his attempt to flee from an immoral woman, his subsequent jail sentence and final release. We can rehearse the highlights with others and tell about Joseph's encounter with Pharaoh and learn about Pharaoh's promotion of Joseph to second in command of all of Egypt. This is a good start to understanding Joseph's life, but does it end here?

The second method of learning God's Word, taking us to yet a higher elevation, is **study**. "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (II Timothy 2:15). At this new level, we gain insight that is a step beyond information. Now the hiker begins to identify the trees and ferns. He takes note of the fact that streams have a destination and merge with other streams, giving birth to rivers. Details become important. Joseph's life is not just an account of a young man who rose to power through difficulty. That's information. Through study and careful insight, we discover that his obedience is woven into the providential working of God. "*But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive*" (Genesis 50:20). At this elevation, we have a greater understanding because we begin to have God's perspective. But does it end here?

The third method is to **method** Scripture. "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11). Strengthened by the two former exercises, we are ready to move to an even higher elevation. The hiker now memorizes the identifying marks of an oak or maple tree. Memorization protects us in time of need and gives us direction like guideposts that keep us on the trail. We recall from Joseph's life that he told his brothers, "*Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life*" (Genesis 45:5). As we find ourselves in difficult situations, Scripture provide us a lifeline to heaven. We see ourselves as pilgrims who have learned the lay of the

land through memorization. As we tuck away the Word of God in our hearts, our souls will be comforted. But how much further do we have to go?

We are now above the timberline. The summit is just ahead, but it cannot be reached without his final biblical exercise—meditation. Reading gives information, study gives insight, memorization comforts and guides, but meditation gives life. As we meditate, Joseph's life becomes very real. It is no longer just biblical information sacrificed on the altar of exposition for another message disconnected from real life. Meditation doesn't give life to the Word, it gives life to the one who meditates on the Word. The message of life and fruitful living will never be fully experienced at the base of the mountain. The Scripture promises that those who meditate will *"be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper"* (Psalm 1:3).

As the hiker moves gradually through the forest, he gains information, insight, and guidance from careful observations along the way. However, the best part of any hike is taking the time to reflect on what cannot be experienced when we move too rapidly through the forest. When I was a boy hiking with my dad and brother through the Blue Ridge Mountains, my dad would often have us sit on a log for about 20 minutes and wait for the forest to come alive. Things began to appear—things we would have otherwise missed because of a quickened pace. Creatures began to emerge. Birds and squirrels found their way back into the clearings. A deer crept out from the late afternoon shadows as a chipmunk scurried by.

I remember camping out in a chapter 40 of Genesis several years ago. Joseph was in prison and observed the discourage faces of his two cellmates, the butler and the baker. He lovingly asked them why they were so sad. They told him they had had dreams that no one could interpret. What seemed like simple dialogue brought life to my soul through meditation. Had I remained at the lower levels, I would have missed the message waiting at the summit. What appeared to be an innocent question from Joseph was actually the tuning point of all history. Had Joseph not inquired about his friends' sadness, he would never have interpreted their dreams; had he never interpreted their dreams, Pharaoh would never have sent for Joseph to interpret his dream several years later. When Pharaoh saw the wisdom of Joseph he responded, *"Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou"* (Genesis 41:39-40). Consequently, Joseph's life took on a whole new meaning. Just like the excitement in Joseph's life, we are now at the summit. At first glance, one might ask what could possibly live at this elevation? However, Joseph's life has many hidden treasures that, once discovered, give a 360-degree view of life that would otherwise be missed if we remained at the lower elevations.

Joseph was now in a position to sell grain to his 11 brothers and eventually reveal himself to them. The 12 tribes were birthed out of Joseph's simple inquiry while in prison. The Messiah would come through the line of Judah. Through meditation I learned that what might seem like a small concern for others can in fact be used by God to change the world.

A Personal Account

Several years ago, a young carpenter was doing some work for a couple in our church. While the carpenter was working, he overheard a sermon tape that was playing in the home. Though he was a believer, he wasn't aware of any church in the area that preached the gospel. He inquired of our church and started attending with several other couples who were also seeking a church. One of the couples was separated at the time. By sitting under the Word, their marriage was healed and eventually they became involved in the ministry and were sent out to plant another church.

Two other couples became very involved in the husbands became others to help lead our church body. The carpenter became our youth pastor. Another couple was having great difficulty in their marriage, but eventually their marriage was healed. Their rebellious teenage son came to the Lord and is serving on the mission field in Thailand. The tribe to which he and his wife have been ministering have sent their own to reach neighboring tribes with the gospel.

Probably the most amazing part of the story came when I was having a conversation with a friend and relayed God's marvelous providence concerning the situation. As I finished up the story, I said to my friend, "just think, if it weren't for the faithful soul who copy the tapes in the early days, the carpenter would have never heard of our church. I wonder who it was that did the duplicating back then?" My friend looked across the table at me and said, "I did." Providence heaped upon Providence.

The Nature of His Word

We have seen that the Word has much to offer as we ascend to its heights. It would be unfair, however, to make the climb seem easy. The Word is stubborn in yielding its secrets. *"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter"* (Proverbs 25:2). God wants us to dig, labor, and toil in the areas of reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating. I believe that as we exercise these related disciplines, much fruit will be harvested. We must not be discouraged as we encounter difficult passages. Revelation comes by degree and the process may cause frustration until we understand what the Word says about His Word. A simple definition of Revelation is what God wants man to know that man could otherwise not know. From my own study of the Scriptures, I have come across six degrees of revelation that the reader must keep in mind.

We must understand the mind of God, regarding His Word. When we hear people say, "The Bible has the answer to all questions," we will become disillusioned when we find that there are issues on which the Scriptures are silent. I have labeled these issues with degrees of revelation, so as difficulties arise I can assign the appropriate category of revelation ranging from 1-6, with 1 representing no revelation to 6 representing personal revelation. For example, "why did God create Adam and Eve if he knew from eternity past that they would fail the test?" Answer? The Scriptures, don't tell us. This falls into category number one, which is classified as "secret." *"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are*

revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we made do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Scripture reveals there are some issues the Lord keeps to Himself for His own reasons. We must learn to trust Him.

The second category is defined as "hard to understand." "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (II Peter 3:16). The Bible tells us that some revelation is hard to comprehend. Each person has his own area that may fall under this heading. It is not a secret -- these passages are clearly revealed but difficult to accept. Perhaps, you know that Scripture teaches Christ to be the only way to heaven. This is a very clear teaching, but you might feel it's unfair. After all, there are many who have never heard of Christ. Although the first chapter of Romans may help us better understand God's plan, for many, it does not erase feelings of unfairness. Thus it is "hard to understand."

The third area deals with revelation that is "partial" as we read in I Corinthians 13:12: "*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*" Here we have biblical revelation that leaves out some details. We know that heaven is a perfect place with no more pain or sickness, and my assumption is that human language can't describe it, so we are given partial revelation on this subject.

For a, we have revelation based on "maturity and need." Jesus told his disciples, "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now*" (John 16:12). Revelation is often based on obedience and maturity. As we grow in our knowledge of the Lord, the Holy Spirit as our interpreter and illuminator will expand our capacity to understand the deeper truths of His revelation. "*The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant*" (Psalm 25:14).

Our fifth point can be labeled as "clear." Clear revelation is just that. These five degrees of revelation are based on the fundamental doctrines of the faith that have stood the test of time. I believe the sixth and final degree of revelation is perhaps the most important—personal revelation.

Personal Revelation

There is no doubt that some might resist this description, because they believe that it falls into the mystical ¹arena. Throughout Old and New Testament history, we read about people who heard from God. I believe that with the 66 books comprising the canon of Scripture, we no longer need visions, dreams, or personal appearances by the Lord to give us direction. However, we must be careful not to force Scripture to say what it doesn't say. Those who vehemently

¹ "Mystical" should not be interpreted as some kind of New Age term. It suggests more of a subjective guidance by the Holy Spirit, rather than objective guidance from the Word. Should leading from the two appear to conflict, the Word must always be the final authority.

oppose hearing from God use logic rather than clear Scripture to support their argument. Let me share some guidelines about personal revelation:

- the Lord generally speaks to his people through his written word.
- Any experience outside the word must never contradict the word.
- Hearing from the Lord is not a mystical experience but the living Word relating to the life of a believer.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "*For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even into the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intent of the heart.*" Since the Word is spiritually alive and we as believers are spiritually alive, then two living things of the same kind can communicate. Most people who do not believe the Lord can speak to them today will often give evidence contrary to what they verbalize. Here is an example. Several years ago, one of my favorite Bible teachers was conducting a seminar. In the midst of his teaching, he defended his staunch position that the only revelation we have is the Scripture. Following his lecture, someone asked how the speaker felt called to the ministry. Without hesitation, he told us of a car accident he was involved in during high school. He said, "That was my Jonah experience." He went on to tell us that he had been running from God and the Lord used the accident to call him into the ministry. Though he didn't realize it, this countered everything he had just said regarding the silence of God outside of Scripture. Perhaps he learned firsthand what the psalmist said, "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes*" (Psalm 119:71). Another common example can occur with career choices. Those who deny the Lord can speak in any way other than God's Word will often ask for prayer about a possible job change. "Please ask the Lord to reveal to me if my family and I should move to California and take this job." How will it be made clear if we can only go by Scripture?

Much of what we believe comes out of a defense against the pendulum swing—if we allow for God to speak outside of Scripture, then we open the door for all types of heresy. Should fear of what might happen affect how we interpret Scripture? The Bible itself gives us permission to learn of God outside of His Word. If this sounds heretical, consider the following: "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge*" (Psalm 19:1-2). This verse tells us that we can learn of God through natural revelation². Job tells us to go to the fish of the sea and the beasts of the fields and learn of God (Job 12:7-9). What about answered prayer? Is this not God speaking? Who could ever deny the promptings of God's spirit (Romans 8:16). Proverbs 6:23 tells us that one of our instructors are the reproofs of life. I'm not trying to put all this on the same level of divine revelation because divine revelation is universal, whereas promptings, circumstances, and the reproofs of life are personal. Hebrews 12 is an example of God's dealing with His children in discipline. Most believers have felt this discipline and recognize it as from the hand of God. I simply want to point out that the most ardent defenders against hearing from God outside the words of Scripture will often use terms such as, "the Lord answered my prayer," or "I could feel the Lord pulling of my heart," or "I felt the Holy Spirit

² Natural revelation is God's witness to fallen humanity that He exists and will hold everyone accountable for awareness of His existence. Natural revelation is God making Himself known through the wonders of nature.

convicting me," or "the Lord put you on my heart today." These are all mystical expressions at best, but ones that are very dear to every believer.

A number of years ago, my family and I experienced an example of personal revelation. We were renting a house from a deceitful young man who asked us to leave and refused to return the security deposit. In my devotional time that given day, I came across this passage, "*And unto him that smiteth the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take the coat also. Give to every man that asked of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.*" (Luke 6:29-30). The Scripture penetrated deeply into my soul and it was unmistakably clear that I was not to fight for my security deposit. We were left with no money to move in turn next home. Within a week's time, I had \$3000 in the bank, a second car, a nicer home (which we eventually purchased) and a washer and dryer. I saw the hand of God at work in a way that I had never experienced. If these events had unfolded over a year's time, I would never have made the connection of the Lord speaking to me and his blessings that followed immediately.

Would I ever tell someone else in the same situation to do what I did? No! Would they have every right to use our legal system to stay in the house where they had a two-year lease? Certainly. But sometimes the Lord speaks to us in such a way that is unmistakably clear. Listen to the words of our Lord's disciples on the road to Emmaus: "*And they said to one another, did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?'"* (Luke 24:32). This sense of "burning" may be a parallel expression to Hebrews 4:12, where it tells us that the Word "pierces" into the core of our moral and spiritual life.

I do not encourage believers to seek strange meanings beyond the clear, intended meaning of the Word. However, I also do not want to rule out the voice of God that often speaks a personal level while we read Scripture.

The Authority of the Word

The Word of God is always the final authority. Any personal message from the Holy Spirit through the Word must never contradict the Word. "In my quiet time the Lord told me to leave my wife because He wants me to be happy." Such foolish interpretation counters the clear teaching of his Word and can be dismissed immediately as a false conclusion. There will always be the temptation to fall for some satanic lure that suggests the Word is not the final authority. There are four factors to consider as you read Scripture:

- The Word is more authoritative than a sign. "*But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*" (Matthew 12:39). Here the Lord Jesus rebukes any who would put the sign above the written Word. Jesus then uses Scripture to support his point.
- But Word is more authoritative than a miracle. "*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the*

dead" (Luke 16:31). We have the clear testimony of Christ explaining that even the miracle of the resurrection will not bring about conversion if the observer denies what was written by Moses and the prophets.

- The Word is more authoritative than human reason. *"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual"* (I Corinthians 2:13). The Apostle Paul addressed the issue of human reason resisting divine revelation. This is a major temptation, which is all around us. We must be on guard and compare all human wisdom and reason with Scripture.
- The Word of guide is more authoritative than any experience. *"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and day star arise in your hearts"* (II Peter 1:19). Peter speaks of his experience at the Mount of Transfiguration and then goes on to tell us that Scripture (the most sure word of prophecy) is more reliable than any experience.

Always keep the Word as the final authority.

The Place of Scholarship

Many believers are intimidated by the Word because they are not graduates of seminary or Bible college. They feel inept and secretly asked, "What right have I to interpret God's Word when I lack the tools for such an endeavor?" Certainly this is an honest question and one I asked years ago. Since I have no original language study, can I really draw as deeply from the well?

This is where we must call for balance. There are those who feel scholarship is cold and lacks the work of the Spirit. Scholarship is quick to defend its position by denouncing the loose handling of the Word and the more subjective reliance upon the Spirit to tell the reader what the Scriptures say. Do we need scholarship? Absolutely! Do we need the Spirit for illumination? Absolutely! What is the balance? Perhaps an illustration may help at this point. A few years ago I was sitting in the bleachers watching a high school basketball game. I recognized the man next to me as a referee. At halftime I struck up a conversation and asked him if he was able to enjoy the game as a spectator or was he still wearing his referee's hat while observing. He said, "I couldn't tell you the score. I constantly look for any fouls or infractions. I simply can't just sit back and enjoy the game." As I drove away that evening, I began to think of how many scholars there are who know all the nuances of the Word but don't know the score. They simply can't enjoy the Christian life. Every word has to be analyzed to the point where they can't see the forest for the trees. By the same token, I wonder how many who are opposed to scholarship think they know the score but are loose with their interpretation and rely on feelings or a "movement of the Spirit," rather than careful biblical exposition. Confusion will result with either extreme.

I believe the balance is found in the truth that both scholarship and a reliance upon the Spirit are needed. I never preach on a text of Scripture without first consulting the scholarship of

a commentary. I want to know what the words mean. I don't want to be sloppy with the text. However, I don't allow this to detract from what I draw out of the text for personal application.

For example, in studying the life of Abraham, scholarship helps me understand the various meanings of God's names, such as Adonai, Jehovah, and El Shaddai. Meditation revealed to me that Abraham's life typifies the Christian life. We see the ups and downs. We see hope and doubt. We see victory and failure. In summary, we could conclude the following:

- In Genesis chapter 12, Abraham went down to Egypt. In Genesis 22, he went up a mountain.
- In chapter 12, Abraham went down to sin. In chapter 22, he feared God.
- In chapter 12, Abraham was rebuked by the heathen. In chapter 22, he was rewarded by God.

All the scholarship in the world would not have revealed this to me, but meditation in the Holy Spirit did. All the meditation in the world will not tell what Jehovah means but scholarship does. I trust we can see both are essential. Scholarship keeps me honest with God, while meditation keeps me in touch with Him. Certainly this is not an exhaustive study of either discipline but hopefully will help the reader see the need for cooperation.

Biblical Patterns

When reading through Scripture, look for consistent themes, cause and effect relationships, and common denominators. These are very helpful in understanding the mind of God. One biblical pattern that I noticed a few years ago is what I call the saturation principle. In Genesis 15:16 we read, "...for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." I began to inquire if there were hints in other portions of Scripture that would indicate when the Lord would say, "Enough is enough." In Genesis 6:13 the Lord tells us, "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with earth" (Genesis 6:13). The fullness of man's evil brought a deluge upon the world. We then read of the wickedness of Sodom. The immorality was from "*every quarter*" of the city (Genesis 19:4). There again we see fullness. Destruction was soon to follow. Daniel tells us in Daniel 8:23, "...when the transgressors are come to the full...." Nineveh had reached a level of wickedness when God sent Jonah to warn them of impending doom.

God had a point of saturation for a city Sodom, a nation Israel, and the world. What might this say to us who live in present-day America?

Obedience and Revelation

In Psalm 119:105 we read, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*" When this text was written there were no flashlights or lasers. People use simple lanterns to find way in the dark. The analogy that Scripture uses here is quite significant. If I hold my lantern, it

will cast a certain amount of light to allow me to see my way, but not *all* the way. As I step onto the safe ground revealed by the light, it advances the light and reveals the next step to me. New revelation only comes as I obey previous revelation. Many believers continue to stare at the same piece of property all their lives and never take that next step of faith. God reveals nothing new to some believers because they have failed to obey what had been revealed.

The Lord's teaching on this is brought to light in many Scripture passages. In Acts 10, we have the vision of the sheet descending from heaven. Peter has no idea what this represents (Acts 10:17). In verse 20 he is instructed by the Holy Spirit to carry out a task without doubting. He obeys. The next thing we find out is "...*but God hath shewed me...*" (Acts 10:28). The Lord revealed the meaning of the vision. This is consistent throughout the meaning of the vision. This is consistent throughout the sacred Scriptures. Joseph, Daniel, Paul, and others obeyed, feared the Lord, and were given understanding.

I am not talking here about receiving new revelation. The Scriptures are complete. Understanding them, however, is another matter. Obedience to what we do know yields greater understanding of what we need to know next.

Theological Bias

Most theological systems contain some truth and some error. Many of these systems have been the brainchild of brilliant Bible scholars who have wanted to systematize the ways of God. It is dangerous to subscribe to a framework that defines God. He simply defies all efforts to be systematized or categorized. The Lord has a way of placing speed bumps throughout His Word that thwart all attempts to put Him into a box. The problem arises when we have a pre-existing reference point from which to operate, which forces interpretations of a text in an effort to fit the theological mold, often distorting the truth.

Several years ago, I went to hear the great theologian J.I. Packer. After one of his lectures, someone asked him how God could bless people who were incorrect theologically. I will never forget his wise reply. He looked over the audience and said, "I'm off theologically and God blesses me." The audience was stunned at his reply. How could the great J.I. Packer be off? He went onto say, "I just don't know where. If I knew where, I would correct it. I couldn't be perfect in my interpretation of all doctrinal issues." What a wonderful, humble response.

There is a certain danger inherent within theological systems because they leave no room for mystery. They are rigid and must give answers to all difficulties. There is a subtle arrogance that surfaces, and we become excellent debaters who sling scriptural grenades back and froth as though we were at war with anyone who would dare to question our thinking. I don't wish to be misinterpreted at this point by implying we can never drive a stake in the ground and say, "Thus saith the Lord." I have very strong convictions about doctrine, but I leave room to listen to others whom God might use to sharpen my position or help me see a different perspective. Believe it or not, God blesses people who don't agree with you or me; He doesn't bless us because of our knowledge, but in spite of it. That's what makes God gracious.

Prospecting for Wisdom (Proverbs 25:2)

This section needs a special introduction. Wisdom is such an important quality of life and Scripture puts a great premium on it. It is particularly special to me because I had a difficult time in the academic environment in which I was raised. School did not come easily to me, and I floundered from the day I entered the classroom until the day I graduated. Recently, a young man from our congregation politely asked me if I ever had a complex about being stupid. He phrased it differently than that, but I had no trouble reading between the lines. I told him I don't ever recall having had a complex, but if I did it was quickly resolved when I understood the difference between being intelligent and being wise. Intelligence speaks of the inherent capability to grasp information and process it. Wisdom is a skill for living—it is seeing life from God's perspective. I have known many intelligent fools in God's eyes. The Scripture refers to those who profess themselves to be wise but are fools. These are intelligent people who reject the revelation of God. Not everyone has the mental capability of being intellectual, their I.Q. may be limited. However, all believers have the capacity to become wise because the Holy Spirit illuminates our minds. *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthians 2:14).

The Scriptures exhort us to search for wisdom as we would a hidden treasure. First, this implies that the Lord considers wisdom as greater than gold or silver: *“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold”* (Proverbs 3:13-14). Second, the Word shows that wisdom is not easily found. We must “prospect” for it. Third, it demonstrates that what is valuable does not lie conspicuously on the surface but must be unearthed. Value is usually based on the availability of an item. The less available, the greater the value. This is why wisdom is so valuable and why so few people possess it, for we live in a day when intelligence and human wisdom are highly desired. Parents drive their children to excel in academics, which is not wrong, but may very well be out of balance if wisdom is not sought with equal fervor.

How do we search for wisdom? Diamonds and gold must be mined, and they are usually found in places that are not as accessible as jewels of lesser value. This is where careful study and meditation pay great dividends to uncover the precious nuggets in the Scriptures. Prospecting for wisdom means spending time in the Word.

God's Word About His Word

It has been said, and rightly so, that the greatest commentary on the Word of God is the Word itself. I had a wonderful professor in Bible college who said, “It's amazing how much light the Bible sheds on all those commentaries.” Perhaps the most succinct statement about the Scriptures within the domain of Scriptures is Hebrews 4:12: *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and*

spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This wonderful revelation tells us what the Word is and what it does. It is alive and it does pierce. It is powerful and it does divide. It is sharp and it does discern. This verse must be squeezed in order to extract every bit of its spiritual nourishment. Let’s address what the Word is:

- **It is alive.** Unlike Shakespeare or great poetry, that warms the soul, the Word of God imparts life: *“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which and liveth and abideth forever,”* (1 Peter 1:23). The Word takes us into the spiritual arena by giving us new birth as we understand and accept the gospel. We are made right with God. The Lord can now communicate with His people through the Scriptures by His Spirit, who illuminates our minds.
- **It is powerful.** It gives spiritual energy to the believer who needs to feed daily upon it because our pilgrimage is difficult. We need the exhortation to keep on persevering through the trials of life.
- **It is sharp.** We have the illustration of being able to cut and divide. This is necessary because life is filled with hazy issues that leave perplexed and confused. How often do we hear the question “Where do you draw the line?” Though Scripture may not give us an exact answer to every issue, it serves as a guide to help us navigate the narrow channel of decision making.

Now let’s consider what the Word does:

- **It pierces.** This is the penetrating character of the Word. It penetrates to hidden areas of the mind. It searches out the secret places without a warrant. It plays no games as it brings the soul under conviction.
- **It divides.** Its razor-like quality is like the precise scalpel of the surgeon, whereas human reason is like a machete being wielded by a wild man. The Word can actually tell us what thoughts or actions emanate from the soul (the immaterial part of man that relates to the world) and the spirit (the immaterial part of man that relates to God). *“...Lord, believe [spirit]; help thou mine unbelief [soul]”* (Mark 9:24).
- **It discerns.** Because of its living quality, the Word can discern between the thoughts and intents of the heart. This is why Hebrews 5:14 tells us that a mature believer in the word can discern between good and evil. Many believers today are handicapped in this area of discernment. Once the Word sinks deeply into our spirit, we become sensitive to evil and are able to avoid it.

The Profitability of the Word

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, or reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (II Timothy 3:16). We are told in this verse that Scripture is profitable for:

- **Doctrine** – sound teaching.
- **Reproof** – conviction.

- **Correction** – brought to an upright state.
- **Instruction** – nurture and discipline.

The end result is “*that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (II Timothy 3:17). When I consider the great promises attendant with reading the Word, what is it that keeps us from it? Peter Lord, a well-known pastor in Florida, often inquires of large audiences: “How many of you believe everything you read in the newspaper?” He waits to see if anyone will raise their hand. He then follows up with this question, “How many of you believe everything you read in the Bible?” The response, of course, is usually everyone or nearly everyone raises their hand. He then asks, “How many of you spend more time reading the newspaper than the scriptures?” He knows what the agonizing response will be. His final word of conviction is, “You mean to tell me that you spend more time reading what you don’t believe than reading what you do believe?” Though convicting, it is certainly an excellent question. One of my desires in writing this is to remove the excuses we often give about not spending time in God’s Word.

Because the Word is profitable, it is imperative that we learn to benefit from it:

- **Doctrine.** We often think of doctrine as belonging to theologians, but doctrine simply means teaching. A study of the Trinity is no more doctrinal than a study of love. In I Timothy 1:9-10 we have a list of sins that show deficiency of character, which is referred to as “...*contrary to sound doctrine.*” I Timothy 6:3 speaks of “...*doctrine which is according to godliness.*” Titus reveals the same truth regarding doctrine when he says, “*But speak thou the things that which become sound doctrine: that the aged men become sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children*” (Titus 2:1-4). We, therefore, must not be intimidated by the word “doctrine” and should be encouraged by the fact that anyone can understand and obey sound doctrine.
- **Reproof.** Doctrine brings about conviction (reproof). This is so vital to our spiritual growth; for if we are not convicted, we will not see a need for change. The psalmist speaks to the importance of this issue when he writes, “*Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way*” (Psalm 119:104). I love this verse because it tells me that without the guidance of God’s Word not only will I not hate every false way, I won’t even be able to identify the false way. This is a sobering thought because Proverbs 14:12 warns me of the consequences of going in the wrong way: “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*” This is why so many believers today seem oblivious to the immorality that not only surrounds them but has overtaken their lives. My first booklet, *Moral Discernment*, addresses this issue more definitively.
- **Correction.** This word carries with it the idea of returning to an upright state.
- **Instruction.** This brings us to the point of being nurtured and disciplined. We are now strong and mature to carry out the good works to which God has called us.

Defining What We Learn

Through the years it has become very helpful to me to take a biblical truth and put it into my own words. This forces me to think through an issue in a precise and relevant fashion. The Scriptures reveal to us the purpose of the law. If I take the time to examine several verses regarding the law—“*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith*” (Galatians 3:24) or “*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Romans 3:20) or “*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*” (Romans 3:28), I can put some definition to the overall truth regarding the law. I have distilled the subject of the law to this singular definition: The law states where I should be but condemns my every attempt to get there. This succinct definition will help me explain the purpose of the law to others, particularly to the lost.

Another example of putting truths into my own words is in Paul’s writings on contentment. Paul in several Scriptures addresses the issue of contentment. In Philippians he tells us, “*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*” (Philippians 4:11-12). In I Timothy 6:5-6, he is even more definitive in his exhortation: “*Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain.*” My own definition of contentment is coming to a place in my own life where I desire nothing, as apposed to coming to a place where I have everything. We can do this with most any subject of Scripture. From Deuteronomy 8, I have learned that material possessions are not wrong, but if they cause me to forget God, they become wrong. Therefore, materialism is enjoying the pleasures of this life independent of glorifying God. Having looked at the life of Jesus, I conclude that leadership is that quality of life which by its very example encourages others to follow.

Our definitions need not be profound, but should be basic expressions of major truths that help us see the big picture in a simple way.

Asking the Hard Questions

Scriptures is of little value if we are not personalizing it. Information about the Bible is collected in the brain. Application of biblical truth penetrates the soul. This comes from asking yourself hard questions. Let’s analyze a very simple statement from the Lord Jesus found in the 12th chapter of Luke’s gospel. As Jesus was addressing a large gathering, a man from the crowd came up to Jesus and asked Him if He would be willing to settle a dispute about an inheritance between his this man and his brother. Read carefully Jesus’ reply: “*And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of*

covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:14-15).

How much simpler could a statement be about what life does not consist of? Having meditated on this verse for quite some time, I started asking myself some hard questions. I wrote them in the margin of my Bible. If my life does not consist in the abundance of things, then why do I continue pursuing the abundance of things? How does my life reflect the fact that I don't love the things of this world? If my life does not consist of what I have, then what does it consist of? Asking ourselves these types of questions is a good discipline to cultivate, as it forces us to grapple with the practical nature of the Word. It keeps us honest and plants seeds of truth for a future harvest.

The Summit

The summit obviously refers to the top of the mountain. Clearly no one ever reaches the peak knowing all there is about Scripture. While truth is gained through the climb, the summit offers perspective. We can see what lies below. We can see the world scrambling around trying to figure life out. Scientists study diligently for clues about how life began, but we already know if we have read God's Word. Philosophers ponder the meaning of life, but we already know because we have studied His precepts. Religion seeks to explain how man can reach God, but we already have memorized His statutes. The high tech crowd seeks to make life better, but we already know because we have meditated day and night on principles that have made us wiser than our teachers. This is not a prideful attitude, but one in which the truth has set us free. This is not arrogance, because we will be humbled by the climb. So put on your boots! We have some hiking to do.

The Good News

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. Please consider the following words, which are the most important you will ever read.

You may have been struck by a sense of spiritual emptiness or confusion as you read through this material. Knowing about the Word and knowing the person the Word reveals are two very different things. You may feel disconnected from your creator. This is not unusual. All people experience guilt, which is an inner awareness that something isn't right. There is a way to make it right. Man's greatest need is to be forgiven. The following biblical truth will set you free and deliver you from your sense of bondage:

- **God requires perfection to enter heaven.** Revelation 21:27 states: *“And there shall in now wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”* This often surprises people since we operate on a merit system in this life. Good people are rewarded and bad people are punished. In comparison with God, however, there are no good people (Romans 3:10)
- **Man needs God’s righteousness.** II Corinthians 5:21 says: *“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who know no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”* Since heaven is a perfect place and man falls short of perfection because of his sin, God offers His perfect righteousness through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- **God’s provision is a person.** John 3:16 tells us: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* Jesus Christ is our salvation. He is our eternal life (I John 5:20). Christ died in our place to satisfy the demands of God’s holy law. Sin is a violation of God’s law, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).
- **Man’s response is to believe.** John 6:47 explains: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”* To believe is to acknowledge your sinful state and separation from God. It is total dependence upon Christ as your sin bearer to cleanse you from all sin: past, present, and future. You *cannot* save yourself.
- **God’s guarantee is eternal life.** Romans 6:23 states: *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* When we receive Christ, we receive His life, which is eternal. Call upon Him now to save you (Romans 10:13).

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