

Sanctify them by the truth,
your word is truth.

2 PETER

Scripture is inspired by God
correcting, for training in
complete, equipped for e-

from burdening you in any way
ing of mine will not be stopped in the region
don't love you? God knows I do!
But I will continue to do what I am doing
only to those who want to be regarded as
about. For such people are false apostles
themselves are spokes of Christ. As
well as an agent of light. So it is
ones themselves as servants
to their works.

PAUL'S OFFERINGS
X repeat letters

in the presence of his disciples that
are written so that you may believe that
and that by believing you may have life

in this world and in the world to come.

and that by believing you may have life

in this world and in the world to come.

EASE INTO THE BIBLE

How to Wade
into the Water
of God's Word
with Confidence

JEAN WILUND

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To Larry

Since the moment Steve, the *Harcombe Preacher*,
pronounced us “man and wife,” you’ve prayed for me,
cared for me, protected me, and loved me well.

And you’ve loved God and His Word more every day.
This has made all the difference.

I love you to infinity plus one!

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MY HOPE FOR YOU— BIG WAVE BIBLE CONFIDENCE

AS FORTY-FOOT WAVES SURGED into Waimea Bay on the North Shore of Oahu, forty surfers charged toward them.¹ The 2023 Eddie Aikau Big Wave Invitational drew surfers from around the world to ride what few dared.

These forty surfers were either insane or confident.

Assuming they're all of sound mind, how do big wave surfers gain the confidence to take on 40-foot walls of crushing water? The same way we become confident in surfing the heights and depths of the Bible. They ease into it. They wade in.

Big wave surfers first learn the basics: how waves react to the wind, reefs, and tides. The most effective methods to maneuver a bottom turn, cut back, and carve. The intricacies of longboards, shortboards, and eventually a gun surfboard.

In time, these men and women master barrels and popping up on the face of a towering wave with confidence and joy. Whatever intimidation they feel the first time they

paddle out ultimately gives way to exhilaration as they discover the excitement of big wave surfing.

They're hooked.

As we ease into the Bible, we wade into the basics. How the 1,189 chapters and 66 books fit together to form one glorious, life-giving story. The most effective methods for reading and studying the Bible for transformation. The intricacies of the Bible's organization, genre, and translations.

In time, the Bible eventually masters those who trust in and follow Christ and fills us with confidence and joy. Whatever intimidation we feel the first time we open this massive book ultimately gives way to exhilaration as we discover more and more the greatness of our God and His Word.

We're hooked—and transformed.

STUDYING *EASE INTO THE BIBLE* WITH A GROUP

IF YOU'D LIKE TO study *Ease into the Bible* with a group, you can download a free Group Bible Study Guide on my website: JeanWilund.com.

Under the *Ease into the Bible* tab, you'll find group discussion questions and other resources to help you and your group get the most out of this book.

CHAPTER 1

THE BIBLE IS LIKE RHUBARB

THE BIBLE IS A bit like rhubarb. Until we understand it, we're not sure what to do with it.

Rhubarb is a reddish-pink, celery-type vegetable, but we don't treat it as a vegetable. We sweeten it to the level of fruit and serve it as a treat. It tastes uniquely delicious, if we can get past its fibers that look like someone stirred hair into our dessert or jam.

The first time I encountered rhubarb, my husband and his siblings were shoving each other aside to snag jars of their mom's bright-pink jam. I decided then that either rhubarb makes the best preserves, or I'd married into a strange family.

I took a cautious, but hopeful, bite.

Once I tasted and saw that rhubarb is everything they'd promised, I was changed. I became a rhubarb lover, hairs and all.

The Bible—Hairs and All

The Bible is a book, but we don't treat it like other books. For one thing, we don't know whether to read it from the beginning or jump around within its 1,189 chapters and 66 books.

It's full of stories, but it's not a novel. It tells the history of God's works and plans for humankind, but it's more than a history book.

It contains so many different literary genres, it may actually cover them all. Or at least most of them, including horror. (Ever read the book of Judges?)

The Bible sends the hearts of Christians into heights of rejoicing from Genesis to Revelation, but we could do without the icky parts—the hairy parts. (The laws about bodily fluids alone in Leviticus make my skin crawl.)

But once we taste and see that the Bible is not just good, it's the most glorious book ever written, we're changed. We become Bible lovers, hairs and all.

Taste and See

The Bible changes us, but not because it's the literary wonder that it is. We're changed because it's unique above all other books. It's the very Word of God. It's Christ's unfailing words of eternal life and the power of God to save and transform even the most unwilling heart.

Yet, until we taste and see for ourselves, the Bible sits on our shelf as if it were any other book.

My husband's college roommate never tasted his mom's rhubarb jam. While Larry feasted, his roommate missed out simply because he didn't like the way rhubarb looked. He refused to try it.

Despite the Bible being the best-selling book of all time, many hesitate to taste of it. We may display a Bible on our bookshelf with its gilded pages and decorative cover, but its vast size intimidates us. It's not a quick read. The ancient cultures and idioms confuse the casual reader. Some of the scary parts terrify us because they carry eternal significance.

But since you're reading this, I assume you're curious enough about the Bible that you're at least cautiously hopeful. Whether you just bought your first Bible, or you own a collection, my prayer is that this little book will instill you with confidence that you can taste and see that the Bible is far better than rhubarb—and any other book in history. That you will sit down each day with God's Word, eager for another taste until you've devoured it all, and find that you are changed.

The instruction of the LORD is perfect,
renewing one's life;
the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy,
making the inexperienced wise.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
making the heart glad;
the command of the LORD is radiant,
making the eyes light up.
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;

the ordinances of the LORD are reliable
and altogether righteous.

They are more desirable than gold—
than an abundance of pure gold;
and sweeter than honey
dripping from a honeycomb.

In addition, your servant is warned by
them, and in keeping them there is
an abundant reward. (Ps. 19:7–11)

CHAPTER 2

THE OVERARCHING STORY (AND MAIN POINT) OF THE BIBLE

THE BIBLE IS ONE grand and true story.

All grand stories have a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning sets the stage and introduces the crisis. The middle raises the stakes and reveals how the hero ultimately saves the day. Happy endings bring the longed-for resolution and rest.

True stories with happy endings are the best.

So are true heroes.

Jesus is the greatest and truest hero. His unparalleled story is not a work of fiction or fantasy. It's historical (and future) fact. Christ's true story is the *gospel* told from Genesis to Revelation.

The Gospel Story

The original Greek word for *gospel* (*euangelion*) means “good news” or “good message.” The gospel of Jesus Christ

is the message of salvation, which makes the good news the best news because the bad news is devastating.

No matter how many times I read the Bible, my heart races during the bad news sections like it does when I read retellings of the *Titanic*. Maybe this time, the ship won't sink. Maybe this time, Adam and Eve won't plunge the world into sin. Maybe this time the crowd won't look at their Savior and shout, "Crucify Him!"

But the gospel story remains the same—shocking, gripping, and dire.

And glorious.

It's glorious because just as the beginning and middle never change, neither will the end. To understand the ending, though, we first need to understand the beginning.

The Beginning

Before the beginning of time, there's always been God. And nothing else. Only God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

To help us understand what our finite minds can't fully grasp, scholars call this divine three-in-one being the *Trinity* (also sometimes called the *Godhead*). Three distinct Persons who share one divine and perfect nature.

From the first verse of the Bible, God introduced the truth of His triune nature by using the Hebrew plural word for God—*Elohim*.

In the beginning God [Elohim] created
the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)

In other words, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the heavens and the earth together. But why? Given this triune nature of our God, it's a curious thing that the Trinity would want to create other beings at all. After all, since eternity past, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed together in perfect unity, holiness, and relational fullness. Perfect contentment and love. They've never experienced a need because they've never experienced a lack. They can't. Such is the nature of being perfect. Of being God.

Since the triune Godhead clearly didn't create us out of need, why then, were we created? For two exciting reasons:

First, our three-in-one God created us, not because He needs us, but because He wants us—even knowing everything we'd ever do, including bring sin into the world and cost Jesus His blood on the cross. God made us in His image and likeness—or more accurately, as God says in Genesis 1:26 when referring to His triune nature, “in *our* image”—all for His glory and pleasure.¹

Second, we were created “for good works” (Eph. 2:10), or as Christ said, to produce “much fruit” (John 15:5). God created us to serve as rulers over the earth, guardians of His creation, and to multiply image-bearing worshippers across the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28).

As image-bearers (likenesses) of God, we're thinking, reasoning, and emotional beings with a will. On top of this, we're capable of being merciful, good, patient, and so on. These shared attributes of God give us the unique ability to know and worship Him and to reflect certain aspects of His nature to a watching world.

Unfortunately, because of the bad news, our expressions of God's perfect attributes are imperfect. While God can never change (He's immutable), we change by the second. ("I love you! I hate you!" "I'm so full, I can't eat another bite. Oh, look! Brownies.") Like God, we can offer grace, mercy, and forgiveness and experience love, joy, and peace, but in us, these are often fleeting.

Like liquid gold slipping through our fingers, we struggle to hold onto God's shared attributes. To faithfully feel and demonstrate them. But oh, how we can hold onto anger. God's wrath is always righteous anger over sin, whereas ours is frequently baseless tantrums.

Our sin and God's righteous anger bring us to the devastating conflict in the gospel story. To the crisis. To the bad news.

The Bad News

When God created the heavens and the earth, He also created angels and the first man and woman.² All good news until sin entered the picture.

Sin is anything that causes us to rebel against God and His commands. It's choosing our way and our rule over His.

As the Bible tells us, the sin of pride rose in one of the greatest angel's heart. The angel rebelled against God's rule and coerced many of the others to rebel with him. Their coup failed, and God cast them out of heaven.³

The Bible calls the leader of the fallen angels *Satan*, which means adversary.⁴ He remains the adversary against

all God loves and all who love God, beginning with Adam and Eve.

God placed Adam and Eve in the garden to rule over the earth. He gave them the fruit of every tree to eat—except the fruit from one tree. God said if they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die. Not break out in a rash—die.⁵

Through this one “Thou shalt not” Satan found his weapon to destroy God’s most loved creation. He disguised himself as a harmless serpent (I suppose serpents weren’t scary yet!) and slinked up to Eve. While Adam looked on, Satan planted a thorny seed of doubt in her heart about God’s Word and His character.

Satan lied.

He told Eve, “No! You will certainly not die. . . . God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4–5).

Although Adam and Eve lacked nothing, thoughts like, *Is God withholding good from us? Is God a liar?* sprouted in their hearts and spawned discontentment and pride.

We can rule ourselves.

We can determine what is good and what is evil.

We can be like God.

Eve gave into Satan’s temptation of self-rule, rebelled against God, and ate the fruit He’d forbidden. Adam joined her.⁶

They traded God’s benevolent rule for sin’s tyranny. They exchanged friendship with God for submission to Satan.

While Satan had lied, he was right about one thing. Adam and Eve now knew both good (God) and evil (sin and Satan).⁷

Sin entered the world that day and as God promised, it brought death—instant spiritual death and eventual physical death—to them and their descendants.⁸

Their God-given nature twisted into a sin nature. Thoughts like, *I'll do it just this once. Come on, you know you want to, and That's not fair, God. You're ruining my life!* now ruined their hearts and infected their descendants.

Even today, we're all born spiritually dead, unable by our own power to throw off sin's rule. After all, dead people can't do anything. Without God's intervention, we can't escape sin's horrifying penalty of hell—a real place of eternal torment where all who reject Christ and His salvation experience God's wrath and are cut off from Him forever.⁹

The stakes couldn't be higher.

If God didn't intercede, all hope was lost for Adam and Eve—and for us.

(*Devastating* is too tame of a word to describe their helpless state.)

The good news is that, from before time began, God had already interceded.

(*Good* is too mild of a word to capture the fullness of relief and joy this news brings.)

In eternity past, God had already chosen our Savior—our true Hero.¹⁰

The Hero

With sin's introduction into the world, the dark backdrop was now laid—a backdrop against which God would display His glory (the sum of all His attributes).¹¹

The deeper the darkness, the brighter the Truth shines—and the easier we can see the Light.

As Adam and Eve ate the fruit, Satan thought he'd destroyed them and frustrated God's plan, but no one can frustrate God's plan. No one. Since before the foundation of the world, (before there was even a need), God had already secured Adam and Eve's salvation—and the salvation of all who believe in Jesus—through the gospel.¹²

In the garden that day, God proclaimed the glorious gospel to Satan—while Adam and Eve listened:

“I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Gen. 3:15)

Here in the first gospel declaration, God promised that although hostility would rise between Satan's offspring (all who hate God) and Eve's bloodline (which eventually leads to Jesus), a coming Hero would settle the hostility once and for all by defeating Satan and all the world-altering effects of his deception.

Satan would strike the Hero's heel. (Some interpret this as inciting men to crucify Jesus. Others interpret it as all the ways Satan tried to trip up Jesus in His gospel mission from the day of His birth to the day of His death.) The Hero,

however, would prevail by crushing Satan's head. (Many interpret this as the Hero giving His life on the cross for sin and sealing Satan's eternal doom.)

The winner between the two is clear—after all, it is possible to recover after being struck on the heel, but no one can survive a crushed head.

The Middle

Everything that transpired in the beginning set the stage for the middle of Christ's gospel story and its chilling climax. The Old Testament records dramatic accounts God ordained to display the truths the world needed to know (and still needs to know). He wove into these thirty-nine Old Testament books more than three hundred prophecies about Jesus to prepare the way for His coming with salvation.

The New Testament records Jesus's fulfillment of every prophecy of His first coming including His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. He proved He's the true Messiah—the Savior God promised in Genesis 3:15.

We can't grasp the complete picture of God's plan without both the Old and New Testaments. These sixty-six books bring the harsh truth to light that every human in history (including us) is a sinner who loves our sin and needs a Savior.

This is the wonder of the gospel story—the story of the Bible.

The Climax

Jesus came into the world in human flesh and lived among His creation. He fed, healed, and raised people from the dead. And He forgave their sins.

Then His own people crucified Him.

They murdered their Messiah and Savior.

Why?

Despite the numerous miracles Jesus performed, the Jewish leaders didn't believe He was the Messiah, the Son of God. They saw Jesus as a threat to their power.

The most insidious evil the world has ever known served as the black-velvet backdrop for the greatest rescue and expression of love the world has ever witnessed. On the cruel cross, the holiness, justice, and wrath of God met with His mercy, grace, and love in the sinless One—in Christ. Jesus paid the full penalty for sin on the cross so we don't have to. By His blood He redeemed us for Himself.

After He died, Jesus was buried in a sealed tomb and guarded by Roman soldiers. All hope seemed lost for His followers. But on the third day, Jesus rose to life and walked out of the grave. For the believer, His resurrection reversed the death-curse humanity has suffered under since Genesis 3. Jesus broke sin's power, crushed Satan's head, and destroyed death's sting.¹³ Through His death and resurrection, Christ purchased the gift of eternal life for all who believe in Him.

For the wages of sin is death, **but** the gift of
God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Rom. 6:23, emphasis mine)

The Hinge of History

Everything in the Bible either points forward or backward to the cross. Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is the hinge of history that leads us to the glorious end.

Old Testament believers received salvation by looking forward in faith to Christ's coming.

New Testament believers (that's us) receive salvation by looking back in faith.

The repentant thief who hung next to Christ on the cross didn't have to look forward or backward. He looked straight into Jesus's eyes.

"Jesus," the thief said, "remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

Jesus responded to the thief's clear display of faith: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (v. 43).

Jesus's resurrection flipped the gospel story's seeming trajectory from hopeless despair to unfathomable delight. He is alive forevermore! And so are all who believe in Him.

Forty days after Christ's resurrection, He rose back (ascended) into heaven where He sits and rules at the right hand of God until the time has come for the glorious end.¹⁴

The End

The end of the gospel story is the beginning of forever. Christ described it in vivid color in the book of Revelation.

It's the return of the King when Christ will gather His bride (the church) to Himself, and we'll receive our glorified bodies—our glory-hallelujah-sin-is-dead-forever bodies.

Christ will then judge all who have rejected Him; destroy sin, Satan, and death forever; and usher in His eternal kingdom—a more glorious kingdom than we can imagine.

The end of the gospel story promises the resolution and rest we yearn for now and forever—so long as we have truly believed in Christ. Only in Christ can we find our rest. This is why we need the beginning, middle, and end of the story. It's why we need the whole Bible.

This Is Our Story

Understanding the story of the Bible makes us realize we're not just reading the history of God's people, Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and the beginning of the church. We're reading our story.

We weren't slaves to a cruel Pharaoh in Egypt with Israel in Exodus, but we're slaves to sin today—and sin is the cruellest ruler.

We didn't stand at the foot of Mt. Sinai and promise God we'd obey His every command and then immediately worship a golden statue as if it were God. Nor were we sent into captivity in Assyria or Babylon with the Israelites. But like them, we choose our sin over God and His law as often as we think we can get away with it.

We didn't stand in the crowd before the Roman Governor Pilate as he asked the Jews what he should do with Jesus. We didn't shout, "Crucify Him!" but our sins sent our Savior to the cross as surely as their cries did.

We didn't watch Jesus rise into heaven and return to the Father, but we'll see Him return. And we'll all stand before His throne one day.

Every book in the Bible opens our eyes to the seriousness and destructiveness of sin and our desperate need for a Savior—for a true Hero.

Every chapter displays irrefutable evidence of who Christ is and who we are—and who we aren't (God).

Every verse propels us toward trusting God and believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ. His story is the grandest in history, and He is the truest Hero—and the main point of the Bible.

It's all about Him.

WANT TO READ THE BIBLE BUT NOT SURE HOW? EASE IN.

Ease into the Bible removes the intimidation factor of this sacred but often overwhelming book. It gently leads readers to understand what the Bible is about and teaches them how to read, study, and be transformed by it.

IN THIS BOOK YOU'LL DISCOVER:

- An easy and effective way to read and study the Bible
- The Bible's overarching story and main point
- Why we can trust the Bible
- How the Bible is organized
- Helpful Bible study tools
- How to pick the best Bible translation for you
- What doctrine is and how it's helpful
- Why church matters and how to find a good local church
- Short Christ-focused summaries of each book of the Bible

Ease into the Bible is the perfect introduction for new Christians, those struggling to understand the Bible, and mature believers who want a fuller Bible reading experience. Lighthearted and easy-to-understand explanations engage even the most reluctant readers. If you long to plunge into a lifetime of knowing and loving God through His Word, *Ease into the Bible* is for you.



JEAN WILUND is passionate about encouraging others to pursue a greater understanding of the Bible and a deeper relationship with God. She's a women's ministry speaker, blogger, contributor to ReviveOurHearts.com, and the author of *Embracing Joy: An 8-Week Transformational Bible Study of Habakkuk*. Jean and her husband, Larry, live in South Carolina, and are members of Grace Bible Church, where she serves with the women's ministry.

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