

RAY C. STEDMAN

Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

New Enhanced Edition



Adventuring Through the Bible

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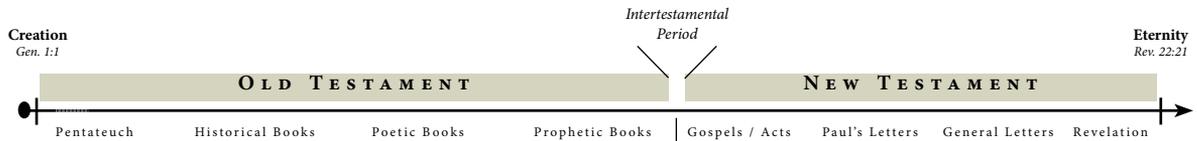
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The Goal of God's Word



A nonbeliever once asked a Christian, “Will your God give me a hundred dollars?”

The Christian’s reply, “He will if you know Him well enough.”

The riches that God has made available to us are the riches of His kingdom, the riches of His Word, the riches of His eternal life in a never-ending relationship with Him. But God will indeed give anyone hundreds, thousands, and even millions of dollars—if it serves His purpose and if that person knows Him well enough.

Take George Müller, for example. He was a man of prayer and the founder of the Bristol Orphanages in England that operated five orphan houses. During his lifetime, his organization cared for more than ten thousand homeless children. Before Müller founded the Bristol Orphanages, such children were routinely housed in prisons.

George Müller was not only a social reformer but a preacher who pastored a church until age seventy, then began a second career as a missionary, traveling to forty-two countries, preaching the gospel wherever he went. He retired from missionary work at age eighty-seven, but

continued to teach and preach in his church until his death at age ninety-two. He read his Bible from cover to cover almost two hundred times—no wonder he knew God so well!

The morning after Müller led his last prayer meeting, he was found on the floor beside his bed. He had passed away while on his knees in prayer.

During his lifetime, George Müller asked God for the money to fund his orphanages and other ministries, and God supplied millions of dollars. But Müller never asked anyone for donations. He never appealed for money from the pulpit, never made a private appeal to a wealthy donor, never wrote a letter asking for funds. He never took a salary, never borrowed a penny, and never lacked for money throughout his life. He simply prayed, and he trusted God to move in human hearts. George Müller knew God—and God gave millions of dollars to George Müller.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter answers such questions as: Why do I need to understand the entire Bible? Isn’t the New Testament all I need to know as a Christian? How did the Bible come into existence? How can I know that the Bible is God’s Word? What was God’s purpose in giving us the Bible?

LEFT: Small oasis in wilderness

Knowing God is the key. He wants to be your friend. He wants to pour out the riches of heaven upon your life—“good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over,” as Jesus tells us (Luke 6:38).

Why did Jesus come to earth? “I have come that they may have life,” He said, “and have it to the full” (John 10:10). And what is that “life . . . to the full,” the abundant life Jesus describes? “Now this is eternal life,” He said, “that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). The abundant life, eternal life, comes from knowing God, and from knowing Jesus Christ.

So in order to know the blessings of abundant and eternal life, we *must* get to know Him. And the way you get to know Him is through the pages of Scripture, as they are revealed and interpreted for us by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures and the Spirit—you can’t separate the two. The Bible without the Spirit leads to dullness, boredom, and dead, institutional Christianity. The Spirit without the Bible leads to fanaticism and wildfire. We need both the Spirit and the Word.

Moreover, we need the *entire* Bible.

We need to understand the story of humanity before the fall so that we might know what God originally made the human race to be—and so that we might understand the kind of relationship God had in mind when He created us. The pure, pristine relationship that existed before sin entered the world is the relationship He wants to restore to us now.

We also need to know the lives of the men and women of faith throughout the Bible in order to see how God works in specific situations. As we read these stories, we see

that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Ruth, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Peter, Stephen, Paul, and all the other saints of history went through the same experiences we do. They drew upon the same supernatural strength and power that is available to us. As we study their lives, the Bible becomes not merely a “religious book,” but a practical, relevant guidebook for daily living.

The lives of the prophets show us how God works through human history, from beginning to end. As we study what Paul calls “God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began” (1 Cor. 2:7), we begin to know His thoughts, which are not our thoughts, and His ways, which are far higher than our ways. As Jesus said to God the Father, “You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Matt. 11:25).

The Gospels reveal the perfect life of Jesus Christ—His unique wisdom, His divine power, His human pain, His extraordinary personality, His unparalleled character, and His extravagant love for people. In the Scriptures, we discover the many-faceted richness and depth of the One who was uniquely the Son of God and the Son of Man.

The Epistles—the letters written by Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude to the first century churches—show us how to apply the great truths of the Gospels to our everyday lives. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writers of the New Testament letters translated God’s truth into practical principles to guide our daily actions and decisions.

Finally, the book of Revelation gives us wisdom, hope, and assurance as the world

approaches the hour of ultimate crisis. As individuals and as a believing community, we need the assurance that this present darkness shall pass, that the futility and horrors of this age will end, that our bondage will cease, and that Jesus Christ will be manifested in the universe—and He shall reign.

God's Eternal Purpose in Our Lives

The story of how the Bible came into being is the fascinating story of a miracle of God. In 2 Peter 1:21, the apostle Peter tells us that the Bible was written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit. Prophecy did not originate in the will of human beings. Instead, men wrote God's message as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible transcends all human documents. It is far greater than any document human beings alone could produce. Despite the tremendous diversity of human authorship and the vast span of time over which it was written, the Bible has one message, tells one story, moves toward one conclusion, and directs our attention to one Person.

As Paul wrote, "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 Tim. 3:16–17). It would simply be impossible to take at random any collection of books from literature, put them together under one cover, and have any consistent and cohesive theme develop. Such a collection is possible only if there is one transcendent Author behind its many human authors.

The Bible is not only the story of God and His Son Jesus Christ. It is also the story

of your life and mine, as well as the story of the human race. The Bible explains what we are and how we came to be this way. It illuminates the human condition. It instructs us, exhorts us, admonishes us, corrects us, strengthens us, and teaches us. In this book, God has incorporated all the truths we need to know about ourselves.

How did ordinary human beings—some from the most common callings of life—capture the thoughts and purposes of God? How did the Holy Spirit lead them in recording the Word of God rather than the mere opinions of human beings? It's a miracle beyond our understanding.

But this we know: The more we study the truth of the Bible, the more thrilling and compelling it becomes. Like a scientist with a passion for uncovering the secrets of the universe, I'm captivated by an intense drive to unfold the wonders of God's Word. After decades of study, I have found that increasing familiarity with this book has only caused it to grow more fascinating, more profound, and more marvelous in its implications for my life.

This book has survived countless attempts to suppress it and destroy it. It has been preserved and defended for us through the centuries in ways that can only be called providential. Again and again its pages have been stained by the blood, sweat, and tears of martyrs who have spent their very lives to save this book for later generations.

Why has this book been so important to God and His people? What is the Bible's ultimate purpose? The Bible itself gives us the answer. The apostle Paul writes:

He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:9–12).

Astounding! The Creator of the universe, the great *starsmith* who fashioned a billion galaxies each containing millions of stars, has a purpose for your life and mine—and He has unveiled that purpose in His Word, the Bible. The apostle Paul extends this stirring thought:

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (Eph. 3:8–12).

Paul says that God is using the church—ordinary believers like you and me—to make His wisdom known to “the rulers and authorities” in the spiritual realms. He is proving His wisdom to the rebellious spirits, to Satan and the other fallen angels who revolted against Him—and He is using your

life and mine to make that case. When you and I live in obedience to God through our faith in Christ, we prove that His judgment against Satan and the fallen angels is just and righteous. Satan lived in God's visible presence—and he revolted against God. You and I can't see God, yet we love and obey Him. Thus Satan stands condemned, and the wisdom of God is vindicated.

Paul goes on to state that the Lord Jesus, having finished His work on earth through the cross and the resurrection, ascended to heaven and gave gifts to you and me and to everyone in His church:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11–13).

God's purpose is to bring us to maturity. He wants us to become mature by becoming *like Christ*. His purpose for the human race is not some vague, impersonal goal; it is here, it is now, it is definite, and it is profoundly intertwined with our everyday lives. Everything that exists has been brought into being so that you and I might fulfill God's amazing plan for our lives. And His plan for you and me is that we attain the fullness of becoming like Jesus Christ.

The Human Ideal

I used to meet regularly with five young men of high school age. On one occasion I

asked them, “What is your image of a truly masculine man?”

“A guy who’s really pumped up,” said one. “A guy with six-pack abs, who can bench-press two-hundred fifty or three-hundred pounds.”

I knew of one athlete at this young man’s school. He had rippling muscles on his body—but also a lot of muscle between his ears! “Oh,” I said, “you mean like So-and-so?”

Startled, the young man said, “No, not like him! He spends a lot of time on the weight machine, and he has arms and legs like tree trunks—but doesn’t have much character and he’s not all that bright.”

“Okay,” I said, “then I guess muscles aren’t a very reliable standard of manhood. So what is it? What do the rest of you think it takes to be a man? Let’s make a list of real masculine qualities.”

They all thought some more. “Well,” one young man ventured, “I think it would have to be a guy with guts. Courage, I mean.”

So we wrote “courage” on our list. The young men thought some more and added some more qualities to the list: consideration, kindness, integrity, a sense of purpose, and so on. Soon, we had quite a long list.

Finally, I said, “You know, this is amazing! Think of it! You could go anywhere in the world and ask any man, and it wouldn’t matter whether he was rich or poor, high or low, black or white or any shade in between. Ask him, ‘What does it mean to be a man?’ and you would get the same answers you’ve given on this list! Because men everywhere want to be men. All women want to be women. There may be small variations in detail, but the virtues you’ve listed are admired everywhere.”

The young men nodded thoughtfully.

“Now,” I said, “how are you doing at fulfilling these ideals?”

“I think I make it about thirty percent of the time,” said one.

“No way!” said another. “You don’t make it even five percent—and neither do I!”

I asked, “Is there anyone who exemplifies these qualities all the time?”

Their faces lit up. “Of course!” they said. “Jesus!”

It’s true. Jesus is God’s perfect man, the most complete expression of manhood ever to walk the earth. He is God’s ideal for our lives. That is what Paul tells us: God is equipping us and building us up “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). The steps toward this goal are twofold.

The *first step* that brings us to this goal is found in the phrase “until we all reach unity in the faith.” Clearly, *faith* is the operative word. Faith is always the way by which we experience all that God makes available to us.

The *second step* that brings us to this goal is “the knowledge of the Son of God”—the *accurate and full knowledge* of Jesus the Son. We cannot achieve maturity in Christ as God intended if we don’t know His Son. By knowledge, God does not mean merely biblical information; rather, He is talking about a *personal experience* with Jesus Christ. *Faith*, the first step, leads to *knowledge*, the second step.

The apostle Paul is careful to make clear that it isn’t just my faith or your faith but *our* faith—what he calls “unity in the faith”—that brings us to this knowledge. In Ephesians 3,

Paul prays that we may come to know with all the saints how high and broad and long and deep is the love of Christ. This means that unless you are in touch with other saints you can't possibly develop as you ought to as a Christian. We need each other in the body of Christ, and as we fellowship, worship, and study God's Word together, we grow together in maturity and in the experiential knowledge of Christ.

We will investigate the Bible together to learn what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In the process, we'll see that the Bible is not merely a collection of sixty-six books written by more than forty human authors over a span of fifteen centuries. It is a single book with a unified theme, a coherent message, and an astonishing relevance to our everyday lives.

This one-volume "divine library" is a book of wonderful variety. Its beautiful love stories reflect the tenderest of human passions. Its stories of political intrigue rival anything we might read in today's headlines. Its stories of violence and battle are filled with the heroism and horrors of war. Its poetic passages soar to the very heights of artistic expression. It contains narratives of intense human drama. Its strange and cryptic passages are as intriguing to penetrate as any mystery story.

However, one subject dominates and permeates this book: Jesus Christ—Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. We first meet Him as one of the voices at creation who says, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26). His coming in human form is foretold throughout the Old Testament. His life is detailed in quadruplicate through the Gospels, and His character saturates the New Testament

epistles. Finally, His return and His kingdom are described in the book of Revelation: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a book about Jesus Christ. In symbol, in story, in prophetic vision, in simple narrative account, in history, in poetry, in every aspect and dimension of the book, the focus is always on God's Son. He is the unifying thread of the book. In learning about Him, we learn God's plan and pattern for our own lives. We understand our problems and find the solutions reflected in Him. We understand our needs and find the satisfaction of our needs in Him.

The Good News

When Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full," He wanted us to know that eternal life means *so much more* than living forever with Him in heaven (as wonderful as that is). Eternal life is truly the abundant life here on earth. It's the daily experience of fulfillment, joy, and peace right here and now. We don't have to just "muddle through" life, making the best of a bad situation. Through Him, we have *life*—and have it to the full.

As Ian Thomas once said, "We must have what He is in order to be what He was." When we become mature in Christlikeness, then God's purpose for our lives will be fulfilled.

Think of it: Who was this man Jesus? He was God's ideal for humanity. For thirty-three years He lived among us on this pain-wracked, sin-drenched planet, enduring the same pressures we face every day. The opposition he face revealed the godly perfection of His character with brilliance and power.

GOOD NEWS!



There is nothing complicated about the good news. It is not a lofty theological principle that requires years of study to understand. The good news is the cross and the empty tomb. That's all. That's enough.

The good news transforms lives, restores broken families, and is the solution to human evil. The good news rescues us from sin and despair, and makes us alive forever!

Some people think that the good news is that heaven awaits us after we die, or that God is love, or some other wonderful thing. While these are all true and good, none of them are the good news Jesus commissioned us to preach, because they are not the good news of the cross and the resurrection. Heaven is not the good news; it is merely a result of the good news.

The good news is that the cross has shattered the power of evil and sin, and the empty tomb has broken the power of death. The Lord is alive, and He lives in us and through us, giving us the power to truly live. This is the good news that we should be preaching as we go.

Ray C. Stedman

The Ruler Who Serves: Exploring the Gospel of Mark, Vol. II
(Discovery House Publishers, 2002)

“But,” you may say, “I can’t become what He was! I can’t live a perfect life.”

Of course not. But our Christlikeness doesn’t depend on us. We’ll become like Christ when we allow Him to live His life through us. If we dare to believe Him, moment-by-moment and day-by-day, we can allow Him to *live through us*. This is good news!

But to do this, we need God’s revelation, the Bible. We don’t come to the knowledge of the Son of God without a learning process, without a conscious commitment to an ever-increasing understanding of His truth. That’s why we are adventuring together through this amazing book.

The View from Orbit

What is the “right” way to look at the world?

Most of the time, we see the world with the naked eye. Physicists, however, use powerful particle accelerators to see the world one

atom or one electron at a time. Astronauts go out into orbit and look down on the world from a distance, seeing the entire world with its continents, seas, and swirling weather patterns. Who has the “correct” view of the world: the physicist, the astronaut, or the naked-eye observer?

Answer: They all do. Each sees the world at a different scale, from a different perspective; and each view is valid in its own way.

Now consider this: What is the “right” way to look at the Bible? Should it be examined minutely, phrase by phrase and verse by verse? Or should we study the Bible book by book? Or should we step back and take a more panoramic view, the astronaut’s view, seeing the great themes and historical sweep of the Bible as if from orbit?

Answer: Each method is equally valid, each offers a different perspective, and each serves a different purpose. Our purpose in *Adventuring Through the Bible* is to take the

wide-angle perspective, the aerial view of the Scriptures.

An Overview

Our survey of the Bible is divided into nine parts:

- Part One:** A Panorama of the Scriptures
An Overview of the Bible, Genesis through Revelation
- Part Two:** Five Steps to Maturity
The Books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy
- Part Three:** The Message of History
Applying the Historical Books, Joshua through Esther
- Part Four:** Music to Live By
Old Testament Poetry, Job through Song of Songs
- Part Five:** The Promises of God
The Prophetic Books, Isaiah through Malachi
- Part Six:** Jesus: The Focus of Both Testaments
Jesus and His Church, Matthew through Acts
- Part Seven:** Letters from the Lord
Letters to the Church, Romans through Philemon
- Part Eight:** Keeping the Faith
All about Faith, Hebrews through Jude
- Part Nine:** Signs of the Times
The End—and a New Beginning, Revelation

With this as our outline, we will journey through all sixty-six books of the Bible, examining its great themes and following the

threads of those themes from their beginnings in Genesis to their triumphant conclusion in Revelation. We'll probe the grand design of God's revealed Word and discover how each part of the Bible fits together with every other part. We'll see the dynamic flow of God's revelation to humanity and discover God's divine authorship behind each book and each human writer.

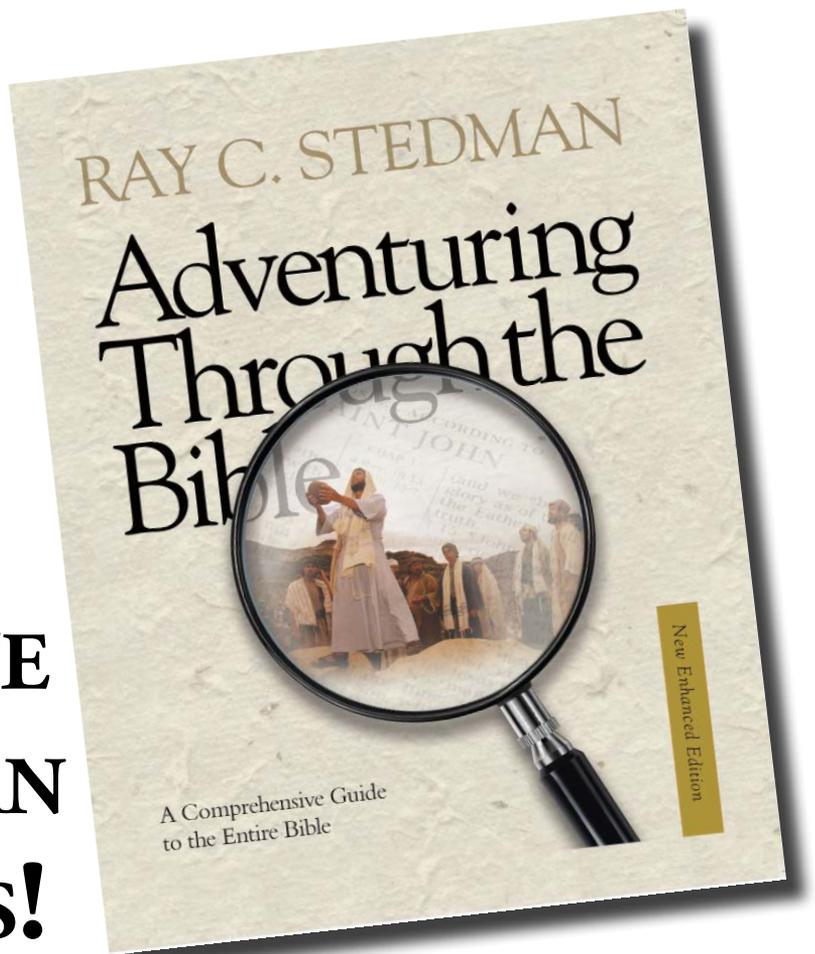
I encourage you to read through these books of the Bible as we go along. This book is not a substitute for Bible study. In fact, I would rather that you dispose of this book than use it as a substitute for reading and studying God's Word. This book is intended to be opened alongside, not in place of, the Scriptures.

So join me in the adventure of a lifetime, an adventure of grand discoveries and exciting breakthroughs. Join me as we adventure together through the greatest book ever written.



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THE COMPLETE BOOK CAN BE YOURS!



If you enjoyed reading through this segment of Ray Stedman's book, *Adventuring Through the Bible*, the complete book, over 900 pages in length, can be purchased at Discovery House Publishers.

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