

"This is an excellent book and resource for youth on their faith journey. The book is very interactive and informative and allows students to process their faith through a variety of learning activities. Author Amy Simpson takes a very difficult concept and through discovery learning allows the reader an opportunity to encounter God. It is an incredible resource for individuals as well as one that could be used in youth ministry as small-group curriculum or in mentoring relationships."

—MARTI BURGER, director of youth and family ministries,
Evangelical Covenant Church

> INTO THE WORD

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM YOUR BIBLE

AMY SIMPSON



Sample from *Into the Word* / ISBN 9781600060946

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INTRODUCTION

Do you realize that we have more access to more information (more quickly) than anyone else in human history? There's a reason they call this the Information Age! At the click of a mouse, we can find information about almost anything, read about the thoughts and ideas of someone halfway across the world, buy nearly anything, spend time with friends, and let the world get to know us. We can communicate instantly, all while sitting in the same place. In fact, we are literally bombarded with information. Our brains are constantly making decisions to ignore most of the information we encounter.

This sort of information-rich society didn't exist a couple of decades ago. Previous generations could only dream of what we experience every day. No one has ever *known* so much.

And yet your generation is perhaps the most biblically illiterate since the printing press.

Why? Is it because today's teenagers are incapable of learning about the Bible? Of course not! Because you don't have access to Bibles to read for yourselves? No way! You don't have access to tools to help you study the Bible? On the contrary! The problem is that teenagers, like everyone else, need to be taught how to study, understand, and apply the Bible. And that kind of understanding doesn't happen instantly.

In this world of instant and constant communication, we're fascinated with the value of our own words. But what about God's Word? The Bible's messages are timeless, spoken to every generation. They are boundless, touching the hearts of people in every part of the world. And they are powerful, changing lives every day.

If you want to experience the power of God's Word in your life, you'll need to learn to know, love, and live the Bible.

This book will help you do just that. *Into the Word* is a basic introduction to the Bible and how to study it for yourself. This book includes five chapters:

Chapter 1: The Ultimate Travel Guide will teach you where the Bible came from and why you should study it.

Chapter 2: Learning to Navigate will teach you a simple Bible study method that will help you understand what you read.

Chapter 3: Equipped for Adventure will give you a basic understanding of some study tools you can use to better understand God's Word.

Chapter 4: Hitting the Trail will help you focus on application, making sure you do more than read God's Word; you apply it to your life and act on it.

Chapter 5: Extreme Adventure gives you a chance to put into motion what you learn in the first four chapters, with specific Bible study projects and a journal for your insights as you study the Bible.

Go ahead and get into God's Word. There's no better way to experience God's power to change the way you live. I hope this book will inspire you to make Bible study a lifelong adventure. As you read it and use the ideas, you'll welcome God's truth into your life. See what happens!

THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL GUIDE

So what's the big deal about the Bible? Is it just another book? A collection of people's thoughts and stories? Did God actually write it? Where did it come from, and why should you care what it says?

The Bible is a very special and critically important book, and not because it's sometimes printed on gold-trimmed pages and bound in leather. The Bible's importance and authority come from God. Studying the Bible can literally help you know God. It can change your life. Most people want God's power and presence in their lives, but many are suspicious of the Bible—can they really trust what it says? So before you study the Bible, it's important to understand how it came about, who wrote it, and the circumstances under which it was written. I'm confident that the deeper you delve into God's Word, the more you'll find it to be valid and trustworthy.

In this chapter, you'll learn that the Bible is rooted in context. That means it didn't just spring up from nowhere. And understanding where it came from can help you understand what it means. You'll learn where the Bible came from and why you should study it. And you might gain a new respect for this living, active message from God.

STARTING THE JOURNEY

Take a few minutes to walk around your house. As you walk around, notice a few random objects. For each object, consider what gives that object credibility and value and makes it trustworthy. For example, maybe you'll see a history book in your room. You might decide that book has credibility because it describes events as they happened according to people who witnessed them. You probably have a loaf of bread in your kitchen. You might decide a loaf of bread has value because it satisfies hunger. Make sure one of the objects you consider is a Bible.

As you walk around and evaluate objects, use the space below to write notes about your observations.

You may not do this actual activity on a regular basis, but what you may not realize is that you do this kind of evaluation all the time. Every day you have to decide whom and what to trust. For example, every time you sit down, you have to decide whether to trust the chair (and the person who made it!). Every time you set your alarm clock, you decide to trust that it will wake you at the right time.

So how do we determine whether something is credible and whether it has value in our lives? Most of us base our trust on what we know about the object, the person who made it, and the way we have experienced it in the past.

IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION

This section of the book will help you do this kind of evaluation with the Bible. In the next few pages, we're going to explore what

gives the Bible credibility and value in our lives. The funny thing is, we're often more willing to trust some of these other objects than we are to trust the Bible itself. But the Bible has more credibility and value than any of these other things. Let's start by finding out more about what the Bible is and where it came from.

> WHERE THE BIBLE CAME FROM

So where did the Bible come from? Believe it or not, it truly did come from God. To create the Bible, God (through the Holy Spirit) directed people to pass along his messages to others. Some of them wrote down their messages right away, and others spoke their messages. Because the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible, the messages it contains are God's messages to people. The Bible reflects the perspectives of the various authors, but the truth is from God.

The Bible was written by more than forty people over the course of sixteen hundred years and sixty generations. These authors included a wide variety of people, such as fishermen, shepherds, kings, prophets, and pastors. They wrote their messages on three different continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe—and in many different places, such as prisons, palaces, the wilderness, and even a remote island. They wrote in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Bible we read was translated from these languages.

Even though the Bible was written over such a long period of time by so many different authors from such a diversity of backgrounds, God's Word is remarkably consistent in its themes. Throughout Scripture, we find one constant message: God loves us and wants us to have a relationship with him.

So I realize that it's sort of hard to understand what the Holy Spirit's inspiration might have been like. But the Bible's consistency, accuracy, and wisdom provide great evidence of this inspiration. The "Try This!" box describes a fun way you can think more about this.

TRY THIS!

If you have a friend around, try this idea to help you think more about where the Bible came from.

Grab a piece of paper, a pen, and a buddy. Sit back-to-back.

One of you tells the other person something to draw; then the other person draws that thing. Be sure you and your friend don't look at each other or at the drawing. Allow a few minutes for drawing.

Now switch. The other person tells what to draw while the partner draws it. Again, make sure you don't look at each other or the drawing.

After you finish drawing, look at each picture. Discuss these questions:

- > **How close was the picture to the partner's instructions?**
- > **How did the artist's personality and interpretation come through in the drawing?**
- > **How might this compare to the way the Holy Spirit inspired people to write the Bible?**

> HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO BE

As the Holy Spirit inspired people to pass along God's messages to others, some of those people wrote down those messages right away. Others proclaimed God's messages through the spoken word, and those messages were passed down orally for generations. In those days, most people didn't learn to read and write in school the way we do. Instead, they learned by listening to stories told by their elders. They learned to recite these stories precisely. Since they didn't read and write, storytelling was the only way for them to record the events that happened to them and their people. This resulted in oral cultures rather than written cultures.

Eventually, strong written cultures developed. People began to write their stories and collect them. They began to value these

stories in written form. The oral messages of the Bible were written down as well, and people began to gather all the writings together in hopes of distributing them for others to read. They had no way to print books at that time, so they copied the Scriptures by hand, being extremely careful not to make mistakes.

After a while, many different writings had been collected. Religious scholars began the process of canonization (deciding what should and should not be considered authoritative and Holy Scripture). Throughout centuries, people worked together to carefully evaluate various writings. They used lists of criteria to determine which books contained consistent messages and the authority to be considered God's Word. Basically, they used two main criteria: Had the book enjoyed widespread and long-standing approval among Christians? And had the book been written or approved by eyewitnesses to the events described? If the book was from the New Testament, it had to meet a third criterion: Had it been written or approved by Jesus' apostles (his original and personal followers)?

Scholars and church leaders spent centuries not only evaluating these writings but also meeting to discuss whether specific writings should be included. This process of canonization determined the collection of writings we know as the Bible. It is a collection written by firsthand witnesses and other reliable people who created their accounts through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All of these writings have stood the test of time, biblical scholarship, and faithful prayer for God's guidance.

So putting the Bible together was basically a long process of collecting and sorting, kind of like sorting a scattered stack of playing cards. Let's say you walk into a room and find a mess of playing cards on the floor. To clean up the mess and sort the cards, you would first need to collect them all. Then you would need to decide how to sort them. You would need some criteria. For example, you could put all of the numbered cards in one pile and the face cards in another. Or you could divide them into a black pile and a red pile. Or you could find all the cards with numbers

that are included in your birth date.

Okay, so maybe this sorting process isn't quite like the process of canonizing the Bible, but it gives the basic idea about using specific criteria to make a decision. The people who collected the Bible determined which books truly were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in this process itself, they sought and received the Holy Spirit's guidance.

> PARTS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is divided into two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament was written before Jesus was born as a man on earth. The New Testament was written after Jesus' birth.

Within these two main sections, the Bible isn't just a storybook or a reference book; it's a collection of writings by various people at different times, in different places, and for different purposes. These individual writings include various types of literature, such as historical accounts, poetry, prophecies, letters, and proverbs (wise sayings).

Each individual book of the Bible is a different piece of writing that originally stood on its own. For example, the book of Romans was a letter written by the apostle Paul to some people who lived in Rome (Romans, get it?).

Within each book are further divisions called chapters, just as in any novel or textbook you might read. These chapter numbers and divisions were added by people who wanted to make the Bible easier for people to read and understand. They also added verses to make things easier to find. Reading individual chapters and verses can help us find specific things in the Bible and also understand where major themes and concepts are located. However, it's important to keep in mind that these were not part of the original writings, so they must be read in the context of each book as a whole. If you want to understand what a specific verse is about, it's

important to understand what the entire book is about.

So to find something in the Bible, look for the book of the Bible (you can always use the table of contents in your Bible) and then locate the chapter and the specific verse. For example, if someone says to turn to Romans 12:4, you would turn to the book of Romans, chapter 12, verse 4. Note if the book is from the Old Testament or the New Testament, as this helps you put what you're reading into context with the time period in which it took place.

Finding something in the Bible is sort of like finding a place on a map. If you want to find something in your community, what's the first thing you need to know? The address, of course. Once you know a place's address, you can look on the map to figure out where it is (or use the Internet to get directions).

Scripture references are sort of like addresses. Knowing the reference helps you navigate the Bible to find the verse or passage. Practice now by looking up and reading these Scriptures:

- Acts 8:4
- Esther 4:16
- Exodus 20:8
- Haggai 2:6-7
- Hebrews 11:1
- Jude 20

Hey, you've just learned a lot about the Bible and why we might want to pay attention to what it says. You've also learned how to find what you need in the Bible. Let's learn more by looking at some of what the Bible says about itself.

BIBLE DISCOVERY

Use your navigational skills to find 2 Timothy 3:16-17. (Remember to start with the table of contents to find out whether 2 Timothy is in the Old or New Testament.) Then read what the Scripture

- > Teaching
The Bible teaches us by telling us what Jesus' life was all about.

- > Rebuking
The Bible rebukes by showing us when the way we are living is against what God wants for our lives.

- > Correcting
The Bible corrects us by reminding us how God wants us to live.

- > Training in Righteousness
The Bible tells us that God gives us wisdom when we ask him to.

Hopefully you were able to name some of the ways the Bible is useful in people's lives, just as the Bible says it is. If you're short on ideas, try asking several other people about how the Bible has helped them in these ways. Write down their answers too. You

might be amazed to see how powerful God's Word is in the lives of people you know. The truth of the Bible really does have the power to change people's lives! Want to see God's truth change your life? Keep reading to consider how you can welcome the power of God's Word in your own life.

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

Grab a pen and get comfy. Get ready to spend some time quietly thinking and journaling about what you've learned so far. Consider the following questions and write your answers in the space provided:

- > How should you respond to what you learned today about the Bible?

- > Why should you trust the Bible? Value it? Study it?

- > How do you feel about the Bible today? About God?

You've made some exciting discoveries! A great way to respond to these discoveries would be to learn more about God's Word and how you can study it. As you continue to work your way through this book, you'll explore how you can do your best to understand God's message through the Bible. Enjoy this great adventure!