

INTRODUCTION

Why Did I Write This Book?

I wrote this book to teach children about the love of God. When I was a child I learned about the God of wrath in the Old Testament. When I came of age I was confirmed in the church, even while I rejected this God in my heart—but at the right time, on the day appointed for me by God, at the age of twenty-one, the Lord brought me to himself and I embraced this God with faith. I placed my trust in him to forgive my sins and rescue me from death. He was not a God of wrath, but a God of love and grace. It has grieved me that my heavenly Father should be so maligned, especially in the eyes of little children. God's great Love pours forth from the very beginning of the Bible, from the opening words in Genesis, to the closing words in Revelation. God's great salvation is proclaimed throughout the Scriptures—and that is how my heart was turned to him, by seeing this salvation unveiled in the Old Testament. I discovered that the Bible was not a collection of unrelated short stories and it was seeing this unity of the Scriptures that brought

me to faith. I came to a saving knowledge of Christ through the Gospel of Moses and the last shreds of unbelief were ripped from my eyes by the proclamation of John the Baptist. He was the voice calling out in the wilderness who finally reached my heart: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” I beheld Jesus, because I understood for the first time about the Lamb of God in the writings of Moses. This Messiah had been announced from the beginning. I had not understood what manner of man he was, because I had not been taught all that had been written beforehand concerning him. Jesus said, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken . . . And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25, 27). How foolish we are not to teach our children about Christ the way he taught about himself! How foolish we are not to begin where he began, with the writings of Moses! It is the Old Testament writings about which this is written: “From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching” (2 Timothy 3:15–16). I believe that knowing the Old Testament from their earliest days will make our children wise for salvation through Jesus Christ. Our children must see the Love of God from the beginning; they must see God’s plan of salvation unfolding from the beginning, if they are going to place their trust in him. “Herein is Love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10 κϣ). The work of God’s Son was proclaimed to us from the very beginning.

I decided to write this book when I was sitting in the National Arts Centre Theatre in the capital of Canada. The National Ballet Company of Canada was performing *The Nutcracker* and I was thinking, “The world takes a silly little story like this and tells it to the children so beautifully and meaningfully that they remember it for the rest of their lives. The church takes the most beautiful and meaningful story ever told—the salvation of God’s people—and somehow turns the most exciting events and amazing facts in all human history into unimaginably boring lessons. How is this possible?” It was that thought in that moment which motivated me to write this book in this way.

There was also a very practical reason for this book. I needed Bible lessons for teaching. In 1980 my husband, Dr. Richard L. Ganz, was called to plant a church in Ottawa, Canada. I found myself responsible for the

Sabbath school of that new work. What materials were available for teaching children the Scriptures? I was disheartened by what I found. Most Sunday school material was so uninteresting and so uninspiring that I could barely read through the lessons myself. The great theme of Scripture—God saving a people for himself—was somehow lost in these lessons and what emerged was the repetitive message: “Be good. Do this. Don’t do that.” Of course children must be taught right from wrong, but without faith, works are dead—and they cannot bring a child to life. “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith . . . not by works” (Ephesians 2:8–9). All the accounts in the Scriptures, all the stories of the Bible, are there to strengthen our faith in God. “These are written that you might believe” (John 20:31). Every lesson should encourage the children to believe—to believe in God’s Word, to believe in God’s Love. I became aware that in most Sunday school lessons the focus was wrong. These lessons focused on what we should do, instead of focusing on what God had done. Their emphasis was upon our works, rather than upon God’s grace. What does the Bible say about teaching our children? “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done . . . He established the Law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children . . . Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands” (Psalm 78:4–5,7). Works follow faith. Keeping his commands follows putting their trust in God. And how do they come to put their trust in God? It is by us telling them “the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.”

O LORD, my God, how many are the wonders Thou has done!
 How many are the gracious thoughts, which Thou to us has
 shown!
 No one can sort and set them out. None can compare to Thee!
 If I would tell and speak of them, they could not numbered be.
 I never have within my heart concealed Thy Righteousness.
 I Thy Salvation have declared and shown Thy Faithfulness.
 Thy Mercy great, Thy steadfast Love, I ever have revealed,
 And from the congregation great Thy Truth have not concealed.

—Psalm 40:5, 10

The Book of Psalms for Singing, 40C

In this book, in these lessons, I have humbly endeavoured to begin this task, the task of telling the children of God's wonders, the task of declaring to them God's righteousness, salvation and faithfulness, the task of revealing to them God's truth, his great mercy and his steadfast love.

For Whom Did I Write This Book?

I wrote this book for the children, praying that, step by step, it would bring them ever closer to Christ. It was written to encourage them, lesson by lesson, to put their trust in God, to believe in his promises, to rejoice in his salvation. It was also written for any adult concerned about this most vital ministry—the teaching of our children.

I have used these lessons for many years with real success. I have taught many different classes of children of varying ages. What I have discovered is that most people underestimate the ability of children to understand the Word of God. They also underestimate the power of the Word of God to pierce through the hearts and minds of our little ones. The truth will captivate them, without any gimmick. It takes a very short time for my little students to realize that they are in a class involved in serious learning. They listen carefully. I have had large classes of eight-year-olds weeping with grief as I teach through one lesson, then laughing with joy as I teach another. I have had parents say to me, “We can't get our child to read a book or to show much interest in anything, but he races home after your class to read the Bible!” I have had mentally challenged children in my classes. They may not understand everything, but they listen attentively and, to my surprise and delight, answer the most important questions correctly! The children I have taught over the years have written me letters, thanking me for teaching them about God. These many children have taught me something very important: These little people, these small saints in the kingdom of God, don't want fluff. They want the pure milk and the good meat of God's Word—and we cheat them and starve them if we give them anything less than that. By God's grace, may we never stand in their way to the Lord; may we never cause them to stumble.

Where Did I Write This Book?

It was difficult for me to find a place to write this book. We had four children, all home-schooled. My pastor/husband's study was in our home,

which meant there was not a spare room in the house. We had a thriving new work, with people constantly visiting our home. I was becoming desperate. There was no longer a quiet moment anytime or a quiet corner anywhere. At last I retreated to the hayloft of our log barn. At first I used to write sitting on a bright-red, antique, horse-sleigh, with a clipboard and pen in hand, but when the Canadian winter struck and the temperatures dipped below minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit, I could not work, not even with double mittens. However, there was a small dark grain room in the barn. With the help and skill of our friend, Stas Jesionka, we converted this into a study for me. We added windows, insulation, a heater, and eventually a computer. It is the most wonderful room in the world. It overlooks the farmlands of the Mississippi Valley in Ontario, Canada. In winter I trudge through the waist-deep snowdrifts in the barnyard. In spring I walk by the sheep with their little lambs. In the autumn the barn loft is filled with hundreds of bales of hay. A narrow pathway, with walls of hay towering on each side, is left for me to walk to my study. One of my little pupils, who had been visiting our farm, reported to her parents: “My Sunday school teacher works inside a haystack!” Yes, at times all you can see of my room is a small wooden door under a huge mound of hay. It is my favourite place to go to be with God, to study his Word and to proclaim his praises.

May the Lord himself bless my work for him.

THE WORD OF GOD

The world is filled with books, countless millions of books. Have you ever been to a big library? There you can see thousands and thousands of books, stacked up shelf upon shelf, lined up row after row, stored in room beside room. There are books from the floor to the ceiling. There are books from one end of the room to the other. A small child could get lost among all those books.

There is one book which is very special, different from all the other books in the world. Do you know which one that is? Yes, the Bible. What makes the Bible different from any other book? Perhaps you would answer that it's a book about God, but there are many books about God—and many of them are not true. Perhaps then you would answer that the Bible is a true book about God, but if you looked in a good church library you would find many true books about God, written by righteous men who knew him. However, the Bible is unique even among those books. What makes the Bible different? The Bible is the only book on the face of the earth

whose author is God. All the other books are words that people have written, but the Bible comes from God! The Bible is God's Word.

Words can be used in different ways. Here are three different ways of using words:

1. **Writing**—People use words in writing. We can write words on paper with a pen; we can embroider words onto material with thread; we can carve words into wood with a knife; we can type them on a computer screen with a keyboard; we can print them on a sidewalk with chalk; we can scratch them onto a stone with a nail; we can make words in the snow with an icicle; we can press them into the sand with our fingers. There are many different ways that we can write words.

2. **Speaking**—People also use words in speaking. We can whisper words; we can scream words; we can giggle words; we can sing words. There are many different ways that we can speak words.

3. **Thinking**—This is a third way that people use words. In our minds we think in words. We often pray this way, speaking silently in our hearts to God.

God has made people like himself, for God also uses words in these three ways:

1. The Word of God in the mind of God, that is, the wisdom of God, was there “from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began . . .” (Proverbs 8:23). This form of God's Word was “the first of his works,” before he created anything (Proverbs 8:22). The universe and everything in it (including you and me) exist because of the Word of God, because God thought of us. “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast the sum of them!” (Psalm 139:17) “How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!” (Psalm 92:5).

2. The Word of God was also spoken. “We understand that the universe was formed at God's command” (Hebrews 11:3). “Long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed” (2 Peter 3:5). We exist, the world and everything in it exists, because God spoke. “He commanded and they were created” (Psalm 148:5). And from the beginning God spoke to men, for God graciously “reveals his thoughts to man” (Amos 4:13). The Lord spoke at various times in various ways for various reasons. Sometimes he whispered in a still small voice. Once God spoke from a burning bush.

Sometimes he thundered from a mountaintop. Occasionally God sent angels as his messengers to proclaim his word. Usually though, God spoke his word through men called prophets. These men “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). A prophet of God was asked: “Who are you?” He answered, “I am the voice . . .” (John 1:19–23). God most often used the voices of men to speak his word to the world.

3. God’s Word was also written. One time God wrote his Law, the Ten Commandments, on tablets of stone. These stones were inscribed by the finger of God. Another time the fingers of a human hand suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the air and this hand wrote on the wall three terrifying words. It was a message from God. But usually God wrote his Word by using people. He used human minds to express divine thoughts. God used men like Moses and Malachi, Matthew and Mark. God’s Word became their words and their words became God’s Word. The Bible is the book that God wrote for us, using human agents.

Some people say there is no God. Others say that God may be there, but we can’t know, for God is silent and has nothing to do with us. These people are wrong. From eternity God has been there and from the beginning God has communicated with us. God’s Word has been spoken to man and written for man. Isn’t it amazing that what God said thousands of years ago has not been lost? Many angry, wicked men have tried to destroy God’s Word, but they were the ones who vanished. The Word of God remained. “The word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). God preserved his Word throughout the ages and scattered it throughout the nations. His Word has been copied millions and millions of times. God’s Word has also been translated, so that people all over the world can read the Bible in their own language. (The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, which are different languages with different alphabets. If someone had not translated the Bible for you, knowing your ABC’s would be of no help to you at all, for you would not have been able to read God’s Word. But the Lord made sure that his message would reach you.) God has not been silent. His voice has gone out into all the earth and his words to the end of the world.

In the Bible, God told us everything we need to know about him and everything we need to know about faith and life. In the Bible, God told us how we can be with him now . . . and forever. In his great Love for us, God

gave us a very precious gift—his Word! The Word of the Lord is more precious than silver or gold, for it brings us life. We cannot live by bread alone; we live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. The Word of God is the word of life and truth. It is a very great treasure and must be kept carefully by us.

Where should we store this treasure? In our hearts. How? We can store God's Word in our hearts by listening to it, by reading it, by studying it, by thinking about it, by saying it, by writing it, by singing it, by memorizing it—and by living it. It is not enough to hear God's Word or to know God's Word or to say God's Word. You must also obey God's Word! You must live God's Word! (That is one other way that words can be used. You can think words and say them and write them, but you can also do them. For example, you can think, "I want to go outside and play." You can say, "I want to go outside and play." You can write a note: "I want to go outside and play." Or, you can actually go outside and play.)

If you treasure God's Word in your hearts, not only will you have it forever, but it will also overflow to others. Out of the treasure in your hearts, God's love and truth and life will flow to other people. If you have treasured God's Word in your hearts, it will be in what you think and speak and write . . . and do. It will be a blessing, and it will guard you and guide you until you reach heaven, to see the Living One, who is called "The Word of God" (Revelation 19:13).

Who is this person called the Word of God? It is Christ Jesus, our Lord. You see, God did one more thing with his Word, something that we cannot do with our words. We can think and speak and write and live our words, but God caused his Word to become flesh. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning . . . and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:1–2, 14). God's Word became a man who walked in this world with us. God sent this Man, who was the Word of God incarnate, to us. He was the highest expression of God's Word and the greatest expression of God's Love. "Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10 KJV). "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

IN THE BEGINNING, OUT OF NOTHING

- Genesis 1:1
- Colossians 1:15–20
- Hebrews 11:3

Everything in our world has a beginning. A giant oak tree begins as a tiny acorn. When it first begins to grow, it is just a little green shoot, barely visible above the earth, but after many years of growing it becomes a full-sized tree, so children like you can climb up in its branches and sit among its leaves or jump down to play in its shade and gather the little acorns on the ground below. Where do these acorns come from? They come from the oak tree. And where does the oak tree come from? It comes from an acorn. But long, long ago, there were no oak trees in the world; there were no acorns. There was nothing!

Everything in our world has a beginning. A tall bright sunflower begins as a small grey seed. When it first begins to grow, all you can see are just two tiny leaves unfolding above the ground, but after many weeks of growing it becomes a flower taller than you are, with a face fatter than yours. Birds can perch on its stalk and peck at its seeds. Where do these seeds come from? They come from the sunflower. And where does the sunflower come from? It comes from a seed. But

long, long ago, there were no sunflowers in the world; there were no seeds. There was nothing!

Everything in our world has a beginning. A white squawking chicken begins as a fluffy yellow chick, which hatches from an egg. Have you heard this riddle: “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” Chickens come from eggs and eggs come from chickens. But long, long ago, there were no chickens; there were no eggs. There was nothing!

Everything in our world has a beginning. A butterfly hatches from a cocoon. The cocoon is made by a caterpillar. The caterpillar hatches from a tiny insect egg no bigger than a dot on a piece of paper. Where does this egg come from? It is laid by the butterfly. But long, long ago, there were no butterflies; there were no eggs, not even the ones the size of dots. There was nothing!

Everything in our world has a beginning. You had a beginning. Only a few years ago you were a little baby. Your parents remember the day you were born. That special day, your birthday, is celebrated because it marks your beginning in the world. Before that, you were a tiny person living and growing and playing within your mother’s womb. At the very beginning of your time there, you were so small that you couldn’t be seen without a microscope. Your mother didn’t even know you were there. And before that, you didn’t exist. Where did you come from? You came from your mother and father. Where did they come from? They came from their mothers and fathers; your grandparents. And where did your grandparents come from? They came from their mothers and fathers; your great-grandparents. But long, long ago, there were no mothers; there were no fathers. There were no people at all. There was nothing!

Everything in our world has a beginning. The world itself had a beginning. Before that time even the world did not exist. There was nothing, absolutely nothing. There was not even a speck of dust, let alone a spark of life. This is hard for us to understand, because the world we see now is so vast and full. Where did everything come from? The answer is written in our hearts. Everybody knows the answer, but not everybody likes the answer.

Where did everything come from? The answer is also written in the Bible, in the very first words on the very first page of the very first book of the Bible. “In the beginning God . . .” (Genesis 1:1). God was there in the

beginning. God was there before the beginning . God was there without a beginning. That is also difficult for us to understand. Because everything in our world has had a beginning, including ourselves, it is hard for us to understand that God was always there. God is eternal. He had no beginning; he will never end. The Lord is the One who is “without father, without mother . . . without beginning of days or end of life” (Hebrews 7:3). God was the beginning!

Many brilliant people, such as scientists, have tried to figure out how the world began, but the best they can do is guess and suppose and imagine—because they were not there. No human beings were present at the opening ceremonies of the universe to report what happened, but God was there and he has revealed to us the truth about the beginning of the world. In his Word, in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, a great proclamation is made: “IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH” (Genesis 1:1). Again and again the Bible declares that the Lord God is “Maker of heaven and earth” (see Psalm 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 146:6). God made everything that we see. The Bible says: “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Hebrews 11:3). God did not make the heavens and the earth out of something; he called them into being out of nothing. “He commanded and they were created” (Psalm 148:5).

In the beginning God (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit)—in the beginning this one God created the heavens and the earth. “There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Concerning the Son of God we read, “By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together . . . he is the beginning” (Colossians 1:15–20). We also read this about Jesus: “He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life . . .” (John 1:2–4). Again the Scriptures claim that “the world was made through him” (John 1:10). Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:12).

God has revealed to us—in our hearts, in his world, in his Word—that he is the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. Knowing that all things come from him, we should love God. We should obey God and worship God. We should trust God. His praises should be upon our lips:

You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things.

—Revelation 4:11