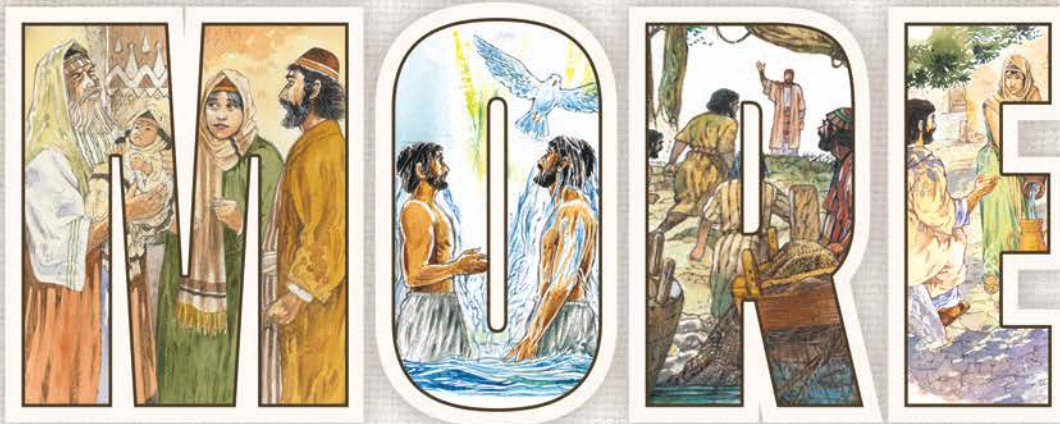


NEW TESTAMENT

SALLY MICHAEL

ILLUSTRATED BY FRED APPS



THAN A



**EXPLORING THE MESSAGE OF THE
BIBLE WITH CHILDREN**

More Than a Story: New Testament

by Sally Michael

Illustrated by Fred Apps

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Cover Design by Shannon Brown

Our vision at Truth78 is that the next generations know, honor, and treasure God, setting their hope in Christ alone, so that they will live as faithful disciples for the glory of God.

Our mission is to inspire and equip the church and the home for the comprehensive discipleship of the next generation.

We equip churches and parents by producing curricula for Sunday School, Midweek Bible, Intergenerational, Youth, and Backyard Bible Club settings; vision-casting and training resources (many available free on our website) for both the church and the home; materials and training to help parents in their role in discipling children; and the Fighter Verses™ Bible memory program to encourage the lifelong practice and love of Bible memory.

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DEDICATIONS

Dedicated to my husband David, who has been a faithful and zealous partner in striving for the discipleship of the next generation for more than four decades.

May our children, grandchildren, and all our descendants be remembered by the LORD forever, and may your passion for the faith of the next generation be served through this book.

He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; (Psalm 78:5-7)

Dedicated to John Piper, who taught me the theology in this book. May your God-centered, passionate teaching of the Word extend to generations beyond you through this book.

“Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.” (1 Chronicles 29:10b-11)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been in my heart, mind, and prayers for decades. Throughout that span of time, there have been many individuals who have encouraged me to pursue a project like this. But chief among them has been my husband, David, who continually encouraged me to pursue my heart-burden to write a Bible story book for children and instilled in me the confidence that “God will help you.” A close runner-up is my close friend and co-writer Jill Nelson, who has always given me honest feedback and strong encouragement.

There are so many others who have contributed to make this long-term dream a reality—my daughters who heard so many of these stories in some form or another growing up; my daughter Kristi, who patiently listened to story after story, stopping me when something needed to be reworded or suggesting better wording; my daughter Amy, who together with her children (my precious grandchildren) helped “test” these stories; my son-in-law, Gary Steward, who graciously checked for theological accuracy; Karen Hieb, who smooths my wording and corrects my grammar; Brian Eaton, who approved the project and brainstormed illustration ideas; Fred Apps, who came out of retirement to use his remarkable talents in pencil and paint to capture the heart of the text; the whole team at Truth78, who prayed, encouraged, and worked diligently to make computer files into a book; the many friends who have prayed consistently and fervently; and the financial contributors who gave sacrificially to make what was impossible for Truth78 a viable project.

The front cover of this book may have two names on it, but in reality, there are so many more names representing a host of people who have been associated with this book. Without their prayers and support, this book would not have happened. Their names may not be written on the cover, but they are written in my heart...and most importantly, they are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Thank you, brothers and sisters.

Sally

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PREFACE

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Page by page in our journey through thousands of years of Old Testament history, two stark realities stand out: the unchanging majestic character of God and the devastating effects of sin. These inescapable realities bring us to the threshold of the New Testament where we see the promise of deliverance fulfilled, unmerited redemption secured, and the glorious future for the redeemed revealed. It is a peculiar paradox and a staggering reality that God Himself rescues sinners from His own wrath. There is only one word that can describe it: GRACE. Amazing grace. Glorious grace—completely undeserved yet freely given.

This redemption repeatedly foreshadowed in the Old Testament is now revealed in the Person and work of God's own Son, Jesus—the second Adam, the Substitute Sacrifice, the Passover Lamb, the Mediator between God and man, the Perfect Law-Keeper, the Bread of Life, the Permanent High Priest, the Final Prophet through whom God has spoken, the Everlasting King from the line of David. By His miraculous birth in human form, His agonizing death on the cross, and His victorious resurrection, Jesus purchased salvation for sinners, fulfilling the promise of redemption made in the garden. Such a glorious rescue, such a deep and complete forgiveness cannot be comprehended in its glory without understanding the continual failings of the people of Israel generation after generation and the unfailing, secure light of the promise of the Messiah in the darkest and most wearisome of times. The New Testament does not stand alone. It is the continuing narrative of God's glorious provision for an undeserving remnant of humanity.

The New Testament reveals the unfolding plan of God to build the Church—His beloved children, from every tongue, tribe, and nation—to call out a peculiar people who act as salt and light in the darkness of this world...and to create a new heaven and a new earth when Jesus returns as King. He will establish His eternal Kingdom where His people can enjoy Him with unceasing praise. Will you be a part of that everlasting Kingdom of abundant life and profound joy?

As he was dying, former slave ship captain, redeemed sinner, faithful pastor, and writer of the hymn "Amazing Grace," John Newton whispered to a friend, "My memory is nearly gone. But I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour."

May this be the posture of your heart as you embark on this journey of reading through *More Than a Story: New Testament*.

...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

INTRODUCTION

By Jill Nelson

For the past three decades, I have had the great privilege of teaching the Bible to children. I can honestly say that the longer I teach, the more I am absolutely stunned by the grandeur and power of God's written Word. The answer to every pressing question, every longing of the heart, every struggle of the will, and every hope of all-satisfying joy is found in the Bible. Therefore, there is no more pressing need than for our children to become fully acquainted with the Bible. Parents—and every believer—this is your sacred responsibility and privilege. Timothy's mother and grandmother knew this to be the case. Here is what the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Now more than ever, our children need to know, understand, and embrace the truths of Scripture. Toward that end, they also will benefit from solid Bible resources that not only reveal and explain the grand narrative of Scripture but also clearly help children understand the particular parts. Furthermore, they need Bible resources that serve to guide, challenge, and urgently impress upon them the need to wholeheartedly respond to God's Word with faith in Christ, resulting in love, honor, obedience, and worship of Him. I am delighted to say that *More Than a Story* is such a resource. It stands out as a unique discipleship tool for acquainting children with God's holy Word. Here are some distinguishing features that I deeply appreciate about this resource:

A Reverence for God's Holy Word

More Than a Story treats God's Word in the manner it rightly deserves. The clearest evidence of this is the sizable amount of biblical text included in every chapter and the meticulous care given to explain biblical truths clearly and accurately—nothing fanciful, exaggerated, silly, or speculative. Your child will be continuously reminded of the authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency of the Bible. God's Word is truly "more than a story"!

A Comprehensive Introduction to the Breadth and Depth of Scripture

By the time your children finish reading the Old and New Testament volumes of *More Than a Story*, they will have taken a chronological survey of the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. They will have discovered the Bible's many books and literary genres, as well as the major events, people, places, and themes. Additionally, your children

will be exposed to the disciplines of biblical theology, systematic theology, and moral instruction, all grounded in the gospel.

Child-Appropriate without Compromising the Text

There is a great tendency when writing for children to take too much creative license in order to make the resource more “child-friendly”—fun and engaging. Sadly, children are often left with a delightful and memorable storyline but one that leaves out or minimizes essential biblical truths. This resource uses child-appropriate language to creatively convey biblical stories and truths, without compromising the nature or intent of the text.

A Clear Presentation of the Key Doctrines of the Christian Faith

Throughout *More Than a Story*, you will find numerous phrases and statements highlighted in bold font. These serve to develop a systematic theology for your children by highlighting key doctrines essential for the Christian life—doctrines concerning God, creation, man, the Fall, redemption, providence, the church, and many more.

A Serious and Sober Portrayal of the Problem of Sin

One of the unique features of *More Than a Story* is its depiction of the essence, pervasiveness, and problem of sin. Chapter after chapter your children will be confronted by the utter wretchedness of man’s sin against a holy and righteous God. Rather than being distressed by this, consider it a great gift meant to point your children toward utter dependence on Christ. As D. A. Carson has stated:

There can be no agreement as to what salvation is unless there is agreement as to that from which salvation rescues us. The problem and the solution hang together: the one explicates the other. It is impossible to gain a deep grasp of what the cross achieves without plunging into a deep grasp of what sin is; conversely, to augment one’s understanding of the cross is to augment one’s understanding of sin.

To put the matter another way, sin establishes the plot line of the Bible.¹

Grounded in the Gospel

Every chapter in this book is grounded in the glorious reality of the gospel. Every chapter points Christ-ward. However, in saying this, it is important to note that not every chapter in the Old Testament volume of *More Than a Story* overtly mentions Christ’s redeeming work on behalf of sinful man. Rather, the author carefully lets the historical, progressive nature of Scripture unfold. This lays the crucial foundation on which to build true understanding and appreciation for the person and work of Christ. Where warranted, key connections to Christ are emphasized.

Guides Children in How to Study the Bible

Not only do children need to become acquainted with the actual text of Scripture, but they also need to be taught how to study the Bible. *More Than a Story* has been written

1 D.A. Carson, “Sin’s Contemporary Significance,” Chapter 1 of *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, edited by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013), as republished on monergism.com

in an interactive manner that prompts children to observe and ask specific questions of a text in order to discover the meaning. This type of interaction not only encourages children to be eagerly and actively engaged, but it also develops critical thinking skills that will serve a lifetime of biblical study as they grow and mature.

Addresses the Mind, Heart, and Will

It isn't enough for a child to simply *know* the Bible—although that is the first step in the life of faith. God's Word must also be embraced by the heart and acted upon by the will. *More Than a Story* keeps all three realities in mind. Woven throughout every chapter are questions guiding your children to respond to what they read: How does God want me to respond? What should my heart feel and desire? What does God want me to think, be, and do?

Inspires Worship of God, for the Glory of God

Psalm 86 gives a beautiful summary of what biblical teaching is meant to inspire, fuel, and produce.

*⁹All the nations you have made shall come
and worship before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.*

*¹⁰For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.*

*¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth;
unite my heart to fear your name.*

*¹²I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.*

More Than a Story has been written with this glorious, God-centered goal in mind. Every chapter clearly and readily shines forth the incomparable greatness and worth of God, inspiring children to eagerly and whole-heartedly worship Him as their greatest treasure and delight!

In conclusion, *More Than a Story* is a wonderfully engaging discipleship tool for parents, grandparents, teachers, and anyone else who cares for the faith of the next generations. But bear in mind that it is also a serious tool, one conveying weighty truths that require our utmost attention. Will it be worth the added effort? Consider this thought and exhortation from John Piper:

The issue of earning a living is not nearly so important as whether the next generation has direct access to the meaning of the Word of God. We need an education that puts the highest premium under God on knowing the meaning of God's Book, and growing in the abilities that will unlock its riches for a lifetime...Lord, let us not fail the next generation!²

² John Piper, "A Compelling Reason for Rigorous Training of the Mind: Thoughts on the Significance of Reading," July 13, 2005, desiringgod.org/articles/a-compelling-reason-for-rigorous-training-of-the-mind

C H A P T E R 1 0 1

LEAVING EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW JESUS

John the Baptist Is Imprisoned; Jesus Calls Fishermen to Be Fishers of Men—Matthew 4:18-20; Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11

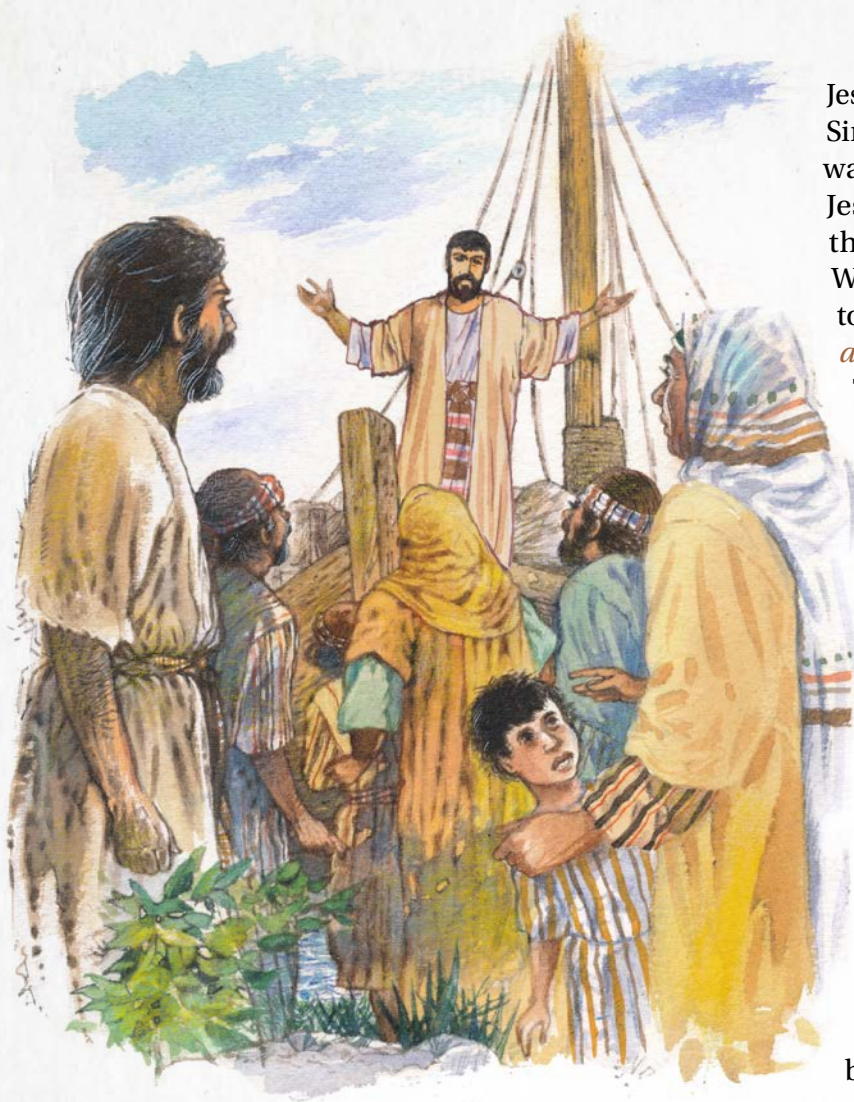
And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:11)

What is repentance? Repentance is admitting your sin, sincerely grieving over your sin, and turning away from it. John the Baptist preached the good news of the coming of the Lamb of God to take away sin. He preached about faith in the Son of God, but he also preached about repentance.

Not everyone liked John's message. One person who definitely did *not* like John's message was Herod, a ruler in Galilee. John was bold in his preaching and sure in the truth of God's Word. He was not afraid to call sin "sin"—and that is what got him in trouble with Herod. Herod had divorced his wife and then had wrongly taken his brother's wife, Herodias, to be his own wife. John would not ignore this, and he told Herod that he had sinned against God. *How should Herod have responded?* Herod should have admitted his sin and repented. *But do you know what he did instead?* He threw John in prison!

But John's message of faith and repentance was still being preached. *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John were already followers of Jesus who had heard Him tell the good news of repentance and faith. But they were also fishermen who spent many hours at night catching fish. Now Jesus was going to show them greater things and call them to follow Him as His special disciples. How did this happen?

Jesus had a big crowd around Him as He was teaching near the lake of Gennesaret (or the Sea of Galilee). The crowd was pushing to get closer to Jesus. There were so many people that those in the back could not see or hear Jesus. But Jesus knew what to do. Jesus saw two empty boats in the water. The fishermen had already been fishing all night and were cleaning and fixing their nets—pulling off weeds and sticks, washing off sand and pebbles, and mending any torn parts.



Jesus got into Simon's boat and asked Simon to push the boat out into the water, not far from shore. This way, Jesus could teach the people, and they all could see and hear Him. When Jesus was done teaching, He told Simon, *"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."*

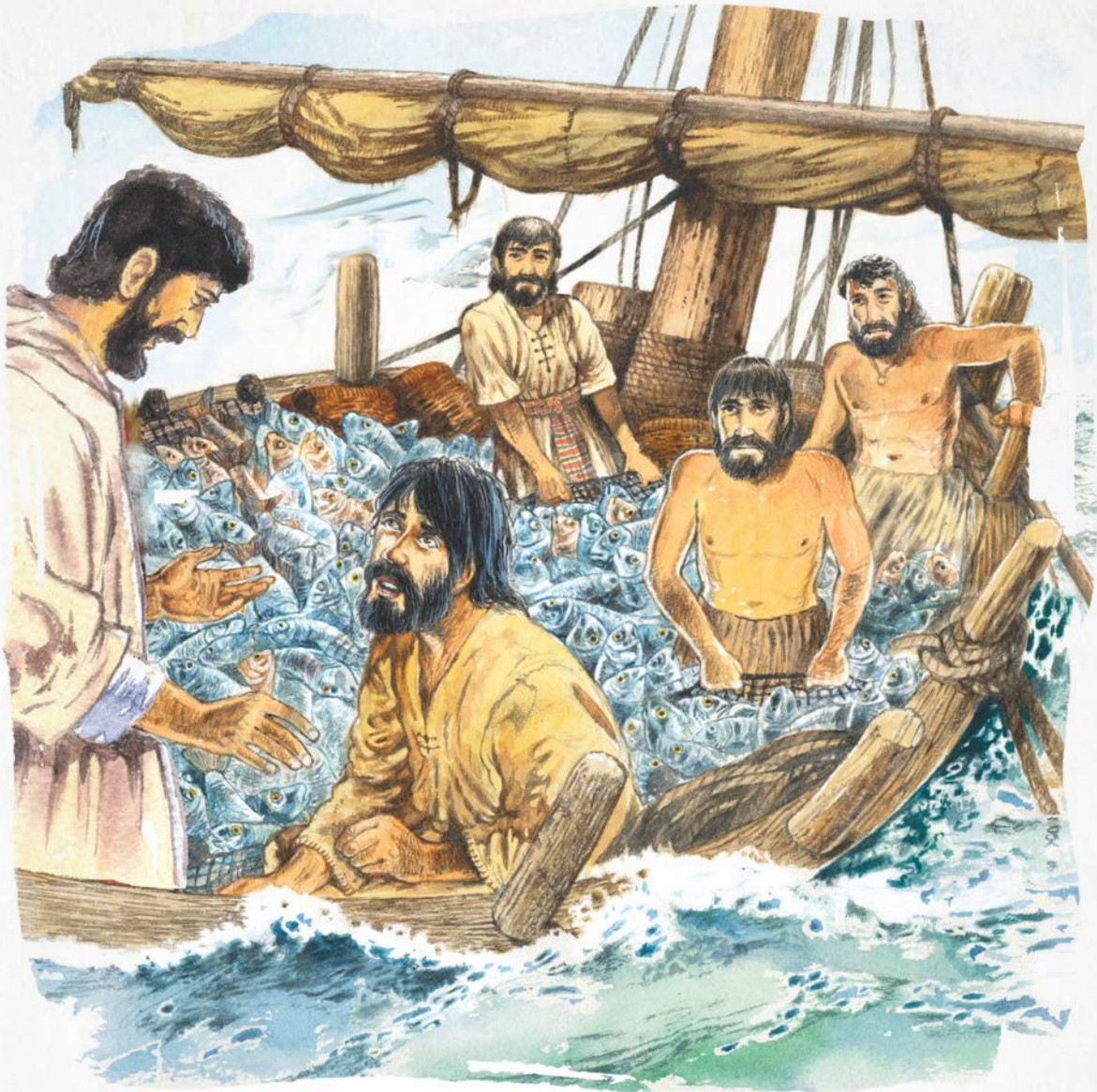
This did not make sense! *Why didn't this make sense?* The best time to fish is at night when the fish are closer to the surface. During the day, fish hide deeper down in the water and are harder to catch. Simon knew this. He was an experienced fisherman. So were his partners Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They all knew that this was not the right time to fish. Besides, they had just cleaned their nets. They wouldn't want to clean them again!

And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!"

These men were tired. They had been fishing all night. They were probably discouraged too as they

had no fish after all their hard work. But Peter respected and followed Jesus, calling Him "Master." He had already seen Jesus heal his mother-in-law of a high fever. Jesus commanded the fever to leave her...and it left! Simon had also seen others healed. He had seen Jesus command Satan's demons to come out of tormented people. Simon saw that Jesus had authority and power over sickness and evil spirits. Simon could trust in his knowledge of fishing, or he could trust Jesus and follow Him. What would Simon do? He answered Jesus, *"But at your word I will let down the nets."* Simon would trust and obey Jesus. He would honor Jesus as Master.

So the fishermen threw their nets back into the water. *And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.* Their nets were full of all kinds of fish—big, little, skinny, fat, brown, green, silver ...so many fish that the nets were starting to break! They filled two boats with fish—so full the boats began to sink! There were fish everywhere! *Why was there such an enormous*



catch of fish? Jesus was not a fisherman, but **Jesus is the Lord and Master** of fish and of all things! The fishermen were amazed at the number of fish in the nets! This didn't just happen! This was a miraculous act! Who was this Jesus?

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Luke 5:8)

Simon Peter recognized who Jesus is—**Jesus is the holy Son of God**. He knew that Jesus was worthy of His worship. Simon, a sinner, was not worthy to be in the presence of Jesus. But **Jesus came to save sinners**. *And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."*

Jesus was calling Simon and his partners to travel with him and preach the good news—the good news that God was bringing salvation to His people. The four hundred years of silence



had been broken. God was making a new covenant with His people; a covenant of **salvation by faith alone**. Instead of throwing out their nets and catching fish, these fishermen would “throw out” the good news of the gospel and “catch” people to believe in Jesus. *How did these simple fishermen respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him?*

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:11)

Simon, Andrew, James, and John left everything—their fishing business, their families, their friends, their homes...they left everything to follow Jesus. What would they see and what would they learn following Jesus? How would they be changed? What cost would they have to pay to follow Jesus? Would they end up in prison like John the Baptist? Would the sacrifices be worth it to follow Jesus? It would take faith to follow Jesus.

You, too, can follow Jesus wholeheartedly. It will not always be easy. There will be sacrifices. Others may make fun of you for doing what God says is right. How important is following Jesus to you? Are you the kind of person who will say, “At your word, I will...”?

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Philippians 3:8a)

THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

What does this chapter tell us about God?

Talk about and apply the **biblical truths** in **bold** text. Make them personal and apply them to what is happening in your family, church, community, or the world today.

John’s boldness to speak the truth caused him to be put in prison. What does this tell you about what John treasured most? Are there times you have been afraid to speak the truth? Explain.

Talk About: *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Philippians 3:8a)*

How could the disciples leave all to follow Jesus? What does this tell you about Jesus? Though Simon knew morning was not the right time to fish, he trusted Jesus enough to obey Him. (“But at your word I will let down the nets.”) Do you trust Jesus enough to follow His Word even when things don’t make sense to you?

Pray: Praise Jesus for His mighty acts. Confess to God that you are a sinful person. Thank Him for sending His Son to be a friend of sinners and to rescue sinners. Ask God to give you a heart that treasures Him more than anything else. Ask Him to give you a heart that is submissive to Him as your Master.

Think About: *What is hard for me to give up for the sake of Christ?*

The OLD TESTAMENT POINTED to CHRIST



Jesus is the second Adam who perfectly kept the Law and clothes those who trust in Him with His perfect righteousness.

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

Jesus is the one way of salvation.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)



Jesus is the Promised Son born through the power of the Holy Spirit, belonging to the line of Abraham, whom God the Father offered as a sacrifice to redeem a people for Himself, a holy nation to bless the world.



"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Jesus is the substitute—a sacrifice who has paid the price for the sins of those who have faith in Him so that we might live.

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29b)



Jesus is the perfect and final prophet through whom God has spoken.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2)



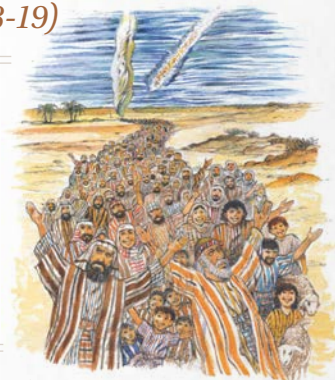
Jesus is the Passover Lamb, who has provided a way for those who believe in Him to have their sins passed over and to be freed from the slavery of sin.

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:7b)

...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Jesus has rescued His people from the slavery of sin and darkness to His Kingdom of freedom and forgiveness.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin. (Colossians 1:13-14)



Jesus is the Perfect Law-Keeper who justifies (declares righteous) those who come to Him by faith.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Galatians 3:23-26)

By His blood on the cross, Jesus replaced the temporary old covenant of the Law and made an eternal new covenant between man and God—a covenant of salvation by faith through grace.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6)



There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:11, 13a, 14)

Jesus is the Bread of Life who satisfies and gives eternal life.

Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” (John 6:32-33)

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)





Jesus is the perfect and permanent High Priest, who has made a single sacrifice for all time and is seated at the right hand of God as the mediator of a better covenant.

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25)

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf... (Hebrews 6:19-20a)

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. (Hebrews 9:24)

Jesus is God dwelling among His people in human form, and we go to Jesus Christ to experience the blessing of God's presence.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)



Jesus is the final Scapegoat who has carried away our sins so that they are remembered no more.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and...the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

Jesus died on the cross to save all those who believe in Him.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)



Jesus is the everlasting King from the line of David who will reign with righteousness forever.



“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:32-33)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.” (Matthew 25:31)

Jesus has made a way for those who trust in Him to enter into the presence of God.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession...Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14, 16)

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, (Hebrews 10:19-20)



CHAPTER 153

DOERS OF THE WORD

Learning to Live in the Wisdom from Above—James

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (James 3:17)

Do you know what book of the Bible talks about a mirror, a fire, deadly poison, and a farmer? If you said the book of James, that is the right answer. James was the brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and he was very wise. He wrote the book of James to pass on the wisdom God had taught him. James wrote this book shortly before he was put to death for his faith.

In a way, you could call James' wisdom "upside down." That's because the wisdom of the Kingdom of God is very different from the wisdom of this world. For example, James tells us to, "**Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.**" Why should we be joyful in troubles? That doesn't make sense—to the world, to those who only see this life on this earth. But if you are in Christ, you have a whole other life, a better life—you have a spiritual life. And this spiritual life makes everything different. There is a very good reason to be joyful in trials—*for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.* Christians care more about strong faith and a heavenly reward than about being comfortable in this life. True wisdom like this comes from God, so James tells us to ask God for wisdom. God is generous and will give wisdom to those who ask in faith, without doubting.

It is easy to say, "be joyful in trials," but it is a whole lot harder to actually do it—to put it into practice. *Hearing* the truth is one thing, but *doing* it is something very different! James had a strong word for us about this—**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.** This is where the mirror comes in. A person who only hears the word is like a man who looks in the mirror...and then walks away and forgets what he looks like. He sees, but the seeing doesn't do him any good. He isn't changed at all. He has the same attitudes,



heart, and actions as the world does. *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.* The person who obeys God's Word and follows the way of Christ will receive great blessing and joy.

The upside-down wisdom of James tells us not to treat people who are rich better than other people. We are to treat all people with honor and respect. This is loving your neighbor as yourself. Sometimes people who are not smart or good at sports, or who have a disability, or who wear out-of-style clothes aren't treated kindly by others. But this is not the way of Christ. Jesus treated lepers, Samaritans, and all people with kindness. *Are you kind to those who are different from you?* True Christians care for the poor. If someone is in need and we only say, "I hope things are okay. Go in peace," without *doing* something to help, we are not helping. ***So faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.***

What does James say about a fire? How does a great forest fire start? Sometimes it is started by a campfire or a bolt of lightning. But James talks about a great forest fire started by...the tongue! The tongue is small, but it can cause great damage—just as a forest fire does. We can tame all kinds of animals, but we cannot tame or control the tongue. *It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.* The tongue is very small but causes great problems. It spreads gossip, lies, arguments, and hurtful words. James tells us this shouldn't be!



Our tongues show what is in our hearts. The worldly heart is full of “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition”—fighting with others to get the best, and only thinking about yourself. It is wanting attention or glory. This is earthly wisdom. It is unspiritual and even demonic! *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* The person who has true upside-down Kingdom wisdom and understanding will be a doer of true good works. When you truly love your neighbor as yourself, bitter jealousy and selfish ambition will not control your life, but you will be guided by Christ-like humility, kindness, and generosity. *What kind of wisdom do you want to guide you—earthly wisdom or the wisdom from above?*

Do you know what causes fights? It isn't that another person makes you angry. **Our actions come from what is in our hearts.**

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:1-4)

Our desires control our hearts. Everyday there are battles in our hearts—battles over what will rule our hearts and our behavior. Will we let God rule, or will we let our desires grow out of control and rule our hearts? We will either love God and His Kingdom, or we will love our own little kingdom of self. Whenever we let something else rule our hearts instead of asking God to rule our hearts, we are loving the world and making ourselves an enemy of God. True wisdom is submitting to God—obeying Him and asking Him to rule our lives. It is recognizing that we need God's help. ***God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*** *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*





James reminds us that we are “double-minded.” We say one thing but do another. We are hearers of the Word—knowing what is right, pure, and good—but we so often are not doers of the Word. What we say doesn’t always match how we act. But God wants to make us “perfect.” James does not mean that we are without sin. Perfect means whole—making our actions match what we believe. We become “whole” by recognizing that we need to be purified. We need God’s help. We need to depend on Him each day to match our actions with our words—to do what is right, not just know what is right.

So how do we learn this humility? James gives us an example of pride that is surprising.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

Our pride makes us think we are in charge. But James reminds us that we are not in control—God is in control of all things. Living our lives understanding that God is at the center of all things makes us realize that His Kingdom is more important than ours. Everything we have comes from God, who owns all things. *Every good and perfect gift comes from above.* Life is not about us and our plans. God rules and His Kingdom purposes will come about. Until Jesus returns, we must wait patiently, as hearers *and doers* of the word. *Be patient, therefore,*

brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.

If you are a follower of Christ, you are learning the wisdom from above. You are learning to be “perfect” or whole so that your words and your actions match each other. Will you humbly ask God to help you today?

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22)

THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

What does this chapter tell us about God?

Talk about and apply the **biblical truths** in **bold** text. Make them personal and apply them to what is happening in your family, church, community, or the world today.

Explain what the wisdom from above looks like in different situations.

Talk About: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22)*

What is in your heart when you argue or fight with others? What is it that you want most at that moment? How is that not showing wisdom from above? (Think of a recent fight you had and examine your heart.)

Pray: Praise God for being holy, gentle, understanding, merciful, and gracious. Ask Him to give you the wisdom from above. Confess worldly wisdom and ask God for forgiveness. Thank God for patiently working in your heart.

Think About: *Am I humble? Do I depend on God to give me wisdom from above? How can I grow in “upside-down” Kingdom wisdom?*

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

—Hebrews 1:1-2

The glorious account of the birth of God's Son and the sobering account of Jesus' death on the cross; bread and fish multiplied to feed 5,000 and living water offered to a Samaritan woman; Jesus preaching openly and the Pharisees plotting secretly; a crowd singing praises in the streets and an angry mob calling for crucifixion; a blind man receives his sight and a persecutor of the church is blinded by light; an apostle is freed from prison and another is put in chains—the pages of this book are filled with stories from the Bible, all of them absolutely and eternally true, telling one grand story. More than a storybook, this book displays Christ's manifold character as well as His glorious deeds, righteous commands, sure promises, severe warnings, and gracious plan of redemption.

More Than a Story takes children on a chronological journey through the Bible, exploring both the breadth and depth of Scripture. Key doctrines of the Christian faith are emphasized and clearly explained, all leading to the glorious realities of the gospel. Actual texts of Scripture are woven into each chapter, exposing children to the variety of literary genres, events, people, places, and themes of the Bible. Written in an interactive style, it enables parents and children to engage in conversations addressing the mind, heart, and will, encouraging children to “set their hope in God” (Psalm 78:7).

Above all, *More Than a Story* was written to
inspire the worship of God for the glory of God!

*All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you,
O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do
wondrous things; you alone are God. —Psalm 86:9-10*

Sally Michael is a co-founder of Truth78 and has authored curricula and books marked by a passion for developing God-centered resources for the spiritual development of children. For 16 years, Sally served as minister for children at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota under the leadership of John Piper and of her husband, David. Sally and David live in Indianapolis, Indiana, where they continue to spread a passion for the discipleship of the next generations through the ministry of Truth78. They enjoy spending time with their daughter Kristi, daughter Amy and her husband Gary, and three grandchildren.

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