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# Acknowledgments

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# 1 | The Holy Scriptures



I don't know what was different about that night; for some reason my brothers and I did not want to go to sleep. My brother Ben, my stepbrother T. J., and I had all been marched through the bathroom and then downstairs to our bedroom and told it was time to go to bed. I decided to mount a resistance.

We owned a collection of toys known as Sky Commanders—plastic spaceships and battle stations that fired plastic missiles. They had zip lines attached to the ceiling so you could send the ships whizzing across the room at your target while they fired the plastic missiles. I determined these toys would be the answer to our parents' power trip—I mean, who were they to tell us when to go to bed? How much power did they really have?

So I gave a rousing speech to my siblings. “We can defeat our parents if you will follow me and my plan! We will use our Sky Commanders to mount a resistance—it will be a devastating attack! Our parents will be weeping and apologizing for sending us to bed.” My brothers believed me and took my speech as absolute truth. Together we set up our attack.

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When everything was in place, we made a lot of noise so as to rouse our parents from their slumber. Soon we could hear the *thump, thump, thump* of footsteps coming down the stairs. Dad was coming, and he would be angry.

“Battle stations!” I hissed in a loud whisper. Everyone ran to a different corner of the room, readying their equipment.

“Lights!” I hissed again, and the room was in utter darkness. “Wait for it—”

When my dad opened the door expecting to have to give yet another lecture to us wayward children, he was greeted by a surprise. Total darkness. He fumbled around until he found the switch and the lights came on. He was taken aback by what he saw.

Zip lines were strung all over the rafters, with spaceships ready to fly; a whole army of futuristic plastic canons was arranged all over the floor. And manning all the toy weaponry were three very stupid children semifrozen with fear. My dad took a step back.

“What the—”

“FIRE!” I shouted, hoping that one of my siblings would have the guts to do something, since I was paralyzed at that moment by the absurdity of what we were doing. See, my dad is a black belt in martial arts, and it dawned on me that three kids and their toys probably weren’t going to be the most effective negotiation tool to use. Thankfully, Ben came unfrozen enough to fire one red missile, which bounced off my dad’s shoulder.

Bad idea. Really bad.

My dad was so angry at what we were doing that he single-handedly tore down all the spaceships and kicked over all our battlements in a few seconds, throwing them all into the toy box.

“Our toys!” we cried as we saw them crash into each other as they flew into the toy box. “Our beautiful toys!” Once my dad had finished dismantling our assault, he told us to get back to bed and mumbled something about “dumber than a box of rocks” as he returned to his bedroom.

I had to bear the icy glares of my siblings for a few days and lost a great deal of power as they realized that, even though I was the oldest, my advice and ideas were not always good and they should be taken with caution.

## What We Believe

You'll find a lot of bad advice in this world—and even more bad ideas. And when followed, they can result in shame and pain. They may cause whatever situation we are trying to get out of to become even worse.

Recently I read a story of a pastor who claimed he could walk on water. Now we can admire this man's faith, but common sense tells us that while his faith may be admirable, his intelligence is not. In August of 2006, this thirty-five-year-old pastor insisted that anyone could literally walk on water, if only one had enough faith. Big and bold was his speech. He extolled the heavenly power possessed by a faithful man with such force that he may well have convinced himself. The pastor set out to walk across a major estuary. But he could not swim. Long story short, he sank like a rock straight to the bottom, only to emerge just in time for his funeral.

Bad thinking and advice are just everywhere. That same year in Wesley Chapel, Florida, a man was hit in the leg with pieces of the bullet he fired at the exhaust pipe of his car. While repairing the car, he needed to bore a hole in the pipe. When he couldn't find a drill, he tried to shoot a hole in it. I ask you, where do these people get their ideas?

For other examples of bad advice, we can consider the kid who has been having a hard time so his friends suggest getting drunk (which is a depressant). Not a good idea. Then there are the people who get dumped or hurt in a relationship, so they either avoid relationships altogether out of bitterness or get into one relationship right after another in order to fill the emptiness in their life. Another bad idea. Then there are those times in our life that cause us confusion, and because we are confused, we just don't do anything, which is seldom helpful. The list could go on and on.

Thankfully God has given us a tool that helps us when we need a good idea or we need some solid advice when we encounter the challenging, frustrating, and confusing times of life.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NIV).

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He has given us Scripture—also known as God’s Word and the Bible. It provides guidelines, advice, ideas, and comfort for any situation in life that we could encounter. Now, I realize that a book may not seem like the answer to your problems, but the Bible is not an ordinary book. It is unique—nothing compares to it. Just consider these facts.

This Book was written over a period of fifteen hundred years by more than forty authors from all walks of life—from kings to farmers. This doesn’t mean that the Bible is human in origin—the Bible tells us it’s not. But what it does mean is that God chose to express Himself using human words written by human hands. The Bible says “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, NIV). God influenced the hearts and thoughts of human beings and helped them put into words what He wanted us to know. Incredible thought, huh?

The Holy Scriptures were written in different times, during war as well as peace, and crafted on three different continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe. They were written in three different languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. There are more manuscripts (very old copies) to

Do you think God  
can still influence our  
hearts and minds today  
with the kind of wisdom  
we see in the Bible?

support the validity of the Scriptures than all other classical literature combined. The Bible is currently translated into more than two thousand languages. But the most amazing thing? Despite all its unique factors, *Scripture tells a single unfolding story.* Which brings me to the most impressive part of its uniqueness—the power of the story it tells.

First, you must know that the content of the Bible has caused the death of many people. It is important to notice that people have willingly died horrible deaths rather than denounce the Bible, while others have died horrible deaths just to get it into other people’s hands. No simple story book could motivate that kind of commitment, which tells us that there is something special about what’s inside its pages.

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People have also killed because of the Bible. I'm not holding this up as a positive example to follow; but, to me, it just lends more weight to the idea that the Bible contains a message that moves people like no other book. And then there is the fact that no one can stop this Book; and many have tried. The Bible always triumphs.

A classic example of this was what happened to the French infidel Voltaire, who died in 1778. He told people that one hundred years from his time, Christianity would be swept from existence and pass into history. And what ended up happening? Fifty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society used Voltaire's house to produce Bibles. Today, millions of Bibles are circulated, while Voltaire has simply passed into history. God's Word is powerful.

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NIV).

The ability of the Bible to remain a single unit despite its diverse origins, its ability to move people, and its ability to survive persecution are just a few factors that demonstrate this unique Book's power. And in the text above we see that it is living and active and can have an impact on us right down to our hearts and thoughts.

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 we see that it has a use: to instruct us in our daily lives as we learn to live a life like Christ's. It's our instruction manual for life—and I'm glad God has given it to us.

Have you ever tried building something without the manual? When I was first married, my mom said that my wife and I could have her entertainment center. It was a nice big wooden structure and had lots of drawers and such—but no manual. It took a good while to take the thing apart, and when I moved it to my house it took . . . well . . . a very long time to piece everything back together.

God knows how hard it is to make sense of life with all its pieces, which is why He gave us a book, the Bible, that teaches, corrects, and equips us to build a righteous life. This Book has shaped countless



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millions of lives. It has always come through for me when I needed wisdom. It is the only source of foolproof wisdom there is.

It is comforting to know that we have an instruction manual for life in the Bible. It gives us advice on everything you could ever need. God's Word will always come through for you and help you have victory, success, and hope in every area of your life if you put its contents into practice—and that is a lot more than I can say for Sky Commanders and older brothers.

### **READ IT FOR YOURSELF**

Before you begin reading the Holy Scriptures, I must warn you that it won't work if you read it like an ordinary book. Because it is unique and special, we must approach the Bible in a different way than other books if we are to gain understanding from it and hear God speak to us. Here are a few suggestions to help you read your Bible.

First, always ask God to send you the Holy Spirit to help you understand what the Bible says. The Bible is full of deep spiritual knowledge, and in order to find it, you will need the help of the Spirit of God. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14, NIV).

Second, the goal of reading the Bible is not to memorize facts or to learn history. Go buy a history book on the Middle East if that's what you're interested in. The Bible is not a textbook, a history book, or any other kind of book full of information to be memorized. Unfortunately, a lot of people think they become more spiritual by how *much* of the Bible they read, while not understanding any of it. If you take what the Bible says as advice, one little phrase can change your life or have you studying for weeks to determine its meaning. When you study, do it to get new understanding from God. Read a few verses and then ask some questions about it. It might be a good idea to get a Bible commentary or Bible dictionary

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to help you gain even more understanding into the passage you're reading.

Third, meditate on (think about) what you've read. Roll it around in your brain for a while and then ask God, "What is it You are trying to tell me through this passage?" Then wait for God to impress your thoughts with holy ideas of how He wants you to apply what you have read to your life. " 'But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete' " (Luke 6:49, NIV).

God's Word can't help you unless you apply it to your life. You may not always like what you hear—it might make you uncomfortable or make you have to change the way you do things—but it will always work for your benefit.