

## Life Begins With God

you are like the boy who sawed off the limb of the tree on which he was sitting. Your whole philosophy crashes because you have nothing to cling to in life. The basis of all Christian thinking is faith, for “whoever would approach God must have faith in His existence.” [4] Science cannot prove that a God exists, so men of the laboratory declare; but you can prove that He lives by the experience in your own soul.

The Bible reveals a personal God who upholds all things by His power. This is the true origin of the law of gravitation, and of the laws of planetary motion. God knows man’s life; He rules in the affairs of men. Yes, even the thoughts of men are laid bare unto Him. Said the psalmist:

“Thou has searched me and known me, O Lord.  
Thou knows when I sit down and when I stand up.  
Thou discerned my thought from afar.” [5]

Therefore it is possible for the Bible to answer the problems which science can never touch. The earth was not made without design; God declares it was created “for a dwelling place.”

When the facts which science reveals are placed beside the Bible, there is no conflict. My relationship to the Christian church needs never to be antiquated by human knowledge. The modern English poet, Alfred Noyes, has paraphrased the faith and words of Sir Isaac Newton, a true scientist who could see God in the natural laws. In “Watchers of the Sky” the poet has Newton speak these words:

“What is all science, then, But pure religion, seeking everywhere The true commandments, and through many forms The eternal power that binds all worlds in one? It is man’s age-old struggle to draw near His Maker, learn His thoughts, discern His law! A boundless task, in whose infinitude, As in the unfolding light and law of love, Abide our hope and our eternal joy.” [6]

Certain it is that we live in a generation weak in faith; but we can find truth. Honest doubt can be respected, for it must be remembered that one of Jesus Christ’s twelve apostles was a doubter; but, like Thomas, the honest skeptic seeks for truth to dispel his lack of faith. As Donald Hankey has courageously put it: “True religion is betting one’s life there is a God.” [7] Are you willing to risk your life on that faith? Can science take the place of the noblest, richest, and truest thoughts and actions of life? Can science bring comfort and healing to broken hearts? Does science reach beyond the grave?

When you have counted all things and reached the complex definitions which scientists in the laboratories have discovered, you will not have reached God; and you never can find in the modern world anything that will substitute for a personal, loving heavenly Father. Test religion in your own test tube of life. Don’t come to the end as many modems will, pictured by A. E. Housman, when they have research, knowledge, and materialism, but no hope.

“Now hollow fires burn out to black,  
And lights are guttering low.  
Square your shoulders, lift your pack,  
And leave your friends and go.

“Oh, never fear, man naught to dread.  
Look not left nor right.  
In all the endless road you tread  
There’s nothing but the night.” [8]

Life does not begin with science, life does not end with science. The Christian life begins with God, and it continues with God in a new heaven and a new earth.

## 5. THE GUIDEBOOK FOR ADVENTURERS

HE LAY on the operating table as white-clad doctors and nurses worked skillfully to save his life. It was a delicate operation, and a famous brain surgeon was attempting to relieve the pressure on the young man’s brain -an injury caused by an automobile crash. In a room below, the family sat in tense anguish awaiting the moment-it seemed an eternity-when a message would come from the surgery.

This was the setting of an episode in a well-known radio program of American family life. Here

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was depicted a crisis in the lives of home folk. They were linked together by love, yet suddenly plunged into the depths of tragedy. The silence became intense, and then the oldest son of the stunned father suggested that the greatest need of each member of the home in that hour was the thought of eternal beauty. At first the family rebelled against such a proposal. Why should they think of beauty in the shadow of death? Because, he replied, the spiritual power from beauty and truth is the greatest answer to the sorrow of a human heart.

In the stillness of the room the son began reciting a poem which he declared had been his strength when flying over the battle lines during the World War: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." And when he had spoken the final words, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," the group seemed to have caught the confidence and trust which are found in this simple truth. The modern writer of this story acknowledged the greatest source of eternal beauty and truth—the Bible.

Every problem of human beings has its solution in God's library of sixty-six books, and from it God speaks to the lonely heart. The conflict between the spirit and the flesh was never greater than it is today for youth. When faced with the compromise between purity and lax morality, why not find courage in the life of Joseph? As you read of his adventures in the first book of the Scriptures you will see a youth in a foreign land. Watch him advance from common slavery to a position of trust in the house of Potiphar. In his prosperity he is tempted by his master's wife to compromise his purity and integrity. Hear his answer to the evil woman: "How then can I commit this great crime, and sin against God?" It is the unwavering standard of this young man which eventually leads him from unjust imprisonment to the position of prime minister in the Egyptian Empire. His obedience to God's standard is an example for Christian youth in a careless, sinful generation.

Do you ever feel that you have been unfairly treated by the wheel of fortune? Perhaps you cannot secure the position you have been educated to fill, or you are crowded out of work by economic conditions. What can you do? Will you do your best in your place in the world's work, or will you rebel against it all? For your encouragement turn to 2 Kings 5 and read the life of a Jewish maiden carried as a captive into Syria and placed in the menial tasks of an army general's household. She might have sulked against the merciless treatment of being exiled from her home, her family, and her people. But no, instead of hating Naaman, her lord, she told him of the prophet Elisha in Israel who could heal the vile disease of leprosy. The sick general believed the words of this servant, he went to the prophet, and returned with health restored. A spirit of loving service made this insignificant slave girl worthy of mention in a chapter of the Bible.

If the spirit of a materialistic age tempts you to cast aside religious devotion, it is time for you to read the experiences of Daniel. An official in a foreign government, Daniel continues to worship his God in the face of intolerant decrees and jealous, spying enemies. Although Daniel's decision for right led him to the lions' den, he came out the next morning victorious through his allegiance to God. From the pit echoed his words to the Oriental monarch: "My God has sent His angel, and has shut the mouths of the lions, so that they have not injured me; because I was found innocent before Him, and before you also, O king, have I done no injury." [1]

These are samples of the significant human experiences from the Book of books which throw the light of inspiration upon man's life. If, you are discouraged, it is appropriate for you to read how God dealt with David when he committed heinous crimes. Never again is there need to feel that your sins cannot be forgiven, after reading 2 Samuel 12, for there we see the evils of David's life forgiven after the king has made complete repentance and confession. Turn to the most beautiful words ever heard by a dying sinner, the thief on the cross, as Jesus Christ spoke the promise of salvation to him. [2]

The Bible is not just a great literary work, it is not merely another book; it is a reference guide for humanity, it is the volume filled with instructions from God to lead man from sin and death to eternal truth and love.

In the Library of Congress is a carefully guarded case containing the most valuable book in the world. In 1930 Congress appropriated \$1,500,000 to buy the Vollbehr collection of fifteenth-century books, and the most important volume in this small library was a copy of the Gutenberg Bible, the most costly piece of printing on earth. It is reputed to be worth a million dollars today. This Book of books is one of the three perfect copies in existence that were printed by Johannes Gutenberg in 1455. It is now the paramount treasure of the millions of books in the Library of Congress. Could any book be more precious to man than the Bible? No other work contains a living message for every race, no other writing claims to be the direct communication of God to men. There are many standards for the acceptance of the Scriptures. Some men will consider them as nothing more than a valuable study in literary forms, and, indeed, the Bible contains

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masterpieces of poetry, prose, and drama; others are willing to believe that this enduring Book contains some valuable lessons for our age. But the sincere Christian who accepts the teachings of Jesus Christ and follows His words must accept the entire Bible as inspired. You cannot straddle the fence by saying that some portions of the Scriptures are divinely given and some portions are of human origin.

Call to witness the statement of the Master to the Jews who had read and studied the Old Testament, but who had never discerned the true import of the prophecies of the Messiah. To these leaders Jesus said, "These very Scriptures testify to Me, yet you refuse to come to Me for life. [3] It was of the Old Testament He specifically spoke, for the New Testament had not yet been penned. Paul, writing from the underground dungeon in Rome, had not lost faith in God or the divine word. In his last letter, when he was about to face the execution block, he wrote these inspired words. "All Scripture is divinely inspired, and useful in teaching, in reproof, in correcting faults, and in training in uprightness, so that the man of God will be adequate, and equipped for any good work." [4]

Even as Jesus Christ was divinity clothed with humanity, so God's message was spoken to devout men, and they wrote His words in language all might understand. It is fitting that the words should be written in the most beautiful literary form, for God's truth should be in language as perfect as is the philosophy it presents. Therefore, God spoke through prophets and holy men, using them as His secretaries. Peter explains the process by saying, "Under the influence of the Holy Spirit men spoke for God." [5]

It would be impossible for fallible men to harmonize their thoughts in the sixty-six books of this sacred library. From Moses, living some fifteen hundred years before Christ was born, to the beloved John, writing some sixty years after Christ ascended into heaven, men of different races, tongues, and cultures wrote on widely varying themes; yet all their thoughts fit into one perfect record. During this time five great civilizations were upon the stage of history; but the Bible maintains the same truths from Genesis to Revelation. The first chapter opens with the epic words, "In the beginning God," and the last chapter closes with a divine benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." The Eden of Genesis is seen in its restored beauty for the redeemed in the Paradise of Revelation.

A golden thread leads through the Old Testament to Jesus Christ. The New Testament tells the story of the Redeemer and points forward to Jesus Christ's second advent. The center of the Bible is the cross of Christ. Without Him it would be only a book! The Bible is likened to a beautiful mosaic, for when the pieces have been fitted together one is forced to exclaim, "Behold the Man!" The Master's own words, prophetically revealed, were, "In the volume of the Book it is written of Me."

No man can read a book without taking some influence into his life from the pages. Frequently we read of youth attempting crimes after having read detective tales or crime novels. As evil may be brought into life from malicious books, even so may good come to the life of the individual who reads volumes with high and noble principles. How much greater can the Bible influence our thought and action because it has been given through divine inspiration! The character of God's word is transmitted to human lives, and what transformations result!

The word is pure, it is holy, and it is righteous. The sacred pages show God's hatred of sin and His love for the sinner. His eternal law and justice are brought to the mind of man; but as we read we need not be discouraged, for His plan of salvation, proclaiming His love, shines as a light upon man's pathway ahead. A blueprint for the Christian is found in every page. If you would live after the pattern set by the Galilean, study His life and words; read the Book whose center and circumference is Jesus.

What shall it avail us if the Bible be the inspired word of God, but we fail to incorporate its teachings in our lives? The pity of it is that though it is recognized and eulogized as the Book of books, too few individuals bear the imprint of its teachings in their character. It was Jeremiah, the prophet, who described his own acceptance of the Scriptures in these words, "As for me, Thy word is my joy and delight; for I bear Thy name, O Lord, God of hosts!" [6] Whose name is identified with your character and mine? The foundation of Christian doctrine must be the Bible, and the young man or the young woman who has decided to build his life upon religious principles must lay the cornerstone upon Scripture. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." [7]

This present age needs a blood transfusion to save the faith, the courage, and the moral principles of human character; for as realists have looked upon a chaotic and troubled civilization they are fearful in heart. The modern higher critic has produced a pernicious anemia in man's spiritual life. He has had little reverence for religious truth. Indeed, he would "peep and botanize upon his mother's grave." [8] The living story of the cross of Christ, the cleansing blood of the Savior, must come into the hearts of men or they are lost. The Bible alone is the source of this life-renewing stream. The reason men have scoffed at the Bible is that they have never studied it with the hope of finding in it the answers to their perplexities. Youth has had

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very little incentive to study and know the word of God since secular reading, irreligious homes, amusements, and school studies without the Bible have been their environment. I was standing on the steps of a university building not long ago talking with a graduate student who declared himself to be an agnostic.

“Have you ever taken time to read the Bible thoroughly for yourself?” I asked.

“Not exactly,” was his evasive answer; “but I have read what many critics say about it.”

Is that sound scholarship?” I asked him. “You would not do that to a great work of literature such as ‘Paradise Lost’ or a Shakespearean play, would you?”

He admitted that it was not a sound method of study. He was a young scholar of the twentieth century who knew what men had written against the Bible, but he had never studied it for himself. I suggested three steps for his approach to the Bible: First, make individual search and study of the Scriptures. The Bible cannot be read as a simple storybook. Its depth of thought and breadth of subject matter have never been exhausted. Second, think on these things with a sincere heart. Third, compare and analyze passage with passage until you know the complete truth on a subject.

If you would read the Bible to find its treasures, go to its pages daily. Perhaps you will read it from cover to cover in a year; many people find a great blessing in such a systematic study. Or, you may go through the Bible searching for every promise of God to man. You may read all the biographies of the Bible, and see how these men accomplished God’s plan for their lives, or why they failed to do great deeds as they turned to their own selfish desires. If you love literature then you can study all the historical books, all the poetry, all the prophecy, and all the letters according to their form. But, in whichever way you read, search first for the personal message of God to your heart.

If the Bible is a lamp to our path in a despairing world, it will guide us to Jesus, the light of life. We will find the surety of the word proved to us as we read the prophecies written a hundred, five hundred, or a thousand years before the prediction was fulfilled. We will find the Bible to be accurate as we compare its history with archaeological discoveries. And we must remember that there are many unfulfilled prophecies for today and for the future that we may know if we search diligently with divine guidance.

The American poet Whittier wrote concerning the Bible in these poetic words:

“We search the world for truth, we cull  
The good, the pure, the beautiful  
From graven stone and written scroll;  
From all old flower fields of the soul;  
And, weary seekers of the best,  
We come back laden from our quest  
To find that all the sages said  
Is in the Book our mothers read.” [9]

Only when men and women cease to care for life will the Bible be out of date, for within its pages is the cure for what Stanley Jones has called “the three great oppressions,” sin, suffering, and death. The remedy for man’s sin is in the life and death of Jesus Christ; the cure for the suffering in the world is found in God’s love; and the solution for the terror of death is found only in the eternal promise of everlasting life.

Passengers traveling upon steamships which carry on the traditions of the sea will occasionally find the boat swinging around in a complete circle. This is known in nautical terms as “to swing ship,” and the movement is made in order that the ship’s compass may be checked for accuracy at each of the four points of the compass, and any necessary allowance made for deviations. As the captain at the helm of his vessel must take this traditional precaution to know that his compass will mark a true course, so it is imperative that the young mariner, as he voyages forth on life’s sea, know that the compass of his life is true. Test your guiding instrument; is it directing you to the port of your soul? The Bible is the perfect compass for your life.

“O young Mariner, Down to the haven, Call your companions, Launch your vessel, And crowd your canvas, And, ere it vanishes Over the margin, After it, follow it, Follow the Gleam.” [10]