



How We Got the **BIBLE**



Timothy Paul Jones, PhD

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with

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What's So Special about the Bible?

- Inspiration
- Infallibility & Inerrancy
- Sufficiency



“Where’s Jesus?” the little girl asked, and it was clear from her tear-rimmed eyes that she was very disappointed.¹

It was the last day of Vacation Bible School at a tiny church in rural Missouri. The final fruit-flavored drinks and homemade cookies had been distributed, and the craft projects were glittered and glued. Now, twenty or so children clustered in the worship center for a closing assembly.

After leading a few songs, I told the children what I considered to be the most important message of the entire week. I talked to them about God’s righteous wrath toward sin and the provision for peace that God has supplied through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“If you’d like to know Jesus,” I said as the children’s attention spans began to wane, “you can come back with me to a classroom to talk about it. I’ll be glad to introduce you to Jesus.”

One girl—an elementary student named Amy Jo—remained in the worship center after everyone else rushed outside. Amy Jo was always full of questions about God, and I’d been praying that she might become a believer in Jesus this week. She trotted beside me and another teacher down the hall to a Sunday School classroom that had been set aside for counseling.

Amy Jo seemed somewhat distraught when we walked into the room, but I assumed that the cause for her distress was conviction from the Holy Spirit. A few seconds later, it became apparent that her distress had nothing to do with the Spirit and everything to do with what she expected to find in the classroom—or, perhaps more precisely, who she expected to find.

“Where’s Jesus?” she asked. “You said you’d be glad to introduce me to Jesus. I want to hear him talk to me.”

“Well,” I stammered a bit. “I didn’t mean you’d talk to Jesus in person. I meant you could get to know Jesus by following him.”

“But how can I follow Jesus if I never meet him and he never talks to me?” Amy Jo countered.



My attempt to share the truth about Jesus didn't end well that day, to say the least.

Amy Jo was disappointed that Jesus wasn't there to chat with her, and nothing I said seemed to help. She demanded nothing less than a personal visit from Jesus. Until Jesus appeared in that Sunday School classroom, she had no plans to believe anything I said about Jesus.

Why a Personal Visit from Jesus Wouldn't Make It Any Easier to Follow Him

Three years after that disappointing conclusion to a week of Vacation Bible School, Jesus still hadn't revealed himself in the flesh to Amy Jo. Still, God opened her heart to the truths that she heard from the Bible, and she trusted Jesus anyway. Now, nearly two decades later, Amy Jo and I share a laugh whenever we recall how she was convinced that Jesus resided in a Sunday School classroom in central Missouri. And yet, even as I smile at this memory, I can completely identify with Amy Jo's desire to hear a word from Jesus in the flesh.

After all, haven't you wished at some point in your life that Jesus would speak to you in person?

Maybe a hard conversation with an unbelieving friend raised one too many doubts about God's existence. Perhaps you were struggling to understand a recent tragedy, and you were convinced that a question-and-answer session with the Son of God could bring the clarity you needed. It could be that this yearning isn't a distant desire from your past; maybe you're wishing that God would speak to you in person right now.

If so, you're not alone.

We ache to hear God's voice because our souls were shaped to respond to God's voice. Even if we don't recognize it, we were created with a yearning for divine revelation. And yet, ever since the first human beings chose to challenge God's commands, no word from God—not even an audible message from the heavens—has been sufficient to keep us from rebelling against God's reign (Genesis 3:1–15).

- ✦ God spoke personally to Noah and provided him with plans for a ship to save humanity. And yet, this story of salvation ends with Noah waking up naked in his tent, nursing a hangover and cursing his son (Genesis 7:1; 9:20–27).

- ❖ Abraham glimpsed God’s glorious presence and heard God promise that he would have a son. And yet, Abraham doubted God, lied about his wife, and tried to create an heir for himself with his wife’s servant-girl (Genesis 12:1–18:21).
- ❖ God thundered from a mountain so that Abraham’s descendants would obey him forever (Exodus 19:9). And yet, within a few weeks, these recipients of divine revelation were dancing in the shadow of an idol (Exodus 32:1–35).

The little girl in Vacation Bible School so many years ago was convinced that it would be easier to follow God if only he would speak to her in person. Yet the experiences of God’s people demonstrate clearly that divine epiphanies don’t make it any easier to obey. The positive effect of these revelations is fleeting at best.

It’s no wonder then that, thousands of years ago, God called particular people to record his words in a way that would be stable and available even after the memories of his miraculous works faded. God began to inspire a book.

This God-inspired book wasn’t an afterthought or an accident! Eternal eons before God created darkness and light, God had already decided that he would reveal his kingdom not only through spoken words but also through written words. The Bible that you possess today is the perfect product of this eternal plan (Psalm 119:89). The purpose of the book you’re reading right now is to deepen your trust in the Bible by helping you to understand how God’s written revelation made the journey from the mind of God to the sixty-six texts in your Bible today.



Where the Bible Came From

God is revealing his truth to all people at every moment through his creation (Romans 1:18–20)—but God also chooses to reveal himself in particular ways to particular people. Beginning at least as early as Moses, God began to unveil his truth in written propositions.

These written words were so precious that no one was ever to change them (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32).

In the centuries that followed God's initial written revelation, inspired men and women continued to write "as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Some chronicled historical events. Others penned poems and proverbs and songs. Still others wrote prophecies that called people to return to God's reign over their lives.

But these books possessed a purpose far greater than merely recording God's work in the lives of ancient people!

Throughout all those centuries of revelation, God was inspiring the words of Scripture in such a way that the writers were revealing a greater message than they themselves could clearly see.² Every written word of the Old Testament highlighted humanity's need for a living Word who was yet to come (John 5:39). Taken together, all the prophecies of the Old Testament testified in perfect harmony that it was only through faith in a future Messiah that anyone's sins could be forgiven (Acts 10:43). This Messiah would be God's greatest revelation, the living Word of God sent to earth in human flesh (John 1:1–18).

The Word Became Flesh

When it was time to send this Word to earth, God announced his arrival through priests and prophets, angels and starry signs splashed across the eastern sky (Matthew 1:20–21; 2:2; Luke 1:11–18, 26–38, 67–80; 2:8–15, 25–38; 7:24–28). The living Word of God grew into adulthood and sacrificed his life on a cross, embracing God's wrath in place of everyone who would trust in him. After he rose to life on the third day, this same Word filled his people's hearts with his Spirit and empowered them to proclaim his kingdom throughout the world (Matthew 28:18–20; John 14:16–26; Acts 1:8).



But God's revelation didn't stop with the living Word or even with his presence in the lives of his people!

As the message of Jesus multiplied throughout the world, God began to inspire new writings that preserved the truth about Jesus and revealed how to live in his kingdom. During the first decades that followed the resurrection of Jesus, Christians memorized eyewitness accounts about Jesus and wrote

letters that applied Jesus' teachings in the lives of his followers. Soon, these spoken testimonies about Jesus began to be brought together with the teachings of Jesus to produce four "Gospels" written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Christians throughout the first-century churches treated texts connected to apostles and eyewitnesses of Jesus as inspired guides for their lives. Since every authoritative text in the churches had to be linked somehow to an eyewitness, written revelations ended as the first-century eyewitnesses and their associates passed away.

Nearly 2,000 years later, these God-inspired revelations from ancient Israelites and Christ-commissioned eyewitnesses remain the main means that God uses to unveil his truth to humanity. Jesus is the one Word of God, but we also rightly refer to these writings—now gathered together into the book we know as "the Bible"—as "the Word of God." We refer to the Bible as God's Word because this one book and only this book bears perfect witness to God's living Word, Jesus Christ.

Where Did the Word "Bible" Come From?

The English word "Bible" comes from the Latin word *biblia* ("books"), which descended from a Greek word, *byblos*. The Greek *byblos* described papyrus—an ancient writing material made from reeds that grow along the Nile River in Egypt.³ Ancient people stitched or pasted together pieces of papyri and rolled them to create scrolls.

No later than the first century, papyri and other writing materials began to be stacked and folded to form *codexes* (or, *codices*), the predecessors of modern books. As codexes grew in popularity, the meaning of *biblia* broadened to include both scrolls and codexes.⁴ The Jewish people already used the word *biblia* to describe their holy writings; early Christians quickly picked up the same word to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures together.⁵ Ever since that time, the word "Bible"—from the Latin word for "books"—has meant the collection of texts that comprise the sacred writings of the Jewish and Christian faiths. A pastor named Tertullian used the terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament" in the early third century to distinguish the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures.⁶



What the Bible Is

The Bible is made up of sixty-six Spirit-inspired writings penned by many people “at many times and in many ways” over many centuries (Hebrews 1:1). These words from God were given for the purpose of pointing fallen humanity to Jesus, the crucified and risen King. To gain an adequate understanding of the Bible, however, we must move beyond knowing merely what the Bible is *made of*. In a fantasy novel by C. S. Lewis, a character named Eustace looks at a star and points out, “In our world . . . a star is a huge ball of flaming gas.” Another individual—who happens to be a retired star—corrects him by saying, “That is not what a star is, but only what it is *made of*.”⁷ To understand the stars in the world of Narnia, Eustace needed to know not only what stars were *made of* but also what they *were*. Likewise, to understand the nature of Scripture, we need to explore not only what the Bible is *made of* but also what the Bible is.

Because every word of Scripture is breathed out by God, the Bible stands as the full and final authority for God’s people.

According to the testimony of Scripture and declarations of faith that have been confessed throughout the church’s history, the Bible is:

- ✦ inspired,
- ✦ inerrant and infallible, and
- ✦ sufficient.

Let’s take a look together at each of these vital characteristics of Scripture.

Inspiration: The Bible Is God-Breathed

“All Scripture,” the apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, “is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). A more accurate rendering of the phrase “inspired by God” might be “God-breathed.”⁸ If Scripture is “God-

breathed,” that means the words of Scripture came to us from the innermost essence of God himself. Moses and the prophets knew this and declared that they were writing God’s own words (see, for examples, Exodus 17:14; Jeremiah 1:9; Ezekiel 1:2; Hosea 1:1). Jesus agreed with their assessment and described the words of Scripture as words from God himself (Matthew 19:4–5; Mark 12:36).⁹

Notice that God did not merely inspire the *authors* of Scripture! God inspired the *text itself*. If Paul had thought the authors were inspired but not the text, Paul could have written something like this to Timothy: “Everyone who wrote Scripture was inspired by God.” But that’s not at all what Paul said or thought! Paul said that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16) because he believed that the very words of Scripture originated in God.

So what specific documents did Paul have in mind when he dictated the word “Scripture” and described these texts as “God-breathed”?

Paul’s words pointed primarily to the Old Testament. After all, when Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, some New Testament texts weren’t even finished! Yet, even when Paul wrote this letter, Christians were already aware that “Scripture” included not only the Old Testament but also the words of believers who had seen the risen Jesus and close associates of these eyewitnesses. Two biblical texts make it clear that, by the mid-first century, Christians were already treating New Testament writings as Scripture:

- ❖ In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, Paul identified words spoken by Jesus that became part of Luke’s Gospel as “Scripture” (compare Luke 10:7 with 1 Timothy 5:18).

Verbal-Plenary Inspiration

For centuries, Bible-believing Christians have accepted two important truths about the inspiration of Scripture:

- Verbal inspiration (Latin *verbum*, “word”)— God’s inspiration extends to the very words of Scripture.
- Plenary inspiration (Latin *plenus*, “full”)— Every part of the Bible is fully inspired, not merely the parts that have to do with salvation and our spiritual lives.

Verbal-plenary inspiration does *not* mean that God turned writers into robots, controlled from heaven through a cosmic keyboard. The biblical authors used their own free expressions, and God providentially guided their lives so that they would choose the words that conveyed his truth.

- ✦ Shortly after Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, Simon Peter referred to Paul's letters as "Scripture" (2 Peter 3:16).

Even while the texts in the New Testament were being penned and assembled, early Christians knew that writings linked to believers commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus carried the same authority as the Old Testament Scriptures.

Because every word of Scripture is breathed out by God, the Bible stands as the full and final authority for God's people. The Bible in its entirety is the Creator's message to his creatures, the King's edict to his citizens, and the Spirit's tool for transforming his people. Church traditions, creeds, and confessions of faith can be useful, but they can never claim authority equal to God's inspired Word.



Infallibility and Inerrancy: The Bible Is Error-Free

Titus was a young pastor on an island where the inhabitants were well-known for their dishonesty (Titus 1:12). Perhaps that's why Paul opened his letter to Titus with the simple reminder that "God ... does not lie" (Titus 1:2). I lie, you lie—but God never lies (Romans 3:4).

With that in mind, let's ask ourselves a crucial question: If all Scripture is God-breathed and if God never lies, what does that tell us about the reliability of Scripture?¹⁰

Throughout history, faithful Christians have agreed that, if God can't lie, his written revelation can't lie either. Our trust in the truthfulness of Scripture is rooted in our belief in the trustworthy character of God. A broad range of words and phrases have been used in different eras to describe the truthfulness of Scripture. One of the most important of these terms is "infallibility." The word "infallibility" comes from a Latin word that meant

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“unable to deceive” or “not liable to err.” When we say that the Bible is “infallible,” what we mean is that Scripture tells the truth and never deceives us. Another, more recent term to describe the truthfulness of Scripture is “inerrant,” a word that simply means “not in error.”¹¹

Error-prone human beings put the Scriptures together, but God was at work among these inspired authors and editors, preventing them from introducing any errors into his written revelation. That’s why we can trust that “when all the facts are known, the Scriptures ... properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm.”¹² Inerrancy does not require Scripture to be scientifically precise, and inerrancy certainly doesn’t rule out figurative language or numeric estimates in the Bible. “Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.”¹³ For example:

- ❖ In 1 Kings 7:23, a circular pool in the temple is described as “ten cubits from rim to rim” and “thirty cubits ... around.” A circular pool ten cubits in diameter would actually be slightly larger than thirty cubits around. Yet the biblical author didn’t make an error because mathematical precision wasn’t his purpose. The purpose of this text was simply to describe an object that Solomon’s metalworkers made, and the author used rounded numbers in his description.
- ❖ When an ancient chronicler of Israel’s history recorded the demise of 18,000 Edomites (2 Samuel 8:13), this author probably wasn’t taking a precise census of how many Edomites died; he was providing a rounded figure based on the information he possessed. And so, if the exact death toll numbered a thousand or two higher or lower than the number recorded, that’s not an error; it’s an estimate.
- ❖ When Scripture says “the sun rose,” the biblical authors were describing daybreak from an earth-dweller’s perspective (Genesis 32:31; Jonah 4:8); these authors didn’t err anymore than weather reporters today are mistaken when they refer to “sunrise” and “sunset” on the morning news.¹⁴

God revealed his message through human authors who recorded truthful testimony in different genres and styles of writing. To whatever extent precision was necessary to express God’s truth, Scripture tells the truth with precision.¹⁵

Did the early church leaders believe in the inerrancy of Scripture?

The earliest Christians never used the words “inerrancy” and “infallibility.” However, from the earliest stages of Christian history, faithful church leaders treated Scripture as God’s inerrant and infallible revelation.

- “You have searched the Scriptures, which are true and given by the Holy Spirit. You know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them.” —Clement of Rome, first century¹⁶
- “All Scripture, which has been given to us by God, [is] perfectly consistent. The parables harmonize with the passages that are plain; and statements with a clearer meaning serve to explain the parables.” —Irenaeus of Lyons, second century¹⁷
- “I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another.” —Justin Martyr, second century¹⁸
- “The statements of Holy Scripture will never contradict the truth.” —Tertullian of Carthage, third century¹⁹
- “It is the opinion of some that the Scriptures do not agree or that the God who gave them is false. But there is no disagreement at all. Far from it! The Father, who is truth, cannot lie.” —Athanasius of Alexandria, fourth century²⁰
- “I have learned to give respect and honor to the canonical books of Scripture. Regarding these books alone, I most firmly believe that their authors were completely free from error. If in these writings I am confused by anything which appears to me opposed to the truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.” —Augustine of Hippo, fifth century²¹

Sufficient: The Bible Is Enough

So far, we’ve learned that the Bible is God-breathed and error-free—but is the Bible enough?

That’s one aspect of the challenge that the little girl was facing in that Sunday School classroom so many years ago. Before she was willing to trust Jesus, Amy Jo wanted something more than the Word that she heard in the Scriptures—a personal chit-chat with Jesus, in her particular case. In time,

she recognized that what the Bible provided was enough for her to trust God. In theological terms, what she recognized was the *sufficiency of Scripture*.

Throughout history, Christians have treated Scripture as sufficient in two senses: First and foremost, Scripture provides enough knowledge for us to find God's truth and to live in fellowship with him. Second, Scripture has been copied with enough accuracy to preserve God's truth.

(1) Scripture provides us with sufficient knowledge to trust God and to live in fellowship with him. The biblical texts, as they were originally written, contain every truth that's needed for us to be saved and to follow our Savior. "Never in church history has God added to the teachings or commands of Scripture. . . . Scripture is sufficient to equip us for 'every good work'" (2 Timothy 3:15–16).²²

The Meaning of Inerrancy

In 1978, more than 300 Christian leaders—including John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, Francis Schaeffer, J. I. Packer, and Carl F. H. Henry—gathered in Chicago. There, they developed a statement that clarified the meaning and implications of biblical inerrancy.

Here are three key affirmations and denials from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy:

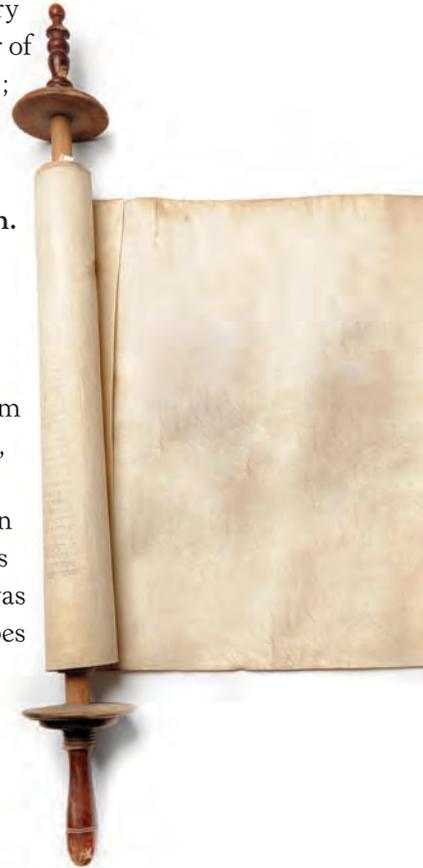
- "We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God. We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source."
 - "We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science."
 - "We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all matters it addresses. We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated."²³
-

The sufficiency of Scripture doesn't mean, of course, that the Bible includes every truth we will ever need to complete every task in our lives! Scripture doesn't provide us with much information when it comes to installing ceramic tile or conjugating German verbs, for example, and performing brain surgery based only on information found in the Bible is likely to end badly for everyone. And so, Scripture doesn't *reveal* all things. Instead, Scripture is sufficient to show us *how to do* all things for the glory of God, with the mind of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 2:5).

(2) Scripture survives in texts that were copied with sufficient accuracy to preserve God's truth.

For nearly a millennium and a half, the biblical texts were copied by hand. There were no printing presses, no copy machines, no dictation devices, no word processors with autocorrect features—only ordinary scribes copying texts phrase by phrase from piles of parchment and papyrus. Over the centuries, some of these scribes made mistakes. Most times, scribes merely missed or misspelled a word or two in a particular verse. Other times, when one scribe was reading a text aloud and others were writing what was said, scribes misheard words. Once in a while, scribes switched words or added phrases to emphasize truths that were tied to hot topics in their day. And so, copying variants can be found throughout the ancient biblical manuscripts.

This fact does not, however, mean that the Bible somehow ceases to be infallible or inerrant. Inerrancy and infallibility refer to each biblical text *as it was originally composed*—not to every copy made later.²⁴ And, truth be told, so many copies of Scripture have survived—more than any other ancient document!—that it's almost always possible to reconstruct the precise wording of the original texts. In the minuscule number of instances where questions about original wordings remain, not one textual difference affects anything that we believe about God or his work in the world. The copies of Scripture that survive today preserve enough of the original text to convey the original message that God inspired.²⁵



This vast trove of highly reliable texts shouldn't surprise us. God himself promised that he would protect and preserve his message (Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:18; Mark 13:31). Thousands of manuscripts and textual fragments testify together that this promise has been kept. That's why it's entirely appropriate for us to treat our Bible today as a trustworthy record of God's written revelation.

Why God Preserved His Word

God's goal in preserving his Word was far greater than merely multiplying people's knowledge or improving their morals. The Bible "is not an inspired book of moralisms or a book of virtues; it is, from cover to cover, a book about the glory of God in Jesus Christ through the redemption of his people who will dwell in the kingdom of Christ forever."²⁶ The center-point of Scripture is Jesus Christ himself, and the goal of the storyline of Scripture is his kingdom.

Scripture is inerrant in its inspiration, sufficient in its preservation, and dependent on interpretation and illumination for its application.

So how can we make certain that Scripture transforms us and turns us toward Christ? That requires both *interpretation* and *illumination*.

Seeking the Right Interpretation

Since first-century Christians saw Scripture as a word from Jesus Christ himself, they placed a high priority on rightly interpreting Scripture. The New Testament was still being written when Paul warned Timothy to watch carefully how he interpreted Scripture (1 Timothy 4:11–16). In a later letter, Paul returned to this same point and reminded his protégé to prioritize "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

So how do we rightly interpret Scripture today? We begin by studying each text in its historical context. If we're reading Daniel, for example, we need to discover how the exiled Israelites who first received this book understood Daniel's Spirit-

How can we know whether our application of a text is a result of the Spirit's illumination?

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth; any truth that comes from the Spirit originates with the Father and exalts the Son (John 15:26; 16:12–13). The Spirit of truth will never illumine an application of the text of Scripture that contradicts sound interpretation of the text.

inspired dreams. When studying Isaiah, it's important to ask, "How would Isaiah's first readers have interpreted this text?" But we never stop there, because Jesus and the apostles never stopped there! Jesus and the apostles understood that Jesus himself "is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in him, and every story in the Bible ends with him."²⁷ That's why we look at each part of the Bible in the context of the whole Bible, believing that every part of Scripture connects with other parts of Scripture to reveal Jesus and his kingdom (Luke 24:44; Acts 10:43).

Receiving the Spirit's Illumination

Even when we think we're interpreting Scripture rightly, it's entirely possible to miss the message of Jesus. Remember the first-century Jewish theologians who encountered Jesus in the flesh? They were world-class experts when it came to interpreting the Bible, but they completely missed the point of the Scriptures (John 5:39). So will we, until the Holy Spirit shows us how to respond to God's Word (John 14:26; 16:12–15; 1 Corinthians 2:10–13; 2 Corinthians 3:14–18). Unless the Spirit is at work within us, we may hear the words of Scripture, but we will never understand Scripture rightly or apply the message in our lives (James 1:22–2:26).



God's Word-revealing work is known as *illumination*. "Without the illumination of the Spirit," a French pastor named John Calvin once commented, "the Word will have no effect."²⁸ Reading the Bible without the Spirit is like trying to read a map in a cave; without some source of light, the map may be right in front of you, but you will never figure out which way to go. As we read and interpret Scripture, the Spirit shows us how the Word should reshape our lives. We respond to this illumination by loving God more fully and by resting more deeply in the grace that he has provided in Jesus.

Where to Go First If You Want to Hear a Word from Jesus

"Where's Jesus?" the little girl asked as she surveyed the empty classroom. "I want to hear him talk to me."

Despite this child's earnest expectations, the current location of God the Son is not in a Sunday School classroom in central Missouri; he's with the Father

in a position of heavenly honor (Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55–56). And yet, the fact that Jesus Christ isn't physically present among us doesn't mean we can't hear from him! The prophets and apostles wrote what they wrote in Scripture because "the Spirit of Christ" declared it (1 Peter 1:11). "Ignorance of Scripture is," in the words of the fifth-century church father Jerome, "ignorance of Christ."²⁹

What this means for our daily lives is that, if we yearn for a word from Jesus, the solution isn't a personal trip into the heavens or an ecstatic vision on the earth. The answer isn't even found by waiting for Jesus in a Sunday School classroom!

If you long for Jesus to speak to you, open your Bible.

Drink deeply from the truths you find there.

Read these texts in the context of faithful Christians gathered in community.

Meditate on these words in their manifold beauty, and receive them as the very words of God—because that is what they are.

The Word of God has been made flesh for us in Jesus Christ, written for us in Holy Scripture, and proclaimed among us whenever the Scripture are faithfully taught. You never need to wonder what God might say is true if he showed up in the center of our circumstances. God has already embraced the circumstances of this world once and for all in the flesh of Jesus Christ, and he has made his truth accessible to you in the text of Scripture.

"The Bible is the God-given means through which we know who Jesus is. Take the Bible away, diminish it or water it down, and you are free to invent a Jesus just a little bit different from the Jesus who is hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New. We live under Scripture because that is the way we live under the authority of God that has been vested in Jesus the Messiah, the Lord."
—N. T. Wright³⁰

The Unity of Scripture

At least forty human authors composed the Bible over the span of more than 1,000 years, but this doesn't mean that the Bible is fragmented or haphazard. The sixty-six books of Scripture intertwine to tell a single glorious story—the story of God's creation, humanity's sin, and God's provision for the redemption of his people through Jesus Christ. God's covenants with humanity throughout the Scriptures are the spine that ties this storyline together.³¹