THE GUIDE OF LIFE

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Introduction

The story is told of a person driving through the back country in a certain place, completely lost. He stopped to ask a man alongside of the road for directions. “How,” he asked, “Can I get to ____ from here?”

Answer: “I don’t know.”

How far is ____ from here?”

Answer: “I don’t know.”

“Is there a store near here where I can buy a map?”

Answer: “I don’t know.”

Frustrated, the traveler shot back, “You don’t know much do you?”

Answer: “No, but I ain’t lost!”

The Bible is the road map that keeps any human being who will read and follow it from getting lost in the maze of confusion and moral disarray of daily existence. Like the man in the story, you may feel you do not know much, but if you know the Bible, you will not be lost!

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:10, 11).

I. The Value of the Bible

“There is a book,” wrote the Spanish philosopher Donoso Cortés in 1849, . . . whither have gone to drink her divine inspiration all the great poets of . . . the world; in which they learned the secret of how to lift up hearts and souls in superhuman and mysterious harmonies. That book is the Bible, the book par excellence. Because in the Bible are recorded the annals of heaven, earth, and the human race. In it, as within Divinity Itself, is contained what was, what is and what will be. In its opening pages is found the beginnings of history and all things; and in its closing pages the end of history and all things.”

“The Bible,” wrote G. W. McPherson, “contains the mind of God, the state of man, the doom of the impenitent, and the eternal happiness of believers in Christ. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts binding, its histories true, its decisions immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you. It is the Christian’s charter. Christ is its subject, our good is its design, and the glory of God is its end.”

Ellen G White writes that “as a means of intellectual training, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or all other books combined. The greatness of its themes, the dignified simplicity of its utterances, the beauty of its imagery, quicken and uplift the thoughts as nothing else can. No other study can impart such mental power as does the effort to grasp the stupendous truths of revelation. The mind thus brought in contact with the thoughts of the Infinite cannot but expand and strengthen.”

The Bible, she adds, “a chart or guidebook to the human family to show them the way to heaven.”
A. The Bible is an agent of change.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7).

Many great ideas, philosophies, and religious theories are often based on designs for changing humanity for the better, but they actually end up making things worse. The Bible points us to Jesus Christ, our Creator and Redeemer, and in Him we have been given wonderful life-changing promises that really work.

By studying the Bible, a person becomes acquainted with Jesus, who is Himself the Truth, and who has the creative, redemptive, and healing power to change us. There is no question that God’s Word can change our lives. Scripture pours out a flood of light on us, pushing back spiritual darkness and revealing to the world the truth about a loving, powerful God who seeks to transform the lives of all who come to Him in faith. Millions of people can testify to the power of the Word of God and what it has done in their lives. All who surrender themselves in faith and obedience to the God revealed in the Bible will experience for themselves just what a dramatic change can be wrought, even in the worst of sinners.

B. The Bible is the “Word of the Lord.”

The Bible is often called “The Word of the Lord.”

1. James 1:21 says that the Word of the Lord is “planted” in us.
2. Hebrews 4:12 says it is “living and active.”
3. Titus 1:9 tells us that it is “trustworthy.”
5. Hebrews 1:3 affirms that it “sustains all things” (NRSV).

All these characteristics make the Bible a positive and valuable agent of change in our lives. For these things to happen in our everyday lives, of course, the Bible also communicates some things we must do with the Word of the Lord.

C. Four things we must do with the “Word of the Lord.”

1. We have to hear it (Rom. 10:17).
2. We have to believe it (John 2:22).
3. We have to study it (Ps. 119:11) for it to be effective.
4. We have to obey it (1 Sam. 15:22).

This kind of dedication to the Word of the Lord satisfies the longings of the heart (Ps. 119:103).

II. How the Bible Guides Us

We noted that the Bible is actually a guide book or map that gives us direction in life. How does this happen?

Christianity is a revealed religion. It did not originate because someone set out to begin a new religion. It did not begin because someone was dissatisfied with the church to which he or she belonged. Rather, God revealed Himself to the human race in the book we call the Bible. The authors of the Bible acted as God’s agents, and recorded for all people and all time what the apostle Paul calls “the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2 NKJV). This book reveals God’s benevolent acts throughout human history, His character, and His greatest revelation, the person of Jesus. By revealing Himself in a person, and in written form, God made it possible for us to know him in a personal way.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).
This text points out the basic purposes of the Bible:

1. Teaching. The Scriptures are the primary source from which we get our information about God, the plan of salvation, and our doctrinal beliefs.
2. Rebuking. The Bible is the source of spiritual “rebuke.” Whatever categories of “rebuke” the church uses must come from the Bible. They cannot be artificially invented by anyone else and then applied to people.
3. Correcting and training in righteousness. Whatever we know about “righteousness” comes from the Bible. It is designed to keep us spiritually on track.

A. The Bible is a source of wisdom.

We are all confronted with choices, with decisions that must be made. As we recognize, wrong choices are too often made. How often, too, our wrong choices bring pain and suffering upon ourselves and others. “Those who study the Bible, counsel with God, and rely upon Christ,” writes Ellen G. White, “will be enabled to act wisely at all times and under all circumstances. Good principles will be illustrated in actual life.” That’s an amazing statement! In the Bible we can find principles that can give us the wisdom we need to make the right decisions, particularly on moral issues.

Look up in your Bible Proverbs 3:13-16. This is the kind of wisdom that makes a difference. It is this kind of wisdom that comes from the Word of God. Think for a minute about some wrong choice you have made. What might have happened if biblical wisdom had been applied in making that choice?

B. Following biblical principles

It’s one thing to read about biblical principles; it’s another to follow them. As the Psalmist said: “In keeping them there is great reward” (Ps. 19:11). The wisdom found in the Bible is useless unless applied. There are many people who know biblical principles, but act contrary to them. As Christians we need not only to know what the Bible says; we need to obey what it says. Only then can we truly have the wisdom available to us through God’s Word. A wise person isn’t someone who simply has head knowledge or can recite Bible texts. A wise person is someone who acts upon the truths given to us in Scripture.

A Christian soldier once came upon another soldier digging a ditch, a common activity in the military. The sergeant in charge said to the Christian, “That guy down there knows the Bible just as well as you do. Ask him something.” The soldier in the ditch proceeded to repeat 1 Corinthians 13 word for word, not a single syllable out of place! The Christian had to admit he couldn’t do that. “Yes,” added the sergeant, “but I have never heard a Bible-quoting guy who can also cuss like that guy digging the ditch!” Knowing Bible words doesn’t take the place of biblical wisdom and application.

The core text we would all do well to memorize is Psalm 119:11: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

The Bible shows some specific attitudes and characteristics of a good worker, which includes good use of time (Matt. 25:14-28), diligence (Prov. 12:24), integrity, respect for legitimate authority (Eph. 6:5, 6), and honesty in all his or her dealings, whether as an employee or as an employer (Prov. 11:1).

Let’s assume that you are in a leadership position of some kind. What makes a leader wise? Sometimes, even we Christians who rise to a level of leadership end up serving ourselves without ever realizing it. The Bible gives examples of unselfish and successful leaders such as Moses; as well as dangerous and immoral ones, such as King Herod. Matthew 20: 25-27 is a core
text that points us to biblical leadership principles. If all leaders in the past 2,000 years had followed the leadership style of Jesus, how different human history would have been!

The Bible contains the principles we need to know and follow to make the right decisions. Ellen G White makes two key statements about this point:

- “The Bible contains all the principles that men need to understand in order to be fitted either for this life or for the life to come. And these principles may be understood by all.”

- “Those who study the Bible, counsel with God, and rely upon Christ will be enabled to act wisely at all times and under all circumstances. Good principles will be illustrated in actual life.”

C. The Bible and personal experience.

“We think this divine character of the Book shows not only the depth of the thoughts that the authors gave us, or the majesty of the truths recorded” writes Marcelo Fayard, “there is something else to keep in mind, namely the fruits produced in the lives of those who allow their conduct to be governed by them. These fruits prove not only the goodness of the Scriptures, but that they are the only source of goodness there is in our world, and they constitute the instrument which God uses to regenerate human hearts.”

Though a Bible is a physical object that you can hold in your hands, it is not a systematically organized textbook. It contains all kinds of word images, parables, figures of speech, stories, experiences, and admonitions. All of these things have to be interpreted. The Bible writers used expressions current in their times, talked about contemporary events, and often used parables and stories relevant to their hearers, but sometimes strange to our ears. Some people feel that because this is so, personal experience is the real guide in the Christian life. They often feel that their own experience is superior to the objective facts of Scripture. The words “I feel,” or “I think,” often express the underlying authority in their lives.

“Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete”’ (Luke 6:46-49).

What this parable tells us is that personal experience must be governed by the express Word of God. There are certain non-negotiable truths in Scripture that are objective requirements of the Lord and not subject to anyone’s opinions, feelings, likes, or dislikes. That is not to say that a person’s opinion or rational processes are not valid resources for the study of the Bible. What it means is that the final authority for decision-making in the Christian life must be the Scriptures, not a person’s own opinion.

III. The Authority of the Bible

A. Who is in charge here?

The Bible does more than just suggest the best way to get to heaven. It is the authoritative road map that shows the only way to get there.

When we are dealing with the Bible, we are dealing with the authoritative Word of God. "Authority" means different things to different people. To some, a person in “authority” must be obeyed to the letter of the law. To others, “authority” means anyone “above” on the ladder of
hierarchy. To yet other people, “authority” means that whoever is talking knows what they are talking about—they are an authority on a certain subject.

B. How biblical authority works.

In the Bible, God is not just making suggestions to the human race. A person cannot pick and choose what he or she likes or doesn’t like in God’s Word. In the Bible, God is telling us what to believe and how to behave. He can do that because He has what is called “imperial” authority. Since He is the author of truth, whatever He says about truth is unquestionable. The truth in the Bible can be studied and always understood better, but it is unquestionably correct. Therefore, whatever is revealed in the Bible is authoritative.

Let’s examine what three key biblical writers say about biblical authority and then look at three biblical affirmations:

● Jeremiah. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah wrote: “The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you’” (Jer. 1:4, 7).

● Paul. The apostle Paul made this point very clear: “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command” (1 Cor. 14:37).


Three general biblical affirmations of the authority of the Word of God: “The word of the Lord is flawless” (Ps. 18:30); “the word of the Lord is right and true” (33:4); “the word of the Lord stands forever” (1 Pet. 1:25).

IV. The Influence of the Word of God

Though it may sometimes seem otherwise, the Bible has had, and still has an enormous worldwide influence, both in individual lives and on society in general.

“The Bible,” wrote Ellen G White, “unfolds truth with a simplicity and an adaptation to the needs and longings of the human heart that has astonished and charmed the most highly cultivated minds, while to the humble and uncultured also it makes plain the way of life.”

“The Bible is quoted more often than any other piece of literature in history and has had more influence on our language, culture, and laws than any other book or idea ever published.”

“Historically, when true Christianity came to any region, those who were practicing Christ’s commands would began to reach out to help the poor, the oppressed, the sick, and needy. Most of our present day hospitals, charity centers, orphanages and rescue missions were all founded by Christians in keeping with the Biblical commands of Christ to demonstrate His love to a needy world. God has always been interested in helping the weak, the feeble and afflicted. Ungodly societies destroy their weak, helpless and burdensome members.”

“In 1809, several believers gathered in lower Manhattan, New York, to discuss the city’s spiritual needs. Among them were community pillars including Henry Rutgers (Rutgers University) and William Colgate (Colgate Palmolive Corp). They formed the New York Bible Society, later renamed International Bible Society, and now Biblica.

“[Its] Bible outreach soon spread as far and rapidly as the young nation itself through outreach to mariners, soldiers, and pioneers heading west. And in 1810, the fledgling society funded its first translation, William Carey’s Bengali Bible translation in India.

“Today, Biblica works in 55 countries in six regions of the world. Our global ministry continues to impact various groups such as children, at-risk teens, the unreached, disaster survivors, prisoners, and refugees.
“Biblica has translated, published, and provided more than 650 million Bibles and biblical resources to bring the good news of God’s love and mercy to people worldwide.”

This is just one illustration of the tremendous influence the Bible has around the world.

Conclusion

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is very clear in its belief about the value and authority of the Bible. Fundamental Belief No. 1 says: “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”

Feeling lost and disoriented in confusing and apparently disoriented surroundings? Pick up the Divine Road Map called the Bible. Study it and use it as your Guide of Life. It will lead you to the Heavenly Land at the end of life’s road.

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1 Unless noted otherwise, all scriptural references in this sermon are from The New International Version of the Bible.
2 Education, p. 124.
3 Selected Messages, p. 15.
4 Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 43.
5 Education, p. 123.
6 Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 43.
8 Education, p. 170.