

Shaking
SCRIPTURE

Mark Manning

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Grasping More of God's Word



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Introduction

I have come to love the Bible. I know that sounds like a cliché that so many pastors have thrown around. But, for me, it has become a wonderful passion that has lasted for over ten years now, without any signs of slowing down.

I think most Christians would also say that they love the Bible. They have been taught through the years that this document is where we turn to discover the truth about God, Jesus Christ, humanity, and salvation. But for many, it seems that their love for the Bible goes only so far as saying it. Very little in their life demonstrates that the Scriptures are an important part of their belief system.

Churches will often have the study of God's Word as a core value in their mission plan. It just sounds good. But many congregations have very little knowledge about the contents of The Book. For example, for many pastors there is a tendency to prefer topical sermon series that tackle subjects they feel more easily apply to their parishioners. *Five Steps to Financial Freedom*, *Ten Lessons on Having a Better Marriage*, and similar themes have replaced verse-by-verse preaching through books of the Bible. This and similar shortcuts have contributed to a widespread ignorance that permeates the clergy and laity alike, and that has led to what I view as a general sense of Biblical illiteracy in Christianity today.

I remember being caught up in the allure of preaching topical sermon series. I believed that the Bible was boring and it needed a little "spicing up" so that my parishioners could grow in their faith in a better way. Little did I know that I was

undermining the value of Scripture by thinking that my cleverness could outdo the magnificent material of those 66 books. Luther aptly described the state I was in when he wrote:

The neglect of Scripture, even by spiritual leaders, is one of the greatest evils in the world. Everything else, arts or literature, is pursued and practiced day and night, and there is no end of labor and effort; but Holy Scripture is neglected as though there were no need of it. Those who condescend to read it want to absorb everything at once. There has never been an art or a book on earth that everyone has so quickly mastered as the Holy Scriptures. But its words are not, as some think, mere literature; they are words of life, intended not for speculation and fancy but for life and action. But why complain? No one pays any attention to our lament. May Christ our Lord help us by His Spirit to love and honor His holy Word with all our hearts. Amen (LW 14:46).

Though this was the state I was in, God had plans for me to rediscover His Word in a way I never thought possible, and to instill within me a passion and drive to learn as much as I can regarding all He has spoken to us.

In 1998, I was privileged to be involved in the launching of a new church called Searchlight Ministries. There were seven of us who envisioned a congregation without the traditional baggage of history that so often stifles creativity and freedom. The very first thing I preached at Searchlight was a topical sermon series. Through the next couple of years, I went back and forth from preaching a topical sermon series to teaching through a book of the Bible. Along the way, I started loving the research and the material I was discovering while

studying Scripture. The words on the pages started coming alive for me like never before. I began to understand what Paul meant when he wrote: **“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”** (Hebrews 4:12).

I started craving the time I set aside to study Scripture. I especially enjoyed learning more about the books of the Old Testament. Like most Christians, I had a general idea of some of the stories within that first section of Scripture, but I had no idea the depth that the Old Testament had.

Things continued to change with regard to my preaching when we chose to go through the book of Genesis. I was doing something that I had vowed never to do. I had been taught that 8-10 weeks is about all that a congregation can handle when it comes to a sermon series. Up until that point, I had stuck mainly to smaller books of the Bible that I could finish in that amount of time. I wasn't sure what I was going to do with a 50-chapter book! When we dove in, it was so wonderful being able to go back to the beginning of Scripture and read some rather familiar material. But as I began this series, I tried covering three chapters a week. I finally had some parishioners come and ask me to slow down. They shared that we were skimming over way too much material, and that they wanted to learn all they could from this important book. I told them that if I slowed down, it might take us a whole *year* to get through Genesis. Their response? *“Who cares how long it takes! We just want to learn Scripture!”* From that point on, I progressed through the book of Genesis much more slowly. It was challenging at times, covering material that is rather sordid in parts, and trying to understand cultures vastly different from our own. But by the

end, I felt rather confident that we had mastered the main concepts and had gotten quite a lot out of our study.

I did a quick poll of the congregation to see what they would like to cover next. Excitement had built up so much by that point that they told me we should continue on into the book of Exodus. From that point on, I have never worried about how long it will take to cover a book, or if the Old Testament has enough material for me to preach on. I trust that God's Word is sufficient and that my calling is to study, learn, and grow as a pastor, and then share my insights the next week with the congregation. During this time, my faith and knowledge have grown tremendously, and I know those who are regular in their attendance can say the same.

During the decade that followed, I had the privilege of studying, in depth, 43% of the Bible. I know there is a long way to go, but I have no plans of slowing down any time soon. I have come to appreciate the language, the description, and the beauty of all the different parts of the Bible.

I pray that *Shaking Scripture* will help you grasp just how exciting the Bible can be, as the stories come to life. Along with that, I hope that your faith will also come alive. The words of Psalm 1:1-3 sum this up perfectly:

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.

May God richly bless you as you study the material in this book, and put what you learn into practice. Together, we can be “Shaking Scripture” and flourishing as followers of God!

A Note about the *For Further Reflection* Section

As I set out on this adventure of *Shaking Scripture*, it became apparent that reflective questions would be a valuable part of the book. Many people want to delve a little deeper and ask a few more questions. Small group leaders are always looking for material that examines Scripture more closely, and would love to have something that they can use with a group right away. This book is also designed for those who are more interested in self-study. We have designed the *For Further Reflection* section to allow it to be used in as many applications as possible. Many people enjoy reading an entire devotion and then going back to answer reflective questions on the material they’ve just read. Others may want to use this in a small group, where the people gathered will start and stop the discussion as they are reading through the devotion. With that in mind, we designed this section to help you.

As you read through the devotions, in the outside margin there are numbered Bible symbols (such as given in the margin here). The number corresponds to a question in the *For Further Reflection* section at the end of the book. If you wish, you can stop your reading at that point and turn to the end to read and answer that question. But if you prefer, you can simply gloss over the symbols and read the devotion in its entirety, and then turn to the reflective questions to read and answer all of them together. I am indebted to my wife who not only came up with this idea but also supplied the questions. She is an amazing leader, teacher, and educator, and I am grateful that she was a part of this project.



The Greatest Bible Study Never Recorded

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

(Luke 24:13-35)

Quick show of hands: Who would like to attend a two-hour-long Bible study exclusively studying the Old Testament? Anyone?

I can hear the crickets chirping.

What if I told you that the Old Testament is actually exciting, informative, and amazingly relevant to your life – right here, right now? You might be thinking that I am absolutely crazy at this point. But I believe you will discover this truth for yourself, if you are willing to take a chance on those first 39 books of the Bible. One of the reasons I have come to this conclusion is because of the story recounted for us above, from Luke 24.



Luke is the only person to record this story in detail, so I tip my hat to the good doctor for giving us this incredible account that helps give us an even deeper appreciation for the Word of God. It is this story that truly opened my eyes to the depth, richness, and fullness of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament. Upon further study, I am confident you will have the same experience.

This episode immediately follows *the* greatest story ever recorded – the account of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Nothing can compare to the world-changing events that took place on that first Easter morning. Jesus had told His disciples that He would die, but promised that He would come back from the dead three days later. And that is exactly what happened! The resurrection of Jesus has been and always will be the cornerstone of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15). The claims of Jesus become validated as He begins to show Himself to some of the believers. His first post-resurrection appearance is to several women who were devoted followers (Matthew 28:5-9). One of those women, Mary Magdalene, encounters Him in the garden by the tomb (John 20:14-18). And now, later that same day on a road leaving Jerusalem, Jesus joins up with a pair of believers on their journey to Emmaus.

Little is known about our two travelers. In verse 18, we discover that one of them is named Cleopas. The other person's name and personal details remain a mystery to us. Most pastors and commentators refer to them as disciples even though the narrative never specifically calls them this. From the information available, we can safely deduce that they are very close followers of Jesus. They know Him and are aware of the details surrounding His crucifixion. They were in Jerusalem when it happened, and could bear witness to the widespread knowledge of the event. They even know that Peter and John ran to the tomb after the women had discovered it was empty. Later on in our story, we learn that these two return to Jerusalem and have direct access to the disciples. It isn't until verse 33 that we learn for certain that neither of these two is counted among the Eleven. (Remember that Judas is already dead and Matthias hasn't been chosen as his replacement quite yet.) And with the events that directly follow this story, apparently they are present with the disciples the first time Jesus miraculously appears and gives a physical demonstration of His resurrection to this large of a group. It is for these reasons that I will refer to these two men as *disciples* for the remainder of this devotion.

So Cleopas and his companion are on their way out of Jerusalem and headed to a town seven miles away. We aren't too sure why they are leaving. Perhaps they are returning home after an extended stay in Jerusalem. Although they are privy to the information that Jesus might have risen from the dead, they aren't sticking around to see if the reports are true. There appears to be a depressed resignation among these two that perhaps Jesus was not who He claimed to be, and that they had been following a false Messiah.

As they walk along the road, they are talking about the events of the previous days. Confused and disappointed, they are still trying to process all that has taken place. In verse 15, our text says that they “**discussed these things with each other.**” However, I don’t believe they are merely *discussing* these events; they seem to be arguing about them. The Greek word used here is συζητεῖν (*suzhtein*), which carries the connotation of arguing or debating. The exact same word is found in Mark 9:14 and 16, Luke 22:23, Acts 6:9, and Acts 9:29. From these particular verses, we can infer that Cleopas and his companion are not merely engaging in a casual chat here. It is more like a debate. Although the text is silent about the topic they are debating, I wouldn’t be surprised if it involved the resurrection, and the claims of the women and disciples regarding the empty tomb.

Excellent! This concept excites me! I firmly believe that we need more debate among Christians. Now, let me clarify something. When I say “debate,” I’m not referring to bitter arguments or fighting. I’m not advocating divisiveness and angry verbal attacks, consisting of yelling matches where true dialogue is absent. I’m talking about a genuine debate that allows people to have an effective back-and-forth discussion and a sharing of alternative viewpoints that will stretch and grow their faith.

I remember a time when I was leading a group through an adult instruction class that was designed to cover the major topics of Christianity. One night, we were debating the concept of infant baptism and the meaning behind the sacrament of Holy Communion. I had shared my conclusions based on my study of the Scriptures. Many people were questioning me and bringing up other Scripture passages along with other Christian viewpoints. It was a spirited discussion with plenty of dialogue, and various opinions were

Shammah's Significance

Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.

(2 Samuel 23:11-12)

Significance. We all yearn to be significant in life, in some way or another. Somewhere deep-seated in our psyche is the desire to have meaning and purpose in our existence beyond mere survival. Have you ever thought of *why* you are even alive? This is a question that we are often fearful of asking simply because we don't count ourselves as people who "matter." Sure, there are some who feel they have discovered their purpose, and have devoted their lives to fulfilling that purpose. But in my experience, most people don't think their existence is all that important.

Take a look at your life. What importance do you have? What significant events have happened? Do you look back with a small twinge of shame because you feel you haven't really accomplished anything?



This world celebrates the "big." We love the superstars on the stage and the singers behind the microphones. We admire the speakers and leaders who make a difference in the world. The news cameras love the celebrities because they are larger than life. When we compare our lives to theirs, we may be tempted

to view our own accomplishments as trivial or unimportant. Consequently, we may even wonder if anyone would miss us if we were gone.

The same is true inside the Christian world. Pastors compare themselves to one another based on the size of their congregation. Youth ministers are evaluated by the attendance they can bring in at fun events. We hear of “spectacular” evangelism campaigns where many souls are reached. So even in ministry circles, we measure ourselves against everyone else. *“Our church isn’t growing as much as theirs. What’s wrong with us?”* Maybe we minister to a couple of at-risk teenagers, but it pales in comparison to another church’s ministry that has a 24-hour suicide hotline to help hundreds of kids every month. Our excitement can even turn to disappointment if we feel that we aren’t making that big of a difference in this world.

Whenever these types of thoughts weigh you down, I want you to return to 2 Samuel 23 and reread the story of Shammah. I am drawn to this guy and what he did! In my opinion, he should be at the top of everyone’s role model list. Although you may never have heard of him before, I am confident that you will come to admire him too. Shammah is counted as one of David’s *Mighty Men*. I invite you turn back to verses 8-39 and acquaint yourself with the other members of this important group. These men formed an elite unit that David kept close to him for military maneuvers and for protection as a bodyguard detail. But Shammah wasn’t just one of the Thirty (a cool title for the Mighty Men, even though there were more than thirty in the group). Shammah held a special place of honor as one of the Three, a trio of men who were extremely close to David, forming his inner circle. (This same arrangement is found in the life of one of David’s descendants – Jesus. He selected twelve men

“For some years now, I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.”

- Martin Luther

Shaking Scripture was written to help develop a hunger in you for God's Word. You will see how intriguing and interesting the Bible can be. You will be guided through some of the well-known stories we've grown to love and that have, perhaps, gotten stale with familiarity. In addition, you will discover some lesser-known stories that just might surprise you because of their readability and application. In all, there are 12 devotions, each aimed at *Shaking Scripture* in a way that helps us grasp more of God's Word. Several reflective questions per devotion are also provided, making this book ideal for individual or group study.



Rev. Mark Manning has been a pastor since 1998. He is married to the love of his life, Heather, and they have the privilege of raising three boys: Mark Thomas, Jacob, and Joshua. Rev. Manning currently serves St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Orange, CA as the preaching and teaching pastor. Each week, he demonstrates his passion for understanding Scripture as he guides the church through books of the Bible. He truly does enjoy *Shaking Scripture*.



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