

GARY KENT

Finding **TREASURE**

A Beginner's Guide

**HOLY
BIBLE**



**The Incredible
Journey**

FINDING TREASURE: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Did you make promises to yourself at the beginning of this year? Maybe you decided to get more exercise, or you determined to stop letting people take advantage of your good nature. You might have promised to spend more time with your family and more time reading the Bible. And it's likely that you broke most of those promises.

It doesn't matter when you're reading this, it's not too late to turn broken promises into steps toward success. Reading the Bible is a good place to start. In this book, I'll show you how to stick with a good reading plan, and how to get more out of it. If you do this, I know you will be richly blessed.

George W. Hensley was a man who liked to add a little flair to his preaching. One week, back in the year 1910, he was almost finished preaching on the last chapter of the book of Mark when he came to this passage:

And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mark 16:17, 18).

Mr. Hensley had a real gift for the dramatic. As he finished reading the verses, he paused, waiting until an expectant silence washed over the crowd. The tension in the room built until he suddenly reached into a box on the stage and pulled out a large rattlesnake with his bare hands. Of course, the congregation was absolutely shocked, but their shock was intensified when the preacher told them that unless they handled poisonous snakes, they risked being “doomed to eternal hell.”

In other words, he made the ability to handle poisonous snakes a test of Christian fellowship—the ultimate proof that a person’s faith was genuine. Surprisingly, a lot of people believed him, and the practice of snake handling became very popular for a while, even long after Mr. Hensley himself gave up preaching. People went on handling snakes for the Lord after George Hensley quit preaching to make moonshine,

after he went to jail, after the break-up of his marriage, and even after he died from a nasty snakebite. Today, even though mainstream churches have done their best to distance themselves from the snake handlers, there are still thousands of people in North America who do it. No doubt they also do it in other parts of the world.

Here's how it works: at a snake handler meeting, believers work themselves into a religious frenzy, and then they pass venomous snakes around the room to prove that their faith is strong. Some of them even deliberately drink poison to show their fellow believers that God is with them.

But once in a while, somebody does get hurt. Faithful snake handlers get bitten, and some of them die. The explanation? Well, those who get bitten just don't have enough faith!

For most of us, the practice of snake handling seems a little absurd, but if you ask snake handlers why they do it, they'll use the Bible to show you why.

"Take a look for yourself," they'll say. "It says in Mark 16:18 that you WILL take up serpents, and that's a command! God is actually telling us to do it!"

At first glance, some people might be tempted to think they're right. But when you place this passage of Mark in the context of the rest of the Bible, the argument quickly fades away. In the verse that comes just before it, Jesus makes it clear that He's talking about carrying the gospel to the whole world. Here is the same verse in its context:

And He said to them,

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow

those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mark 16:15-18).

The context makes it clear that Jesus is talking about the work of worldwide evangelism. As the disciples went into the world to share the good news of Christ, they would experience supernatural events that would confirm God's presence with them. If you read the list of miracles that Jesus told them to watch for, you'll quickly recognise that every one of them happened to the disciples. In the book of Acts, Paul cast a demon out of a young lady who was publicly throwing doubt on his ministry. Peter and the disciples found themselves able to preach in languages they had never learned. Peter and John were able to heal a crippled man at

the gate of the temple, and Paul was bitten by a deadly snake on the island of Malta. He lived.

The context of Jesus' words implies that He was talking about what would happen as the disciples ventured out into the world, and not about an ecstatic religious experience that took place behind closed doors.

When you analyse it in the light of God's Word, the practice of snake handling bears a striking resemblance to the second temptation of Christ, where the devil challenged Him to throw Himself off the temple.

...If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge concerning you, In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone' (Matthew 4:6).

That's another great example of scripture being taken out of context. Even the devil himself can quote the Bible, but one of his favourite tricks is to lift it out of its context so that its meaning is either twisted or lost. Read on to find out how Jesus handles him when he pulls the Bible apart to his own advantage. Jesus says:

...It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God' (Matthew 4:7).

In other words, Christians do not throw themselves off high buildings or handle deadly snakes on purpose. Instead, they believe that God will give them victory, by faith, over tough situations as they need it in the work of spreading the gospel. But to throw yourself deliberately into harm's way isn't faith, it's presumption!

George Hensley's theology was wrong, and it was wrong because it was unbalanced. He took a "buffet" approach

to scripture, loading only the things that looked appetising or personally useful onto his theological plate. Anything that didn't fit his personal ideas, like the all-important Biblical context of a verse, he left behind.

That's a really bad approach to studying your Bible. Unfortunately, a lot of people do it. Instead of reading the Bible for what it actually says, they scavenge their way through the verses, looking for little tidbits that will prop up their own philosophy. Millions of people use the Bible like a magic eight ball, or as a garnish for their own opinion, instead of letting God actually speak to them. And while this doesn't always produce dramatic oddities like snake handling, it does lead to a warped theology and some strange ideas about God.

Pastor John MacArthur tells how he watched someone explain the importance of something he called a "life verse," which was supposed to be

the entire basis of his ministry. He said, "My ministry is based entirely on my life verse, Matthew 19:26, '*... but with God all things are possible.*' God gave me that verse," he said, "because I was born in 1926."

I have to admit, it's a pretty nice thought, but it leads to some real problems. What happens if your birth year doesn't have a corresponding passage in the Bible? What if you were born in 1999, for example, and there is no 19th chapter of the Bible that has 99 verses? Does that mean that God doesn't have a special verse for you? Of course not.

In fact, that's what actually happened on the program that Pastor MacArthur was describing. The host got pretty excited and grabbed his Bible so that he could find his own life verse, but he was born in 1934. Matthew 19 only had 30 verses, so he flipped through the Bible until he got to Luke chapter 19

and verse 34, and that verse says, "...*The Lord hath need of him.*"

Well, he got really excited at this point, and said, "Hallelujah! The Lord has need of me!"

And that's when his wife read the all-important context of the verse. "Wait a minute!" she said, "You can't use this verse, because it's talking about a donkey!"

PAY ATTENTION TO CONTEXT

One of the first rules to getting more out of your Bible is to pay attention to context. Far too many people use their Bibles as a quick way to prop up a personal belief, but if all you ever do is wade through the Bible looking for proof texts to establish what you already believe, you're not going to do much growing as a Christian.

Instead, begin to read your Bible carefully and slowly, paying close

attention to the context of the verse you're reading, both the immediate context and the context of the entire Bible. If you approach the scriptures with this kind of honesty, you'll find yourself both learning more, as well as enjoying yourself more.

I know that every year, a lot of well-meaning Christians throw themselves at their Bibles with good intentions of reading all the way through it, and for a few weeks, they do really well. Then they come to books like Leviticus and Numbers; somewhere in the middle of the genealogies and descriptions, they start to lose interest until their conscience gets the better of them a few months later and they start all over again.

Many Christians are painfully aware that their devotional life could be better than it is. It's not that we don't want to study the Bible, it's just that we don't really know how to go about it so it's

both profitable and enjoyable. For the remainder of this book, I'd like to share my own beginner's guide to finding real treasure in the Bible.

1. DON'T TRY TO CONQUER THE WHOLE WORLD AT ONCE

One of the biggest reasons that people give up on studying the Bible is that they try to accomplish far too much in one sitting. They try to plow through ten or twenty chapters of the Bible in one sitting. However, "Rome wasn't built in a day", and neither is a good devotional life.

It's much better to read just a couple of verses and really understand them than to read twenty chapters and not remember a word of them the next day. Take some time to read a verse carefully. Think about what it means to your everyday life. Ask God to show you what He has in mind for your life

in that short little passage that you're reading.

Then try to memorise that verse. In this way, you will be able to put a great deal of meaningful scripture into your memory bank, and you will be able to retrieve it when you need it most. It might be that when you're dealing with a sticky ethical situation at work, a verse you really chewed on and took to heart will suddenly come into your mind. Perhaps when you're reading another section of the Bible, and it's not making much sense, suddenly another passage that you've really understood, will pop into your head and make it all easier to understand.

The trick is to study only what you can realistically handle in a single sitting. Eventually, you'll find that you can handle longer passages in one session.

2. STUDY WITH A DEFINITE PLAN

One of the reasons many of us fail to maintain a serious devotional life is that we don't study the Bible systematically. We're often guilty of "spot-reading," where we flip the Bible open to a random passage. Not only does this keep us from reading the context of the entire Bible, but it also keeps us from developing the kinds of study habits that will help us get the most out of Bible study.

Take a look at the page edges of your Bible: perhaps you might notice an interesting pattern. It may be that you, like many other people, can actually see where your favourite passages are by the parts of the Bible that are most worn. There are other sections where the pages still look brand-new. That's probably a good indication that you've been spot-reading, or that you haven't been reading the whole Bible through systematically.

There are many good Bible reading plans available, and some Bibles even have one in the back pages.

These plans are very beneficial, because they help you keep a balanced perspective on the Word of God, and help you build that all-important sense of Biblical context when you're reading.

3. ALWAYS PRAY BEFORE READING

The words of the Bible are the work of the Holy Spirit, so if you want the greatest benefit from your study, you should invite the One who authored it in the first place to guide you. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:14:

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

If I were reading a secular book, and

I was confused about what the author meant, the best thing I could do is to ask the author the meaning of that particular passage. It makes good sense to begin each Bible reading with a word of prayer, giving thanks for God's instruction and asking His help to understand it. Without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, you will never grasp the Bible's most important spiritual truths.

This explains why some people can read through the entire Bible and never get anything out of it. What's missing is a desire to draw closer to God, and a willingness to sit at His feet and learn. But when you approach the Bible with a humble heart and a desire to hear His voice, you'll be surprised at how much more you will enjoy your devotional life.

4. KEEP IT SIMPLE

It is tempting, in a world saturated with information, to make our Bible study time overly complicated. Far too

often, we pile up our desk with multiple study tools, but this can result in our spending more time reading every book other than the Bible itself.

Now, I have to confess that I have a lot of books in my library. In fact, I buy several new books every week, and if I had the time, I could disappear into my study and literally not emerge for weeks on end. In addition to my library, I have a high-speed internet connection, which means I have an almost unlimited supply of information at my fingertips.

But even when information is good, it can stand in the way of productive Bible study. In 2 Timothy 3:7, Paul describes people who are *"always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."* And there's never been a time in history when that's been more true.

As it stands right now, there are billions of web pages catalogued in the Google

Search engine. Millions of new books are published every year. Satellite television can deliver more digital programming into your home each day than you could possibly hope to watch in a year!

We have more information at our fingertips than we've ever had in the history of the world. And while I believe the technological age is a blessing from God, it can also stand in the way of a quiet moment with the Word of God.

Think about it for a moment. There is such a glut of information in our world that it literally drowns out the voice of the Bible, even in the lives of well-meaning Christians. One of the devil's best strategies has always been to try to drown out a knowledge of God.

A few hundred years ago, an important development signaled the beginning of a new era. The invention of Gutenberg's printing press meant that it was much

more difficult for Satan to keep the Bible out of the hands of ordinary people. Later, with the introduction of universal education, even more people could read God's word for themselves.

But if Satan couldn't keep the Bible out of circulation, maybe he could drown it out with a glut of other information. Check the history books carefully. At the same time that the Great Awakening was causing explosive Christian revival all over the world, there was a sudden upsurge of new ideas. Darwinism, Russellism, Spiritualism, and dozens of other "isms" all appeared at about the same time.

Have you ever wondered why? Is it possible that fallen angels couldn't stop the spread of the scriptures, so they tried to drown it out? Is it possible that we have so much noise and distraction in our world for a reason?

If you want to get more out of your Bible,

try turning everything off for just a few days—and I mean everything. Turn off the TV, the Internet, iTunes, the radio and Netflix. Put away your other books and magazines, just for a few days. If your phone rings or a text message comes through, there's nothing that says you have to answer it.

Now find a quiet place simply to read your Bible, and I'll guarantee you that something amazing will happen. With all the distractions gone, you will begin to hear the voice of God. And that voice will remain with you for the rest of the day.

5. GIVE SOMEONE ELSE A BIBLE STUDY

One of the reasons we don't get much out of Bible study is because we're far too focused on ourselves. That is completely at odds with the basic principles of scripture. In God's universe, life is more about others than it is about self.

I can't think of a better way to plant the truths of the Bible in your mind than to teach them to someone else. When they ask you honest questions, you'll be forced to dig deeper into the Bible. When they challenge you with objections you had never thought of, it will drive you to your knees in prayer, and you'll find yourself growing as a Christian by leaps and bounds.

One of my favourite Christian authors put it like this:

"If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness. You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened, and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation. Encountering opposition and trials will drive you to the Bible and prayer. You will grow in

grace and the knowledge of Christ, and will develop a rich experience.” (Steps to Christ, p. 80)

6. READ OUT LOUD AND TAKE NOTES

Don't forget that the Bible was written to be read out loud. Many of the New Testament books were actually letters to churches that someone would stand up and read. You'll be amazed at the way you notice and remember things when you read it out loud. Then, to get even more out of it, take notes as you read.

Every morning, I turn on my laptop and write a page about what I read that day. This helps me to organise my thoughts and really remember what I read.

There are a lot of things you could do to bring your devotional time to life, but the most important advice I can offer is this: get started now, it is never too late. It's amazing how just an hour a

day in God's Word will keep you growing and keep you from religious fanaticism. It might even keep you from handing out snakes in church!

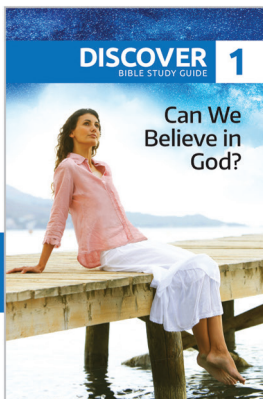
Any time is a good time to make promises to God, and to ask for His blessing as you strive to fulfil them. May you really breathe life into the time you spend in His word.

BIBLE STUDIES

THAT COULD
CHANGE YOUR LIFE

FOREVER!

- God: What is He like?
- If God is good—why is there evil?
- God's dietary plan
- How to Pray
- Steps to Heaven
- Personal Peace
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In this booklet, I'm going to share a few suggestions that I have found to be really helpful in my own devotional life and walk with God. I am certain it will be helpful to you too.



Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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