

A Guide to Kick-starting Your Spiritual Journey

Living
WITH
HOPE

RAJKUMAR DIXIT
Editor

Living With Hope: A Guide to Kick-starting Your Spiritual Journey

Editor: Rajkumar Dixit, DMin

Cover Design: Liv Jacobson

Layout: Liv Jacobson

Available from:

AdventSource

5120 Prescott Avenue

Lincoln, NE 68506

402.486.8800

AdventSource.org

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN# 978-1-57756-313-6

Introduction

I seem to always be in a quandary every time I want to start a Bible study or lead a small group. It can be difficult to find the right curriculum that has a balanced number of stories, Bible teachings, and doctrine all rolled up into one package. If you are like me, you have probably thought to yourself, “I need to just write my own.”

A couple of years ago, the leadership team of New Hope Adventist Church did just that. We wrote and created an evangelistic series with an accompanying small group curriculum to be used in our church. The process started about one year before we ever even preached the first sermon.

Here’s what happened: Our church was rejuvenated by the series. We had over 40 small groups begin as a result of the series; people were meeting in their homes, before and after church—a spiritual community was being built. Each week, both of our worship services were packed with members and visitors alike. People were drawn into the Word and wanted to learn more about Jesus! I even witnessed long-time members who had grown cynical over the years with “tried and tested” evangelistic approaches become filled with God’s spirit. The Bible is filled with compelling teachings that help each of us live a hope-filled life!

As a result, the Resource Center of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists asked us to share this series, and we gladly gave them our template to be tweaked and improved. Since then, hundreds of churches, small groups, and youth groups have taken the *Living With Hope* material and used it in their own personal context.

This is why we have again revised the material and turned it into a book. My hope is that this book will be used as a Bible study tool, devotional guide, baptismal book, and spiritual discipline resource. My prayer is that God’s Spirit will be breathed into these pages, and you will experience Jesus as your friend and Savior.

Peace,

Rajkumar Dixit, DMin, BCCC, BCPC

Acknowledgments

This book project was quite an endeavor. Somehow I was able to get this done during the late night, after a full day of meetings and evenings visits, after the kids were bathed and put to bed. It was only then I was able to crack open these chapters to work on. Something very special happened as I was reading and editing, perhaps something supernatural: My own faith began to grow. Even though I know this material and was one of the original writers for this series of chapters, somehow, perhaps through the mystery of the divine, I grew and recommitted my life to Jesus.

Special thanks to

**Dave Gemmell, Clifford Goldstein, J. David Newman,
Ann Roda, Prithy David, Lynne Ekelof, Rajinie Dixit, Geoff Crowley**



Dedication

Greg and Paula Taylor

Without you, I would not know grace.



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How to Find the Right Bible Version

Choosing the right Bible translation is a significant decision for anyone seeking to engage with the sacred texts of Christianity. With the wide array of translations available today, each offering its own unique style and approach to conveying the ancient scriptures, finding the one that resonates most deeply with an individual's needs and preferences should be a thoughtful process. Whether you're a seasoned scholar, a devoted believer, or someone simply curious about the teachings of the Bible, selecting a translation which aligns with your understanding, goals, and personal connection to the text is crucial.

When embarking on the journey to find the right Bible translation, it's essential to consider several key factors. First and foremost is understanding the purpose and audience of the translation. Some versions aim for word-for-word accuracy, preserving the original language and structure of the ancient texts, while others prioritize readability and accessibility, conveying the message in modern language and idioms. Additionally, exploring the translation philosophy and approach adopted by different versions can offer insights into how they interpret and present the nuances of scripture. Whether one seeks a literal rendering or a more interpretive adaptation, each translation carries its own theological perspective and cultural context, which can profoundly influence one's understanding and interpretation of the biblical narrative.

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS CHART—J. David Newman, D.Min.¹

Translation	Grade Reading Level	Readability	Reference Support Material	Translation Philosophy & Format	Notes	Passage Comparison Romans 12:2
NIV New International Version	7.80	A highly accurate and smooth-reading version in modern English	High	Balance between word-for-word and thought-for-thought Published in 1978	The best selling modern translation especially among evangelical Christians.	Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.
NirV New International Reader's Version	2.90	Very easy to read and understand. Uses simple short words and sentences	Low, but NIV materials can be used	Balance between word translation and meaning with an emphasis on simplicity Published in 2,000	This version was specifically targeted to young children and new readers	Don't live any longer the way this world lives. Let your way of thinking be completely changed. Then you will be able to test what God wants for you. And you will agree with what he wants is right. His plan is good and pleasing and perfect.
KJV King James Version	12.00	Difficult to read due to 17 th -century English vocabulary and word order	High	Priority to word for word translation rather than meaning Published in 1611	Traditionally loved and accepted by all Christians.	And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God
NKJV New King James Version	9.00	Easier word usage, but somewhat choppy because it maintains 17 th -century sentence structure	Low but some KJV materials can be used	Priority to word translation rather than meaning. Published in 1982	A modern language update of the original KJV. Purpose was to update and modernize the original KJV but preserve the KJV as much as possible.	And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
ESV English Standard Version	10.0	Follows very much the KJV but a very easy read	Low	Revision of the RSV Published 2001	Translation by evangelical scholars updating the half century old RSV and more literal than the RSV	Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

¹ Much of the material on Bible translations was adapted from *Bible Comparison Guide*, published by Zondervan.





Chapter One

Soul Food

*No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says:
He is always convinced that it says what he means.*

—George Bernard Shaw

*When you read God's Word, you must constantly be saying to yourself,
"It is talking to me, and about me."*

—Søren Kierkegaard

*Never place a period where God has placed a comma.
God is still speaking.*

—Unknown

Floods. Tornadoes. Tsunamis. Wildfires. Racism. Supreme Court cases. Injustice. Crypto fluctuation. Every time my phone buzzes with a news notification it seems like one of these headlines appears, alerting me to some new disaster or crisis. Sometimes I think my world is running a constant low-grade fever, producing anxiety which affects the way I feel about the world and myself. I'm sure you often feel the same way. And in the midst of all of this tension, most of us find ourselves looking for something to soothe our anxiety and help us enjoy life despite the chaos around us.

In this chapter, we are going to explore ways we can find peace and hope in a world of uncertainty. To do this, we will be turning to a source of ancient wisdom that has proven itself trustworthy throughout human history. These writings are a source of wisdom that is still relevant today. The source of wisdom I am talking about has changed countless lives, and has the power to change your life, too, as you discover practical ways to live with hope.

The fact is, we live in a world of uncertainty. Dramatic changes are taking place all around us—gas prices are gyrating; the housing market is unpredictable; the price of food is at an all-time high;

unemployment affects millions; investments have been wiped out in a volatile stock market; people all around the world are worried about economic stability; we've lived through the first pandemic in 100 years.; we're experiencing the first war in Europe since World War II, which could have nuclear implications; race relations have arguably taken a step backward instead of a step forward.

Yet even amidst all of this insecurity and millions of deaths from a pandemic, some have found peace by turning to this ancient source. *Countless people over the course of history have found they can live with hope in the midst of difficult times because of these words in this ancient document, and you can too.*

Today, we call this ancient source of wisdom the Bible. Let's first look where the Bible came from, what it says about itself, and how the Bible speaks to our uncertain lives today.

GOING OLD SCHOOL

This study is more than just a book. As you read along you are invited to underline a given passage as you study the scripture. To make it easy you may wish to pick up a set of color pens at a dollar store or an archival ink illustration pen from an arts and crafts store so that each study will have a unique color. You can then write in the margin of your Bible the reference for the next text. A 6-inch ruler might help as well, to keep your underlining straight and neat. When you are finished you will have your own custom chain reference Bible!

Okay, you are going to think I am a hundred years old because I am asking you to get out the old pen and paper. Yes, I am aware of modern forms of note-taking, like apps for your phone or tablet and book reading devices like Kindle and beyond. There are even some great Bible apps I like to use when I'm on the go. However, I have found that taking extra time reading, underlining, and writing (with your own hand), actually helps imprint what you are learning into your brain.

Over the years I have been helping people read the Bible, I have found that the act of marking a passage helps a person focus more closely on the words they're reading. By writing, underlining, or highlighting the texts, you will find that key thoughts stand out on the page. Days, months, or years later, as you read through the Bible, you will come across these marked passages and remember and reinforce the experience we're sharing right now.

The format of this book is pretty simple. I am going to ask a question, and then you can look up a specific passage in the Bible for the answer. In some cases, I'll share some background about that passage to give you a better understanding of what the passage means.

Admittedly, 16 chapters in this book do not give us enough time to fully understand the Bible, so consider this a flyover mission, our journey taking us through the great themes of scripture.

BACKGROUND – 66-BOOK LIBRARY

Let's get started. Find a blank page in the back of your Bible and take your first color pen and write the words, "The Bible." Now write the first text reference—Luke 24:45—or you can abbreviate it as Lk 22:45. Look at Appendix A for Bible Book Abbreviations used in this book. The subject of this chapter is the Bible itself, this ancient source of wisdom that has inspired and comforted countless people.

HOW WAS THE BIBLE TRANSLATED?

You can be pretty sure the translation you're reading is based on a text that is almost identical to the original. All of the books found in the New Testament were written between A.D. 50 and A.D. 100 and comprise the best-attested collection of any kind of ancient manuscripts in the world. The New Testament has more manuscript evidence than any ten pieces of classical literature combined. Next to the New Testament, the Iliad is the best-preserved book, with 643 existing copies; the New Testament has 24,633 manuscripts in existence today, including more than 5,300 partial or complete Greek manuscripts.

Obviously, as the Bible was written before the time of copy machines, scanners, cloud-based documents, or email, every copy had to be hand copied. You would think this would make it prone to mistakes but in actuality the accuracy of the copies is quite remarkable. Scribes, lawyers, and teachers preserved and transmitted the documents with almost digital accuracy. When they finished copying a manuscript, they counted every letter, syllable, and word, and if it didn't add up to the original, they would throw it out and start all over. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, scholars were astounded at nearly identical texts separated by more than one thousand years. In comparison, William Shakespeare's text written only 400 years ago is much less certain, containing at least ten times as many disputed readings as are in the entire Bible.

Question

What was the Bible called in Jesus' day? Turn to Lk 24:45 and underline that passage.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

That word “scriptures” simply means “holy writings.” Now, there are many “holy books” in the world, and sometimes they sound alike. In fact, do you know which books the following quotations are from?

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should...give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keep up prayer” (The Qur’an).

“To those who are constantly devoted and worship me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me (The Bhavagad Gita).

“For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted” (Book of Mormon).

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (The Bible).

HOW THE BIBLE WAS ASSEMBLED

There are many wonderful passages from other religious books that are inspiring, and there are many ancient writings that come from Bible times that are not found in the Bible. A few writings from that time were included in the Bible, but most were not. Later, we will explore why. First, let’s look a little closer at the way the Bible is organized.

Question

To what three parts of scripture did Jesus refer? Write in the margin of your Bible the next reference which is Lk 24:44, then turn to that passage and underline it.

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

The Bible is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament, which has 39 books, and the New Testament, which has 27. In the time of Jesus what we call the Old Testament was arranged into 24 books which were called the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Later, the books were arranged according to the type of literature they contained: historical, poetic, and prophetic.

While Christians refer to the first half of the Bible as the Old Testament, we should be mindful these ancient texts existed for hundreds and thousands of years before Jesus' arrival. Jewish people refer to their sacred text as Hebrew Scripture or Tanakh. After the time of Jesus, the Christian community added their books to the sacred collection, bringing the total to 66.

For a book to be included in the Bible, its authenticity had to be undisputed. For example, some writers slapped on the name of a famous person that may have lived hundreds of years earlier in order to get people to read it. Many of those books are left out of the Bible. Other books were left out because they taught things which contradicted previous books.

That is not to say that other books don't contain some truth; after all, a broken clock tells the time correctly twice a day. But you wouldn't use that clock to get you to appointments on time. A delicious portabella mushroom sliced and sautéed in a bed of poisonous mushrooms doesn't counteract the poison from the other mushrooms. That's why in a process covering more than 3,000 years, God took extraordinary care to direct and preserve the collection of sacred writings we call the Bible.[1]

LIBRARY OF HOPE

As you will read throughout this book, one of the best ways of understanding the Bible is to simply read it. Some parts of the Bible will help bring understanding to other parts. Right now, let's see how the Bible answers this very simple question.

Question

What is the purpose of the Bible? Write in your margin Ro 15:4, then turn to that passage and underline it.

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Hope! Is that something you want? The purpose of the Bible is to teach us and encourage us, so that we might live with hope.

We can be secure in this hope because it is written down. Can you imagine if the stories of the Bible were never written down and were just passed down from person to person orally? Maybe you have played the party game of *Gossip* where one-person whispers into the ear of the first person a message such as, “Give Jerry the blue hat before the amazing yellow ship comes to town.” By the time it gets to the last person, it mutates to “Cherries on a blue hat bring the amazing yellow slip down.” What happens when the message is thirty thousand sentences passed between twenty-five million people over 150 generations? Jerry and the blue hat would be long gone. Binding agreements today are written down because they are trustworthy that way. The same is true for the Bible.

Question

How was the Bible written? Write 2Pe 1:21 in your margin, then turn to that passage and underline it.

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

We will talk more about the Holy Spirit in the next chapter. For now, just note that the Bible was written by a group of individuals who were “carried along by the Holy Spirit,” inspired to write down their unique perspectives of God.

At first glance, the Bible may appear confusing because it is not consistent in its style of writing, or even in the details in some of its stories. Some will tell you that the Bible is not trustworthy because of these inconsistencies. However, these inconsistencies may be one of the greatest proofs of its validity, showing the Bible is not a fraud.

Look at the picture on the next page for ten seconds. Now show the same picture to a friend for the same amount of time. Ask the person what they saw and tell them what you saw, without looking back at it. How many similar things did you both see, and how many things did you miss?

Now look at the picture again. It is the exact same picture, and yet you most likely didn’t share all of the same similarities. Have you ever had



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your child retell a story that occurred a few years ago, but their version of the story is completely different? As my kids have grown into teenagers, I have found their memories to be filled with inaccuracies. Sometimes their account includes two or three details from other events. I often want to interject to correct their account: *No, actually your grandparents did not come on that trip. You are thinking about the time we went to Disney! While the essence of the story is true, sometimes the details have been altered based on their memory.*

In reality, the diversity of the Bible is its greatest proof. Different people, with different personalities, living in different geographic regions at different times, all saw the same God and recorded the story of Him and His interaction with the world from their own perspective.

There is an old poem by John Godfrey Saxe about six blind men and an elephant. When the blind men touch the elephant for the first time, each of them encounter a different experience. As the first blind man walks towards the elephant, he accidentally bumps into the large animal's side and stumbles to the ground. The man exclaims, "That is a wall!" The second man touches the elephant's tusk, which is round, smooth, and sharp. He pronounced that it feels like the object is a spear. Another man feels the long trunk, declaring it must be a wild snake, and so on. Each man's idea about the elephant depends on their personal encounter. None of them were necessarily *wrong*—what they experienced was valid—but none of them were entirely correct, either.

Now look again at the picture. If we were to interview everyone and make a compilation of what we all saw, we would be getting pretty close to what the original picture was. That is what the Bible is—a composite picture of God. We are at a great advantage with the Bible because we can compare the stories of different writers to get a clear picture of God.

GOD'S WORDS

Like the picture we looked at earlier, there is much inconsistency in the Bible. Every book gives a picture of God, albeit from different perspectives. A drive along the Pacific Coast Highway offers many views of the Pacific Ocean, each one unique. But it is still the same ocean. So it is with the Bible, with each author describing the character of God through different eyes. Because of its accuracy, we can trust the scripture, learn from it and let it be our guide to life.

Question

How is the Bible useful and relevant to our life? Write 2Ti 3:16 in your margin and then underline that passage.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

Here is another way of saying that the writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit: “All Scripture is God-breathed.” And what can it be used for? “Teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.”

The Bible is a spiritual book. It is for training in “righteousness,” or how to live rightly. It’s not just an interesting novel you might read to kill some time. It is soul food. It contains practical advice on how to live a good life—a life of peace, a life filled with hope.

I am notorious for getting lost easily. I never would have survived living a few decades ago without the modern technology of GPS and Google Maps. I depend on my Maps app even when I am a few miles away from home! Just like my GPS, the Bible serves as a map to help us move toward our destination.

Now let’s turn to one of those Psalms Jesus referred to earlier to answer the following question.

Question

What is the Bible compared to? Write Ps 119:105 in your margin and underline that passage.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

When I was a teenager, I was on a youth campout playing tag in the dark. It was so fun, because I was able to hide from the other kids. However, one of the teenagers found me, and started chasing me through the woods. I did my best to run faster and dart behind a tree, but this kid had a small flashlight (sadly we had never established the rule of no lights!). Once he found me, he kept the light aimed in my direction and it was impossible for me to shake him off.

Living in difficult times in an uncertain economy and a worldwide pandemic is much like walking through a forest at night without a flashlight: we could be paralyzed by fear. If only we could see what was going on around us! Well, the Bible is that flashlight. It sheds light on what is going on in the world, and it illuminates a better path.

Question

What is one thing that sets the Bible apart from most other books? Write Is 42:9 in your margin and then underline the passage.

See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.

One of the types of writing found in the Bible is prophecy. Although the Bible is not primarily a book of predictions, it sometimes describes events before they happen. Now, this is not the stuff of sci-fi where people struggle with the space/time continuum. But at times it gave some pretty detailed predictions which actually happened, and still offers unfulfilled prophecies I believe are yet to happen. We'll look at a few of these in future upcoming chapters. For now, just understand that these predictive elements set the Bible apart from the other holy books.



Question

What is another thing that sets the Bible apart from other books?

Write He 4:12 in your margin and then underline the passage.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Write Jn 5:39 in your margin and then underline it.

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me ...

Here is a spectacular claim: the Bible is living and active. It is not a dead, dry history. These are not just words on the page; the words of the Bible are living and active because they reveal a God who is living and active in our lives today. These words have the ability to penetrate the soul because God’s Spirit flows through them. These words have a special power to transform lives because God works through these writings to plant into your very soul the seeds of peace, joy, and love. And through the Bible, God can cultivate these seeds into a life filled with hope. Do you want that for your life?

Question

What is one of the greatest proofs of the authenticity of the

Bible? Write 2Ti 3:15 in your margin and then underline the passage.

From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

This is written to a young man named Timothy. The writer points out that Timothy knew the Scriptures from an early age, and that these Scriptures have the power to make him wise.

This passage is one of the greatest arguments in favor of the truth of the Bible and the effect it has had on people’s lives. Have the words of Scripture transformed your life? Have you seen its power working in the lives of others, too?

Question

What was John’s reason for writing his book? Write Jn 20:30, 31 in your margin and underline it.

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John personally witnessed the miracles of Jesus; thus his life was changed. John wrote his book because he wanted others to discover Jesus; he wanted others to know Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; and most of all, he wanted others to believe this so they could have new life in the name of Jesus.

John wrote his book, so *you* could believe; so *you* could have life in Christ's name. John's life was impacted so profoundly by his experience with Jesus he wrote a life-changing account. The story of how God can enhance your life is not limited to stories we read in the Bible, and it's not limited to your friends. It can be your story as well, but to do that, you need to spend some time in the Bible yourself.

Let's explore how one group of people responded to this possibility. In what is modern-day Turkey, there was a group of new Christians living a town called Berea. When the missionary Paul invited them to spend time in Scripture, their response resulted in written words of affirmation.

Question

What did the Bereans do that distinguished them from others in the book of Acts? Write Ac 17:11 in your margin and underline the passage.

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The Bereans did two things: first, they “received the message with great eagerness.” They wanted hope, just like we do, and they were eager to find it. But they took that desire and did something more. They also examined the Scriptures—every day. They saw the possibility for hope laid out to them by Paul, and they eagerly pursued it by digging through the Bible.

What about you? Are you eager to find peace, to find joy, to find hope in a world of fear and uncertainty? Are you willing to examine the words of the Bible? Are you, like the Bereans, willing to search the Scriptures?

GOOD OL' SOUL FOOD

These are not just theoretical concepts; these words can change your reality in very tangible ways. Over the course of this book, if you study the Bible with us and apply what you learn to your own life, I believe you will find that you are able to accomplish more than you have at any other time in your life. You will be more productive at work and at home because you will have a new surge of spiritual energy. And best of all, you will discover that life can be filled with hope instead of uncertainty as you live out the power of Scripture.

There's a hidden gem in Washington, D.C., of which most people are unaware. If you want to experience the best soul food—I mean, real southern cookin' you must try Florida Avenue Grill. The exterior of the restaurant is unassuming, however, once you walk inside you feel like you have been transported to the deep South. A friend of mine introduced me to this dive where your taste buds come alive from the strong flavors found in the ingredients. I was surprised by how many limousines and black Uber XLs stopped by to pick up an order for a congressperson or high-level government official hidden behind the tinted windows. You see, there is cooking and then there is *cookin'*. Soul food will awaken your senses and bring to life a whole new understanding of cuisine.

Question

How does the study of Scripture impact us? Write Ps 19:7 in your margin and underline the passage.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The Bible is soul food, reviving us when we're down. It is full of practical teachings for life, giving ordinary people like you and me heavenly wisdom. Scripture lifts us from the uncertainty around us into a buoyant, joyful hope that comes from out of this world.

Have you ever wondered if you are just going through the motions in life? After working forty hours a week you find yourself at home facing a stack of bills, a complaining spouse, ungrateful children and the same items in the refrigerator every week. Sometimes life can feel meaningless—like you are a hamster on a wheel going nowhere.

There is a story in the Old Testament about a group called the Israelites who were ancestors of the Jews and wandered in the desert

for over 40 years. Early on this journey they ran out of food, and there was nothing to eat in the desert. So God provided a special food they called *manna*. You can read about this story in Exodus 16. Every morning, when they woke up, there were thin flakes which looked like frost on the ground and melted away as the sun grew hot. Each morning, families gathered as much as they needed, and for 40 years they used this *manna* as their primary source of food. God provided physical nourishment for them in a miraculous way.

As the Israelites were ending their journey after 40 years, their leader Moses told them God was trying to teach them something by feeding them *manna* every day for all those years. They may have thought they were alone in the 40 years of wandering, but God was with them and had provided for them the whole time.

We often find ourselves in the same situation—we feel like we’re lost, directionless, or just going through the motions. But the same God the Bible tells us provided *manna* in the wilderness for the Israelites to remind them He was still with them is still with us as well.

Question

What was God trying to teach the Israelites by feeding them *manna*? Write De 8:3 in your margin and underline the passage.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

God fed them manna to teach them that “man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” God gave the Israelites manna to eat—bread from heaven which kept them alive for 40 years. God also offers us bread from heaven, not to feed our physical bodies, but to nourish our spiritual souls. And that bread is in your hands right now: the Bible.

Question

What was Jeremiah’s response to hearing the Word of God? Write Je 15:16 in your margin and underline the passage.

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

Jeremiah took God's words and fed his soul with them. He found out what I also believe to be true: there is something truly supernatural that happens when we spend time studying the Bible. The negativity dragging you down begins to purge from your life, letting your spiritual self become healthy and robust. You begin to see things from a different perspective and your priorities change.

Spending time in the Bible can improve your marriage. It can make you a better parent. It can bring healing to deep wounds in your heart, in your home, in your family. Spending time in the Bible can make you more productive at work, because you begin to prioritize better, and relationships with your coworkers begin to improve. Best of all, whatever the storms in your life or the world around us, the words of the Bible can bring you a supernatural sense of joy. And before you know it, you'll find you're living with hope, finding peace even in a world of uncertainty.

You may be thinking this is just religious babble, but I encourage you to give it a try and find out for yourself. This doesn't mean everything in your life will get instantly better, or that your life will be perfect. But it does mean that by having a relationship with the God who created life you will be better able to thrive in the life He's given you.

If you are a person who has always known there is a God who loves and cares about you, but don't understand who He is or how to interact with Him, then this book is a great place to learn those tools. Take time today and pray that God will open the Word to you. Pray that you will be better able to understand His will in your life.

Perhaps you have never believed in the idea of a creator, or that there is a living God who cares about your life. I encourage you to take this opportunity to test the waters of spiritual things. Open up the Bible and pray that God will simply reveal Himself to you. Then start reading. I believe that like so many other people who have put God to this test, you will find Him eager to introduce Himself to you. He will welcome the opportunity take you on a path of discovery.

Have you tasted the difference between artificial sweetener and pure cane sugar? Some studies have claimed that artificial sweeteners are three times sweeter than sugar! Recently, as I was writing this book at Panera Bread, I observed a woman tear open about eight packets of sweetener and pour them into her mug. I am not kidding! I was

dumbfounded by what I saw. Studies have shown that these artificial sweeteners are not healthy and that they are in fact *changing your taste* for what is natural. That is why sucrose is added to so many of our foods. Our natural taste (or inclination) has slowly changed, creating a craving for something that is *unnatural*. Think about how this relates to your own experience. What areas of your life have been slowly altered due to unnatural alterations?

This book is filled with stories of God's love for you. He longs for you, and He's just waiting for you to take this step. So take Jeremiah's lead and feed your soul with the Word of God this week. When you do, you will be taking your first steps toward living with hope, finding peace in a world of uncertainty.[2]

DOUBLE-DOG DARE

I recently went on a thirty-day raw fruit and vegetable diet. For the first few days I noticed I was craving more and more junk food and consuming huge amounts of candy. Regular food didn't taste as good to me as the packaged food and my body needed to be shocked back into a natural diet. I started with a ten-day "Daniel Diet." A Daniel Diet is colloquially known among Christians as eating only fruits and vegetables (based on Daniel 1 & 10). At first, I didn't believe I was going to survive the day. My mind was playing mental games, convincing me that I was starving. The good news is that I made it through the night. And then the next, and the next. My body and taste buds started to get acclimated to what was natural. Now, let me be honest and admit I sometimes sprinkled some good ol' chili powder over my veggies on numerous occasions!

What do you need to fast from? What is consuming your life? Is it binge watching television shows? Are you a news junkie? Do you crave the dopamine hit from the comments and "likes" people give you on social media? I want to double-dog dare you to take a ten-day fast from something which is altering your natural inclinations and let it change the way you read and understand the Bible. Try it for ten days and see if you feel any difference while you detox.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for giving us Your Word—a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. Thank you for choosing to reveal yourself through the words of this precious book called the Bible. Oh Lord, I pray that

you will speak to me through the words of the Bible, and I pray that through these words, you will fill my soul with peace. Please fill my life with hope, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been driving somewhere you've never been before when suddenly your maps app or GPS stopped working? Tell your story to the group. How is the Bible like a map or GPS that helps us find our way?
2. What are some of your all-time favorite books? How is the Bible like or different from those books?
3. Pass out small pieces of bread and invite people to eat them. How does this bread become part of the human body? How is the reading of the Bible like eating bread?
4. Has anyone experienced special blessings upon reading the Bible? If so, what happened?
5. What would be a measurable personal goal you could set for the study of the Bible?
6. While reading this chapter, what was your 'aha!' moment which gave you clarity about your life or an understanding of God?

[1] This illustration comes from Chris Blake in the book "Searching for a God to Love" (Nashville, TN: Word, 2000). We have used many illustrations and ideas from Chris' book, with his permission.

[2] For further reading, here is the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the holy scriptures:

The holy scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The holy scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character; the test of experience; the authoritative revealer of doctrines; and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)