

Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

Access

Assurance

Faith

Patience

The Bible

Studying

Conclusion

Preface

Comfort in the Scriptures is a work that was more than 30 years in the making.

In January 1986, I was working my way through college as a teacher's assistant at an elementary school. My mother was operating a small daycare in the back room of our home. My father was working at the job he had held for more than 20 years, since before I was born. I had just been awarded a full academic scholarship to complete my undergraduate degree. Life was better than it had ever been before, when my mother had the first in series of strokes that initiated the end of one phase of my life and the beginning of a new era.

My father and I bore the primary responsibility of caring for my mother. As opposed to becoming a full-time college student, I considered dropping out of school entirely so that I could devote more time to looking after my mother. But based on the doctors' original prognoses, my father and I agreed that I should quit my job at the end of the school year and begin my junior year of college as planned.

Then, in September of 1986, the manufacturing company my father worked for reorganized and downsized, forcing him into an early retirement. In slightly more than six months, our three income household had no real income to speak of. The expenses associated with my mother's medical care and the college expenses not covered by my scholarship meant that our household "outgo" far exceeded our income and were greater than any expenditures we had ever had before. It was during this period that I began to constantly and consistently seek comfort in the scriptures.

Growing up in the church, I primarily read and studied the Bible as text were assigned to me. I read my Sunday school lessons before going to church; and I read the passages that were highlighted during the Sunday morning worship services. As I grew older, I used the concordance of the large Bible that decorated the coffee table in our living room to search for information on specific topics. If I had questions about fear or forgiveness, I would search for answers, directions and guidance in the scriptures I found based on the research of those keywords.

Things changed in 1986. Because my mother was sick, my father's health was deteriorating and I was a fulltime college student who needed to make time for studying, I couldn't always attend regular church services. Instead, I did daily devotions, listened to everything I could on gospel radio stations and watched everything I could on Christian television. As specific messages and their key biblical passages touched me in some special way, I would jot down those scriptural references and go back to them when I needed to be encouraged and have my strength renewed. Little did I know that those notes were the beginnings of this book.

Both of my parents died of natural causes in 1989, just a few months after I graduated from college with honors. In 1990, I started my first full-time job as a college graduate and things were looking up. But as an only child, still in my twenties, with little family and few close friends, I still depended on the word of God to get me through difficult days.

When I started working and I had daily access to a computer for the first time in my life, I began to compile and organize the biblical passages that had sustained me during four very difficult years. What started out as a simple list of my favorite scriptures, continuously expanded into pages that followed me from one work place to the next.

In subsequent years, I kept copies of the computer file stored in all of my electronic devices so that I could easily access the scriptures whenever I needed comfort. The list was very private for 20 years or more. But over time, I began to share the file or a hardcopy of the document with friends and associates who were experiencing their own trials and tribulations. As I began to accept my call into ministry, I began to share parts of the document with those I encountered who needed the strength and comfort I find in the word of God.

I first considered publishing my list of favorite scriptures after a variety of people told me that they were encouraged and abundantly blessed by the product of what had been my very personal relationship with God through his inspired word. That realization served as motivation for me to write and publish this book. But it wasn't until after I finally accepted my call to ministry and then graduated from seminary in 2015 that the vision and content for the book became clear to me. Although clothed in some academics, the heart of this book is the compilation of the scriptures I highlighted in my Bible during my private studies, while attending church services, watching Christian television, or just interacting with someone who was supportive and encouraging during those difficult years. January 1986 - September 1990 was the most difficult time in my life. It was during that time that my only comfort was found in the scriptures. It is this comfort that I want to share in these pages.

Introduction

The Bible, in one form or another, is the bestselling, most widely distributed book in the world, according to The Economist Magazine. Translated into more than 300 languages, it is estimated that 100 million Bibles are sold or given away each year. But do millions of people actually read the Bible?

The truth is that many of the Bibles sold are collecting dust in people's homes. Others are only opened on Sunday mornings and then set aside until the next church service. Many more Bibles are in hotels rooms, where patrons pick up TV remotes and room service menus, but few read the scriptures. But why?

There is no short, sweet explanation for why people clearly value the Bible as a spiritual reference book, but do not invest time into reading and studying its content. I suspect that some potential Bible readers are intimidated by the unfamiliar terms, names and the context of the ancient cultures; and some have become dependent on others to read and interpret the text for them. Other people might want to read the Bible, but they don't know where to begin. They get frustrated and impatient reading Genesis and the Old Testament books because they want and need to get to the parts that clearly apply to them today. Still others might not want to read the Bible because they feel that the text has been used by the pious and judgmental to belittle them in some way. Some African Americans have rejected the Bible because scriptures were inappropriately used to justify slavery in the United States. Still others generally believe that the Bible is just a book of lies.

This book attempts to address those concerns and others. It takes readers directly to passages that will liberate, empower, encourage and console them. Reading these passages should whet the appetite for reading and studying more scriptures so that one can begin to know

the entire Bible story, see the big picture and use the content as a road map for a more successful and fulfilling life.

The title, *Comfort in the Scripture*, is based in Romans 15:4, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” The ultimate goal of this book is to direct people back to the original purpose of the scriptures so that readers are comfortable reading the Bible and are able to find hope for their everyday lives in the scriptures. The scriptures should never be spoken in an unpleasant, distasteful manner. Scriptures should not be presented or perceived as offensive weapons; or as an aggressive affront to advance an individual or corporate position.

This book also is written to provide foundational knowledge of the biblical text and provide guidance that will enable individuals to continue studying and learning. It is intended to support the development of discernment so that those who open the Bible and hear scriptures quoted in various settings can rightly divide the word of truth, thereby getting a real understanding of biblical messages for practice and application in their own lives. I begin this journey by offering a layman’s explanation of what the Bible is.

The Bible is a compilation of letters and written reports of actual events and activities supported by historical, archeological and other scientific evidence. The words printed in red were SPOKEN by Jesus and written as direct quotes. This collection of documents were written and agreed upon by a diverse group of people from across the ancient world. Christians, believe that the "selection" and "agreement" of the documents that became scripture by such a diverse group was inspired by God as the best representation of his will for mankind.

Subsequent chapters will go into more detail about what is called the canonization of scriptures, how it was determined that the information we refer to and accept as the Bible was selected and who made the selections.

The majority of the content of this book is taken directly from the New King James Version of the Bible. The scriptures might be very familiar to those who attend church regularly. But the arrangement of the scriptures is intended to encourage everyone to have a relationship with the text – more than head knowledge, grow to have heart knowledge.

Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Psalms 119:11