

**HOW
CAN I UNDERSTAND
THE
BIBLE
?**

BILL BRIGHT



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Bill Bright's personal walk with Jesus Christ made an indelible imprint on my life. For more than three decades I observed the life of a man who believed every word of the Bible and lived a life of faith that often stretched the faith of those who walked with him.

The last weeks of Bill's life were filled with phone calls and bedside meetings, giving directions and challenges to those of us who would attempt to carry out his plans. I will remember always the many times a nurse would call me in to meet with Bill, and upon entering the room, I would find him smiling, holding his Bible, and on some occasions, asleep with his open Bible on his chest.

On Dr. Bright's behalf, I dedicate this book to every person who will read it and catch a glimpse of the passion Bill had for the Word of God. The Bright Media Foundation was established with the purpose of continuing the ministry of Dr. Bright and sharing his passion for Christ. Vonette Bright is living proof of the sustaining power in the Word of God. She shared with Bill the commitment to the truth of God's Word for over fifty years and now moves forward with renewed faith.

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John Nill, CEO
Bright Media Foundation



INTRODUCTION

Discover the Treasure of Your Life

Have you ever dreamed of discovering something that would be worth a fortune? All of us have heard stories about someone who found a treasure in an attic or in a box forgotten in an aunt's basement. One television show, *Antiques Roadshow*, travels around the country stopping at many places and allowing people to bring in their antiques for appraisal by experts. Once in a while, the show unearths a valuable artifact, thrilling the owners.

Some time ago, a true-life story of a magnificent find hit the national news. It started in the mid-1990s when a female trucker named Teri was traveling through the Southwest and stopped to meander through Dot's Thrift Shop near San Bernardino, California. She spotted a colorful painting and thought it would make a great gag gift for a friend who was having difficulties. Teri bought the painting for five dollars.

What a buy it turned out to be. Ten years later, art experts concluded that the painting was created in the 1940s by Jackson Pollock, a leading American artist. His "drip paintings" are so unique that they are almost impossible to imitate or forge. Art restoration expert Peter Paul Biro examined the painting and found a partial fingerprint that he compared to a known fingerprint of Pollock and noted twelve characteristics that are identical between the two prints. Biro also writes that the paint and the style used are just like Pollock's.

Although no one can be sure how the painting got to the thrift store, it most likely was purchased in an estate sale in Victorville, California.

Wrapped in burlap and covered with dust and spider webs, it was a gem shrouded in secrecy, a gem that even the owner of Dot's Thrift Store failed to recognize. Yet one estimate is that the painting may be worth as much as twenty-five million dollars.

Can you imagine what Teri felt when she first had an inkling of the painting's value? I can imagine her calling her friends and exclaiming, "Guess what—that old painting I got at the thrift store turns out to be a treasure!" What had seemed at first to be just a run-of-the-mill purchase was truly a fine work of art.

A Treasure in Disguise

That story reminds me of a discovery I made years ago.¹ As a high school and college student I occasionally tried to read the Bible, but it made no sense to me. I found it boring and concluded that no intelligent person could ever believe what it said. I certainly didn't think that the Bible was trustworthy.

Then I became a Christian. From that moment, my life was transformed, and my attitude concerning the Scriptures changed dramatically. It was as if the Holy Spirit had unwrapped God's words from a covering of dusty burlap, and I discovered what a treasure I had in my hands. I realized that the Bible was truly the holy, inspired, and infallible Word of the greatest author in the universe, our Father God.

Since that great discovery, I have spent nearly sixty years studying the Bible, including five years of theological study at Princeton and Fuller Theological Seminaries. One of the important things I learned in seminary was a greater and more profound respect for the Bible. Even more significant, I have seen in my own life—and in the lives of so many others—what the Bible can do. Today my excitement over the Bible is undiminished. Indeed, it grows with each passing day.

I praise God that He used His Word to change me dramatically. As a young man, I was especially ambitious. I was a humanist and a materialist. The only way I knew of measuring success was through the accumulation of wealth. And that's what I was doing. I started my own fancy foods business and put all my energies into making it a financial success. But with the prompting of the Holy Spirit and

through my study of God's Word, I began to learn about our great God and Savior, why He came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to this planet Earth, and all that He accomplished for me. Over time as I studied and read, the great benefits of receiving Jesus as my Savior and Lord and walking with Him daily began to become more and more real to me. I learned that all the blessings of heaven could be added to me if I would faithfully seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This revolutionized my life. In time, the desire to get rich waned, and the thrill of serving God and seeing eternal results superseded my other ambitions.

Today I cannot imagine returning to my self-centered plans. Over the years I've come to the conclusion that I would be the fool of fools to do anything that would rob me of the incredible privilege of living in the light of God's Word and enjoying the supernatural adventure of walking in fellowship with Him. Each day is an opportunity to be part of His great strategy to share His love with all people everywhere in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Discovering God through the Bible has been the greatest find of my life.

Since 1945, I have known many of the world's rich, famous, and powerful people. Many of them achieved what I dreamed of doing as a young man—and are as unhappy as ever without God. I can assure you from experience and observation, true happiness comes from loving God with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and seeking first His kingdom. I know without a doubt that I made the right choice.

Even today I live every moment with the Bible. It is my constant companion. As a believer for fifty-six years, I have tested God's Word and found it true. In more than five decades I have not encountered one situation in which I have not been able to turn to God's Word for comfort, wisdom, guidance, joy, and blessing.

At eighty-one years of age, I would rather have the Bible on my shelf and in my heart than any other book written in history because it contains the message of God to me and to all other human beings, who are created in His image. Not only have I been transformed and enriched through reading the Bible, but I have also seen it change the lives of multitudes of people.

The Book of Your Life

At this point you may be thinking, *It's easy for you to understand the Bible. You had seminary training and have studied the Scriptures for years. But I don't have those advantages. I want to know what God says to me, but reading the Bible seems so difficult. I have trouble finding a Bible reference when my pastor reads from the Bible, especially if the passage comes from the Old Testament. When I read the Bible myself, I can't understand how the ideas apply to me.*

I understand your situation. I had the same perspective when I first discovered the Bible. And I want you to overcome those difficulties. That's why I wrote this book. I want to share with you easy ways to make the Bible the book of your life. Rather than merely telling you about the content of the Bible, I want this book to give you a start in reading and studying the Bible on your own. With this ability, you will see the Lord transform your life through His Word and His Spirit. God works uniquely in each of our lives, and He will emphasize different parts of His message for you because He knows and sees your unique personality, situations, and needs. If you can learn how to mine God's Word for yourself and find the countless treasures He has for you, you will have a lifetime of adventure in walking with God.

Keep in mind that God's great desire is to reveal Himself to us. One of the most heartwarming and inspiring life stories of the twentieth century is that of the remarkable Helen Keller. If you remember, she was blind and deaf, and everyone assumed she would live out her life in darkness and ignorance. Then her parents hired a teacher, Anne Sullivan, who pierced the shroud that enveloped the child by introducing her to words and thereby to communication. Using a unique form of "finger language," Anne began spelling words into the child's hand, and eventually Helen recognized the link between the words and objects. Once Anne Sullivan had given Helen the names of several physical objects, Miss Sullivan attempted to explain the existence of God. She tapped out the symbols for the name *God*.

Much to Miss Sullivan's surprise, Helen spelled back, "Thank you for telling me God's name, Teacher, for He has touched me many times

before.” Even in her darkness, Helen Keller already knew that God existed. With the help of Anne Sullivan, the young blind girl had the ability to “see” and learn more about who God is and what He does for us.

Each of us has an inborn spiritual need to know God, but we must go beyond our soul’s instinct to find out the specific details of what He is like and what He has done. The primary way we discover God’s nature is through the Bible. It is His special revelation to us, His way of communicating with us.

One thing I have learned over the years is that the Bible is a living book. The apostle John writes these intriguing lines: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2 NIV). This is a mysterious and supernatural concept. The *Word* in this verse refers to Jesus Christ. John is saying that the text of the Bible is not just black ink on white paper, but it is infused with the character and message of Jesus Christ, who is the visible image of God. When we read the Bible, we discover the very essence of God’s nature.

Does this excite you as it does me? No other book can make this claim. The Bible is so interconnected with God that we cannot separate it from His being. When we read the Bible with the right attitude, God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, joins with our spirit to help us understand it and apply it. The book comes alive. The words in the Bible have life-changing power.

What Is the Bible?

Let me start our treasure hunt by giving you some facts that show the Bible’s influence. It is by far the best-selling book of all time. No other book comes close in the number of copies printed, distributed, reprinted, and passed down from one generation to the next. This remarkable book has been translated into more than fourteen hundred languages and dialects. People of extremely diverse backgrounds wrote it over a period of fifteen hundred years, and yet all sixty-six books of the Bible are uniquely in accord with each other. And there are more books written about the Bible than about any other work in the history

of mankind. God's holy and inspired Word towers above every other volume in its positive impact on individuals and nations.

The Bible is the cornerstone of Western civilization. Let me give you one of my favorite examples. George Washington, one of the greatest figures in American history, was a man completely devoted to God and to His Word. Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."² The first American president lived this out. From his youth, George Washington began and ended every day on his knees, reading his Bible and praying for God's guidance and blessing. He taught the American troops that God's Word was the standard to live by. What a tremendous example.

Mining for Treasure

When approaching the Bible, we must recognize that it has a definite form and organization. Understanding this format will help us in our reading and study. To give you an overview of what is in the Bible, I have included four sections in this book.

Part 1—"Why Should I Believe the Bible?"—gives important information about the Bible's author and the Scriptures' reliability, basic message, and promises. Each chapter concludes with a section called Discover the Treasure, which includes material to help you dig into God's Word for yourself. The discovery material in the next chapter will give a map of the major sections of the Bible. The next two chapters will help you establish a habit of reading and memorizing Scripture and of using Scripture to build a more effective prayer life.

Part 2—"How Can I Understand the Bible?"—gives the basic elements of how to study the Bible and apply what you learn. The discovery material includes simple Bible studies for you to try on your own.

Part 3—"What Is the Bible About?"—presents an amazing look at who God is and how we can respond to Him. The discovery material includes simple Bible studies that will illuminate God's roles as Creator, Judge, and Savior.

By the time you reach Part 4—"How Does the Bible Change My Life?"—you will begin to feel more comfortable about using your Bible. You will be ready for these practical chapters on how the Bible builds

faith, power, holiness, and love in our hearts and relationships. The discovery material that accompanies these chapters leads you through several biographical studies.

The discovery material at the end of this introductory chapter will help you select a Bible if you don't already have a favorite version. You will also get a glimpse of the differences between several versions of the Bible. I encourage you to select one main version to use in your study but also have on hand several others so that you can compare passages of Scripture from time to time. Most of the verses quoted in this book are from the New Living Translation of the Bible. All others are marked.

Beginning the Adventure

At this point, you may be thinking, *This sounds so hard. I'm not sure I can do it all.* Take heart. The steps to the Bible studies in this book are simple, clear, and short. They are written with not only the beginner in mind but also the person who has a busy schedule and still wants to make reading and studying Scripture a priority.

This is not a deep theological book that digs out the most difficult concepts in the Bible. What I want above all is to give you the basic tools to help you begin your adventure with the Bible. God is so practical, and He wants us to live a glorious life. There is so much we can learn about who we are in God's eyes and what He wants to do through us. Your life can truly be transformed by God's Word, as mine has been.

Since I became a follower of Jesus, the desire of my heart has been to please Him, to love Him, to trust Him, and to obey Him. Christ, in turn, has graciously caused my faith to grow and my relationship with Him to be enhanced. Now I find that having walked with Jesus for nearly sixty years, I am far more in love with Him, more excited about Him, and more enthusiastic about sharing my faith in Christ with others with every passing day. So you can see why I am so excited about the Scriptures. This is where I learn of His love for me and how I can love and serve Him and others better.

My goal through this book is to encourage a true "revival of the Bible" in your life. Certainly the Bible contains far more than what I have condensed in these pages. Let this book inspire you to learn

all you can about God's supernatural Word so that you can go on to spend a wonderful lifetime of discovering God's treasures. You will be the richer for it.

Before you turn to the next page, stop and ask God to open your heart and mind to understanding the marvelous gift of Scripture. In our sinful condition, we cannot change ourselves. But through opening ourselves to the work of God's Spirit and reliance on God's Word, He will do the changing in us.

The Bible is the greatest treasure you will ever own. It is priceless. What a tragedy it would be if you let its cover accumulate dust on a bookshelf through neglect. I encourage you to treasure the Bible as the greatest source of hope, strength, encouragement, peace, and blessing known to mankind.

DISCOVER THE TREASURE

Spending time with your own Bible is an important way of learning about God through His Word. The Bible is the most important book you will own, and it's important that you have the right one for your needs. If you don't own a Bible that helps you want to read God's Word, consider the options we discuss in the following paragraphs.

Since the Bible was written mostly in Hebrew and Greek, our English versions are translations that biblical scholars have made from the original languages, preferably from the most reliable manuscripts available. The scholars who work on a translation of the Bible must follow certain defined translation rules to ensure the accuracy of the English text.

Translators use one of two methods in translating the Scriptures: *formal equivalence* or *dynamic (functional) equivalence*. Formal equivalence tries to render a word-for-word equivalent of the original language. Dynamic equivalence tries to render a thought-for-thought equivalence of the original language, an attempt to recreate the same dynamic impact on modern readers as the original text had on its readers.³

I recommend reading the Bible in several translations, chosen for the unique characteristics of each Bible. By using different translations, you will gain a fuller understanding of the meaning of the original text. The list below will help you with selecting the right Bibles, and the comparisons of translations will give you a flavor of the differences you will encounter.

When you are doing devotional reading, you may at times want to use a paraphrase, which is sometimes easier to understand. I have enjoyed using the Living Bible as a paraphrase that speaks to my heart.

When choosing a Bible, also consider using a study Bible. Study Bibles come in various translations and include not only the full biblical text but also study notes, maps, time lines, outlines, and other helpful tools.

Technology has had a great impact on the resources available to study the Bible. A typical Bible-study software package offers thousands of commentary notes from dozens of Bible reference works for a fraction of the price of owning all of the separate resources. With many Bible software programs, you can instantly search everyday topics—such as love, friendship, or troubles—to find out what the Bible says about such topics. Plus, with a visually animated Bible, you can explore virtual re-creations of the world of the Bible—the streets of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Tabernacle. Such visual and written resources are invaluable for understanding the context of Bible passages and their meaning. A solid Bible software package is a great start for a home Bible reference library and a powerful tool for understanding God's Word.

The following list describes the main versions of the English Bible used today.⁴ Consider them when you purchase a new Bible. Then make that Bible your own. Underline key passages that speak to you. Make notes in the margins. Record dates of the times you claim a promise found in a certain verse. Read and hear the words in your Bible as a love letter from your heavenly Father.

Strictly literal

English Standard Version (ESV)

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Literal

King James Version (KJV)

New King James Version (NKJV)

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Literal with freedom to be idiomatic

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Thought-for-thought

New International Version (NIV)

New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)

Revised English Bible (REB)

Dynamic (functionally) equivalent (modern speech)

Today's English Version (TEV)

New Living Translation (NLT)

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Paraphrastic

The Living Bible (TLB)

The Message (MSG)

Looking at how various Bibles render the same passage can give you a sense of the distinctives of the various translations. Read how several Bibles (in alphabetical order) render this passage from John 1:1-5:

English Standard Version

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

King James Version

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

The Living Bible

Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. He created everything there is—nothing exists that he didn't make. Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind. His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it.

New International Version

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.

New Living Translation

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He existed in the beginning with God.

God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

New Revised Standard Version

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

PART 1

Why Should I Believe the Bible?

*“Holy Scripture is the preeminent authority
for every Christian, and the rule of faith
and of all human perfection.”*

JOHN WYCLIFFE

Who Wrote the Bible?

How essential is the Bible to you? What would you give up to keep it? Your reputation? Your friends? How about your freedom?

The English Bible did not come to us without a price. John Wycliffe sacrificed all the things above so that the people of England could read the Bible in their own language. His story is inspiring.

Wycliffe lived in the 1300s, when most people in Europe were poor and uneducated. Life was so hard that everyday living consumed all their energy. They had little time left for leisure or schooling. Even if they could get their hands on a Bible, it was written in Latin, which only the elite could read.

John Wycliffe, a leading theologian and philosopher at the University of Oxford in England, was increasingly distressed that people had little access to the Scriptures. After much prayer and thought, he decided he needed to do something about it. Christian historian Donald L. Roberts describes Wycliffe's journey this way: "It was not until the twilight of his career that he came to a fully developed position on the authority of the Scriptures. He declared the right of every Christian to know the Bible."¹

At great risk to his career, Wycliffe began translating the Bible into English. Because of his very vocal beliefs, his reputation was damaged and many of his friends deserted him. He was eventually placed under house arrest, and the pope demanded that he appear in Rome to be tried. Because Wycliffe's health was so poor, he was never forced to make that trip. Instead he used the time he served under house arrest to

diligently work on his English translation of the Bible. He saw it completed before he died. And those who supported his work kept alive his English Bible translation and passed it on to the next generation—even in the face of persecution and death.

Forty years after Wycliffe's death, religious authorities tried to silence his influence by digging up his bones, burning them, and scattering the ashes over the River Swift. But they were too late to stop the impact of the translator's work. Wycliffe's commitment to the Scriptures and his English translation ignited a firestorm over Europe in the next several hundred years. Today he is considered "the Morning Star of the Reformation."

The Very Words of God

What would make a scholar like Wycliffe stake everything—even his life—on the authority of the Bible? Because the Bible claims to be the very words of God, and therefore its importance is linked to the character of our heavenly Father. That makes the Bible the most important book in all of history.

The Bible claims that every one of its pages is inspired by God. The apostle Paul writes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). The picture we get in this verse is of God's Spirit breathing the exact words into the minds of holy people such as the prophets Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel or the apostles Paul, Peter, and John, who then wrote down the words.

God used different methods of imparting His words to the biblical writers, but He always used people who were directed by the Holy Spirit. In some instances biblical writers indicated the supernatural way God directed them. Such was the case for the apostle John, who said this about how he received the instructions to write down the book of Revelation: "It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. It said, 'Write in a book everything you see'" (Revelation 1:10-11). The book of Exodus describes how God passed on the Jewish Law, including the

Ten Commandments, to Moses. You can read that miraculous story in Exodus 19:1–20:21. An interesting verse in a later chapter of Exodus also explains how Moses received the Ten Commandments: “When the LORD finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, written by the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18).

All through the Bible, the text is clear about who its author is. We read phrases like “Word of God,” “Word of Truth,” and “Word of the Lord.” In the Old Testament we see clear evidence that God spoke to the writers. For example, Leviticus 1:1–2, Numbers 1:1, and Deuteronomy 31:24–26 indicate that God spoke to Moses, who wrote down the Books of the Law.

One astounding aspect of God’s authorship is that He used humans, writing in their own style. Yet the whole of Scripture—written over thousands of years—is unified and complete. That has to be a miracle of God.

The Words of the Bible

Knowing how God inspired people to write the Bible is essential to recognizing the reliability of the Bible. If God wrote the words, then we must believe them.

Theologians use the term *verbal plenary* inspiration to describe the fact that God “moved along” the writers to produce Scripture. Verbal plenary inspiration insists that God moved people to record not only His *thoughts* but also the actual *words* of Scripture, all the while allowing the writers to express their unique personalities and writing techniques.

Anglican Bible scholar J.C. Ryle writes, “I do maintain that all parts of the Bible are equally ‘given by inspiration of God,’ and that they are to be regarded as God’s Word...The least verse in the Bible is just as truly ‘given by inspiration’ as the greatest.”²

Verbal plenary inspiration means that the Bible is fully inspired, not just in part but in *all* its parts. This makes it impossible for anyone to say that the Bible is not fully the Word of God. We may also be

sure that the Word of God is found *only* in the Bible and in no other book. The Bible accurately reveals both God's thoughts and words to us. From beginning to end and in all its parts, the Bible is the written Word of God.

This means that the Bible in all its parts is a *spirit-imbuéd* book. Scripture is not only a *form* of writing produced by the Spirit but also a *forum* where we encounter the Spirit. This reality is seen in the connection between *word* and *spirit* throughout the Bible. For example, Jesus said, "The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). Note that Jesus's words, as recorded in Scripture, are not just *produced by* the Spirit but *are* "spirit."

Our Confidence in the Author

We can be confident of the reliability of Scripture because we can be confident of its author.

1. *God's nature is eternal.* The author determines the tone of the book. An autobiography written by a Hollywood celebrity will reflect that person's values and beliefs about a variety of issues. The viewpoints expressed in that book will probably differ significantly from the perspectives expressed in an autobiography of a missionary or that of a Marxist dictator. The Bible—God's autobiography—expresses His viewpoint, one that is so far above our human limitations that we can't even imagine all that He knows. When Job questioned God's wisdom, God answered him out of a storm:

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell me, if you know so much.

Who determined its dimensions

and stretched out the surveying line?

What supports its foundations,

and who laid its cornerstone

as the morning stars sang together

and all the angels shouted for joy?"

(Job 38:4-7)

The answer to these rhetorical questions is: Only God has existed forever. He is eternal, all-powerful, and all-knowing. And He has put His wisdom and knowledge into His autobiography. His words are perfectly true and righteous because God's nature is truth and righteousness.

2. *God backs up what He says.* Years ago when my father was raising his family in Coweta, Oklahoma, he considered his word his bond. When he made a promise or proposed an oral contract and shook on the deal, he wouldn't break his word. Most of the people who lived in that area during his day also followed this practice.

When God makes a contract, He *always* keeps it. Sometimes circumstances arise that cause us to break our word. A businessperson agrees to financial terms but then has an unforeseen business failure. A homeowner signs a house loan but then later suffers a debilitating illness that sends him into bankruptcy. But God, who has all power and all knowledge, is able to fulfill all His contracts.

This is what Jesus said about the finality of God's words: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved" (Matthew 5:18). A verse from the Old Testament emphasizes the same truth: "I am the LORD! If I say it, it will happen" (Ezekiel 12:25).

Therefore, we go to God's Word to find out what God says about the past, present, and future. This helps us understand history, our present lives, and our future. God's Word assures us of what God has done, is doing, and will do for us as we obey Him.

3. *God and His Word are perfect.* What kind of a standard did God set for His Word? Perfection. Every detail, every thought, and every moment of historical reference in its pages are completely right. In fact, their surety goes beyond this universe.

Your eternal word, O LORD,
stands firm in heaven.

(Psalm 119:89)

The reason God's Word can last forever is because it is perfect. It is like a building that is erected on a good foundation. Any contractor

will tell you that if the foundation of a multistory building is laid even a fraction of an inch off on any side, the error will multiply itself as the building rises. But if the foundation is laid perfectly true, the rest of the building is solid. Because God's Word is a perfect foundation for life, anything we build on it will be solid and secure. Psalm 19:7-8 says,

The instructions of the LORD are perfect,
reviving the soul.

The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

The commandments of the LORD are right,
bringing joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are clear,
giving insight for living.

God and His Word are perfect for every aspect of life.

What Does the Bible Teach Us?

The Bible is God's way of communicating with us. Through the dialogue God gives us in His Word, we learn two things—what God is like and what we are like.

We Gain a View of God

Historian David McCullough's book *John Adams* was a *New York Times* best-seller. For most people, John Adams, the second American president, is little more than a name on a list. His life was overshadowed by that of George Washington. But McCullough shows what an astounding influence John Adams had on the early days of our nation. Adams was a "devout Christian and an independent thinker." Although he came from an undistinguished background, he "emerged as one of the most 'sensible and forcible' figures in the whole patriot cause."³ After reading the book, you will gain a deeper understanding of the godly character and the trustworthy nature of this man who so influenced our nation. But until you do, you will never understand the contribution he made to our way of life.

In some ways we could call the Bible the autobiography of God. Of course, no one can truly describe God's infinite character in a book—or even in human language. But God has chosen to use words that help us glimpse His majesty and love. We can see His glory in every situation in the Bible. Therefore, if we want to know what God is like, we will read His autobiography. Reading the Bible will give us more insight into His nature than anything else we can do.

We Gain a More Accurate View of Ourselves

The *Peanuts* character Pig Pen makes us chuckle. He walks along in a cloud of dust, happy just the way he is. Doesn't this remind you of many little boys? They play outside in the dirt and come in with half the yard on their bodies. But if their mothers ask them if they need to take a bath, they respond, "I'm not that dirty. All I need to do is wash my hands."

We laugh at children's oblivion to their own state of uncleanness, but we are similar to them in one way. We are spiritually dirty, full of wrongdoing and sin, yet we don't even recognize how desperately we need cleansing. The Bible shows us who we are: "For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Not only does the Bible expose our sin, but it also explains who we are in Christ. Consider these perspectives and promises:

The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith (Galatians 3:24).

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes (Ephesians 1:4).

We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago (Ephesians 2:10).

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13).

And the Bible shows us our future. The apostle Peter writes, "All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Discovering Our God

Getting to know God through His Word is one of the most satisfying and marvelous opportunities of my lifetime. As I get to know God better, I also understand my own weaknesses more fully and how I can, through God's power, become more like God's Son, Jesus Christ. The more Christlike I become, the more I please my heavenly Father.

To help you begin the journey to knowing God better, I have included in the Discover the Treasure section a study on the names of God. Knowing what God calls Himself gives us great insight into His personality. As you look up these names, you will also become more acquainted with the layout of the books of the Bible. Use the contents page in the front of your Bible to help you locate books that may be hard for you to find.

The next chapter will continue our discussion on why the Bible is so important by addressing its reliability. We will discover that God has given us many proofs of the trustworthiness of His Word.

DISCOVER THE TREASURE

In Bible times, a person's name often gave insight into his or her role in life. For example, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "father of many," because he would be the physical ancestor of the Jewish nation and the spiritual ancestor of all who truly believe in God (see Genesis 17:1-8). In the New Testament, Saul changed his name to Paul after his conversion and his decision to serve as an evangelist. He had been transformed from a murderer to a life-changer.

We can be sure that the names God calls Himself reflect what He wants us to know about Him. One of the names that is most common throughout the Bible is Father. What a wonderful picture that gives us of His loving care for us, His people.

As you go through each of these verses, look them up and write down what the name means to you. Then take a moment to praise God for this magnificent quality. The first one is done for you as an example. You may want to use a few of the following exercises as part of your quiet time with God for the next few days.

Father—God our heavenly Father (Deuteronomy 32:6; Matthew 6:9)

What this means to me:

I can entrust my life to His care.

Adonai—"Lord" or "Master" (Psalm 39:7; Luke 6:46)

What this means to me:

El-Elyon—"Exalted One," "the Most High" (Numbers 24:16)

What this means to me:

El-Roi—“the God who sees” (Psalm 139:1-2,7)

What this means to me:

El-Olam—“Eternal God” (Habakkuk 3:6)

What this means to me:

Immanuel—“God with us” (Matthew 1:23)

What this means to me:

Jehovah—“I AM” (Exodus 3:14-15)

What this means to me:

Jehovah-Rohi—“the Lord our Shepherd” (Isaiah 40:11; John 10:11)

What this means to me:

Jehovah-Rapha—“God our Healer” (Exodus 15:26; Luke 4:18)

What this means to me:

Jehovah-Shalom—“God our Peace” (Isaiah 9:6; John 16:33)

What this means to me: