




CHAPTER 1

What Is the Bible?

Okay, so my first question is kind of basic, maybe even dumb.


There are no dumb questions.

Everyone says that.



I mean it. Really. A lot of people think they should know a lot about the Bible and are embarrassed they don't, so they never join others in talking about it or trying to understand it. They don't want to sound dumb, but then they never learn anything.

I often feel like that. I mean, I do know something about the Bible. I went to Sunday school as a kid . . . sometimes. But I don't remember much, and I don't feel like I know enough.



Don't worry about it. You aren't alone, and you probably know more than you think. Even if you don't, even if you know next to nothing, what's the big deal? You've got to start somewhere. I'm just glad you're curious. So, really, no dumb questions—go ahead.

Okay, here goes—what is the Bible, anyway?

A book.



Funny.

Well, it is.

Duh. I know it is. I was looking for a little more.

Funny you should mention it, but there is something more.

Go on . . .

We get our English word *Bible* from the Greek word *ta biblia*. That's actually a plural noun meaning "the books." See what I mean? You're getting a whole collection of books, a whole library, all under one cover and for one low price.

Great value.

Yeah, it is. But, seriously, it matters that the Bible is a collection of books.

Sorry. I still don't get it.

Well, think about books, about what they do.

They tell us about stuff, give us information.

Sometimes.

And they tell us stories.

Yeah, that too. And that's really important because people—all of us—tend to make sense of our lives through stories.

What do you mean?

I mean that we do almost everything through story—tell people about ourselves, learn about others, share our hopes and dreams, just about everything. For instance, try to think of anything major in your life, anything that really mattered, that you haven't shared with someone else in story.

That's hard to do. But I'm still not sure why this matters.

Let me give you an example. Like most kids, my kids love hearing stories. From Eric Carle's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* to *Harry Potter*, we've been reading to them since before they could sit up.

You're a good parent.

Thanks, but that's not really the point. The point is, they grew up on stories. Now that they're reading, it's incredible how many stories they've been exposed to. Not surprisingly, they've started to use some of the characters and plot lines from books to make sense of things that are happening to them. I remember one spring after my daughter had read one of the *Little House* books where the Ingalls family can't afford any Christmas presents. Do you know the scene I'm talking about?

I don't think I read that one.

Well, you know the basic story of the pioneer family.

Sure.

Okay. Well, the scene I'm thinking of is a pretty sad one. Pa's had a tough autumn, with a poor harvest and not much game, so come winter there's no money to buy presents, and things are looking pretty dreary. But when the girls show up at church on Christmas Eve, there are presents waiting for them. Folks back East had sent them out so the pioneer children wouldn't go without Christmas presents. Well, my daughter thought that was so cool she decided that for her next birthday she'd ask her friends to bring a donation for hurricane victims instead of presents.

She's a good kid.

Thanks, she is a good kid. But that's not really the point either. It's more that stories are powerful. They shape the way we think about ourselves, our lives, and our world. Stories give us our identity.

Say a little more about that.

Let me try another example.

Like I said, my kids love stories. And the stories they love best aren't always even from books but are the stories we tell them about our family. You know, stories about their aunts and uncles and grandparents. Stories about the funny things they did when they were kids. The funny things we did when we were little.