

SIS, PICK UP YOUR SWORD!

A PRACTICAL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR WOMEN TO
UNDERSTAND SCRIPTURE, BUILD DISCERNMENT,
AND APPLY GOD'S WORD

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Second edition

I dedicate this book to my grandmothers, Mary and Rose. To Grandma Mary, Gigi; you helped realign my understanding of God and gave me an inheritance of biblical wisdom beyond my wildest dreams. I can't wait to get to heaven one day so we can talk all about this. To Grandma Rose; Granny, your love, compassion, and devotion to God continue to inspire me. To this day, she still sets an alarm to get on her knees and pray. Your lives have shown me the beauty of enduring faith.

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Preface

Can I be honest with you before we begin? Returning to the first book I ever published humbled me, but it also made me excited about what this book could become. I am not the same woman who wrote *Sis, Pick Up Your Sword!* in 2023. I can see places where I could have explained something more clearly, developed an idea more fully, or helped you follow a connection that already made sense in my head. None of that makes me ashamed of the first edition. Everything I included was necessary to what God was teaching me at the time, and the book was edifying. It helped women engage Scripture with greater intention, and it carried the heart of what I believed God had called me to teach. I returned to it because that message still matters, and I now understand more clearly what I want its legacy to be.

When I wrote the first edition, I thought I was writing primarily for the baby Christian because that was how I still saw myself. I was learning how to study Scripture, gathering the tools that helped me, and creating the resource I wished someone had given me earlier. A new believer can absolutely benefit from this book, but I understand now that you may not be new to faith at all. You may have been in church for years. You may already read your Bible, complete study plans, serve in ministry, take detailed sermon notes, and know what the faithful response is supposed to sound like. You know how to do the behaviors of faith. The harder question is whether the truth you know has reached the places from which you are actually living.

You know God is trustworthy, but uncertainty can still send you into overdrive. You know your identity is in Christ, but rejection can still make you question your worth. You know Scripture tells you to rest, forgive, trust, love, and take your thoughts captive, but knowing the instruction has not always shown you how to live it when your emotions, history, responsibilities, and

relationships are pulling in another direction. You may be capable, responsible, spiritually sincere, and very good at continuing to function while quietly wondering why the same fears, patterns, and internal struggles keep showing up. You may assume you need more discipline because discipline has helped you solve almost everything else. So you read more, try harder, build another routine, and place more demand on yourself. Still, there are places where the Word you believe has not yet become the life you live. ***That is the woman I understand more clearly now. That is who I am writing to, and that may be you.***

I do not want *Sis, Pick Up Your Sword!* to be another book that tells you to read your Bible more often, gives you a study method, and leaves you to figure out why the truth still feels disconnected from your daily life. I want this book to become a place where you learn to experience Scripture. I want you to understand what you are reading, recognize what it reveals about God, and notice where it confronts the beliefs, assumptions, wounds, and survival strategies that continue shaping the way you think and respond. Bible study should give you more than information to repeat. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, it should renew your mind, sharpen your discernment, and change the way you trust, choose, love, and live.

My ADHD has influenced the way I think and teach. My mind moves quickly among Scripture, behavior, emotional health, relationships, and lived experience because I can see how those ideas connect. That ability has served my teaching, but returning to the first edition helped me recognize that seeing the connection is not the same as making it clear on the page. I understand now that I have to slow down, build the bridge, and give each idea enough room to do its work before moving to the next one. That clarity helped me refine this edition without diminishing what came before it. The first edition reflected what I understood then. This edition carries the same message with a clearer sense of where I want to lead you.

Across the chapters ahead, my goal is to move you from exposure to edification. You will begin by understanding what you are holding when you open the Bible and why you can trust it. You will learn how to engage Scripture responsibly instead of depending entirely on someone else to tell you what it means. Then we will move into the work of allowing the Word to

reach beneath the Christian answers you already know and into the beliefs and patterns directing your life. I want you to finish this book able to do more than explain what Scripture says. I want you to recognize what it is asking of you and become increasingly willing and equipped to live in response to it.

Everything in the first edition contributed to this vision. What I have now is greater clarity about the woman I am serving, the journey I want to take you on, and the legacy I want Sis, Pick Up Your Sword! to leave behind. I am excited to place this edition in your hands because I believe it can help you move beyond reading Scripture as another responsibility and begin experiencing it as the living Word that reveals God, confronts what is false, and forms you into the woman He has called you to become.

Acknowledgments

First and always, thank you God. Before I was formed, You knew me, saw this work, and purposed me for it. You also knew the season in which I would be called to finish it. My life held more turmoil than I expected, but You would not allow me to abandon what You had entrusted to me or offer anything less than what the assignment required. As I studied, taught, and wrote Your Word for others, You used that same Word to minister to me. You reminded me of who You created me to be, reestablished what I knew to be true about You, and revealed another depth of our relationship. This book is evidence of Your faithfulness to the reader, but it is also evidence of Your faithfulness to me.

To my family and friends, thank you for loving me through everything it took to bring this book into the world. Dad, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insight, and lived experience with me. Our conversation became part of a chapter, but your influence extends far beyond the pages where you are named. To my sisters, thank you for the experiences, conversations, and lessons that eventually found their way into these pages. Whether you intended to or not, you gave me plenty of source material. To every person who prayed for me, encouraged me, checked on me, listened while I worked through an idea, or reminded me that I could finish, thank you. Your support carried more weight than you probably realized.

To Kenyetta, Angel, Tatum, and Victoria, thank you for giving this work your time, attention, honesty, and care. You each made room for this book while it was still becoming what it needed to be. You read, listened, asked questions, offered feedback, prayed, and created space for me to keep writing. Your willingness to participate in the process sharpened both the work and the writer. Iron truly sharpened iron, and this book is stronger because each of you were willing to show up.

To the women who listen to the *Prescription for Purpose* podcast, those who have been part of my communities, and everyone who has trusted my voice enough to learn, question, grow, and wrestle with Scripture alongside me, thank you. Your existence gave this work somewhere to go. Your questions, stories, and willingness to keep showing up reminded me why this resource needed to be written. I have spent more time away from the microphone than I expected. My prayer is that, as you read these pages, the silence begins to make sense. My time away was not empty. Seeds were being planted, tended, and grown here. I pray this book becomes the resource you needed and that what God cultivated during my time away now bears fruit in your life.

Finally, to every reader holding this book, thank you for trusting me with your time and attention. I do not take lightly the responsibility of teaching God's Word or the privilege of walking beside you as you learn to examine what you have been handed. May these pages help you know God more clearly, trust His Word more deeply, and become increasingly confident in your ability to pick it up and study it for yourself.

Introduction

For many of us, faith was first learned in pieces. We memorized verses and repeated prayers. We listened to sermons, highlighted passages, and absorbed the language people around us used to describe God. Over time, much of it became second nature. We learned what to say when someone needed encouragement, which scriptures belonged with certain situations, and how to continue participating in the routines of faith even when life became heavy. Some of us became so dependable in those spaces that other people began coming to us for prayer, wisdom, and reassurance.

There is nothing insincere about that kind of faith. You may love God deeply and genuinely desire to live according to His Word. Still, years of church attendance and Christian content do not necessarily teach you how to return to a passage for yourself, work through what it communicates, and recognize where the text ends and someone else's interpretation begins. Familiarity can conceal that gap for a long time because you are not coming to Scripture as a complete beginner. You recognize the stories, remember the verses, and may already know what a teacher is going to say before they finish reading the passage. The uncertainty usually surfaces when the familiar explanation is unavailable, two respected teachers disagree, or life presents a question that cannot be resolved by repeating the verse you already know.

That can be an unsettling place to find yourself when you are accustomed to being capable. You research what you do not understand. You solve complicated problems, care for people, and make decisions that require discernment every day. You may have earned degrees, built a career, raised a family, started a business, or survived circumstances that forced you to become resourceful long before you should have needed to be. Yet the Bible can still feel different. Its language is familiar enough to make you expect that

understanding should come naturally, and when it does not, the frustration often turns inward.

We decide the answer must be more discipline. We will wake up earlier, pray longer, read more chapters, or finally finish the plan we abandoned somewhere around Leviticus. There is always another app to download, another study Bible to purchase, and another promise to be more consistent this time. Discipline is valuable, but it cannot supply instruction that was never given. Many women have been told throughout their Christian lives to read the Bible, stand on the Word, and test everything against it without ever being taught how to examine a passage closely enough to do those things with confidence.

What we have understood as a discipline problem may, at least in part, be a discipleship gap. Repetition helps us remember words, but it cannot do the work of comprehension by itself. Friend, you can buy another study Bible if you want to, but if nobody has taught you what to do once you open it, adding another translation to the stack may not be the intervention we think it is.

I know what it is like to have plenty of biblical language available and still realize that I did not fully understand everything I was repeating. I could recognize a passage, remember how I had heard it preached, and explain the lesson usually attached to it. Studying more carefully required me to ask where those conclusions came from and whether the text actually supported them. It also brought my own history into view. Trauma, church culture, family expectations, and the messages women absorb about usefulness, submission, love, and worth had all influenced how I understood God and myself.

Many capable women learned to survive by working hard, remaining useful, anticipating what other people needed, and making themselves easy to love. Those strategies can follow us into our relationship with God until grace becomes something we affirm while continuing to live as though His affection must be earned. Scripture tells us that salvation is God's gift and not the result of our works (Ephesians 2:8–9), but years of performing for approval can make a love we cannot secure through achievement difficult to receive.

The good desires women carry can also be used against us. Marriage, motherhood, security, purpose, and belonging matter, which is precisely

why someone can exploit them by promising that the right prayer, formula, offering, or level of obedience will produce the outcome you want. Emotion can complicate the process further. I love worship that moves me and teaching that reaches the heart, but being moved and being formed are not always the same event. A message may bring you to tears without reaching the belief that will continue directing your behavior after the feeling passes.

Learning to study Scripture did not erase every question or immediately remove every pattern, but it gave me a trustworthy place from which to examine them. Scripture has comforted me and reminded me that I am loved. It has also confronted my pride, corrected my assumptions, and exposed beliefs I formed while trying to protect myself. I am not inviting you into work I have watched from a comfortable distance. I have been here too, and I am still learning how to allow the Word to reach beyond what I can repeat and into the places from which I actually live.

My love for Selena has given me an unexpectedly useful way to describe part of this experience. My Spanish is still *así así*. Pero turn on “Como La Flor,” baby, and I am on my feet. I can sing almost every word, and y’all are about to get these salsa moves too. Just do not interrupt the performance by asking me to translate every line. I am getting better. I know *como la flor* means “like the flower,” and I recognize more of the lyrics than I once did. That still does not mean I understand the complete message Selena develops throughout the song.

Repetition made the words familiar enough for me to reproduce them, but it never taught me what they meant. Scripture can become familiar in much the same way. You can quote a verse, recognize it the moment someone starts reading it, and remember several sermons built around it without understanding what the writer was communicating in context.

Studying Provides Clarity

We often talk about “familiar passages” at church, but I want to demonstrate first hand how familiarity and comprehension are not the same. Consider Hebrews 11:1, a verse many of us have heard and may even know by heart:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”

—Hebrews 11:1, ESV

Hebrews 11:1 can feel self-explanatory because we have heard it quoted so often, but study helps us notice what familiarity may have allowed us to overlook. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, so the English word *faith* represents a translation choice rather than the full range of meaning available in the original language. The Greek word *pistis* can communicate faith, belief, trust, confidence, reliability, or faithfulness depending upon how it is used, and the rest of Hebrews 11 gives those meanings shape through the people the writer presents.

Noah receives a warning about something he has never seen, and he builds. Abraham is called away from what is familiar without receiving a complete itinerary, and he goes. Sarah considers the One who made the promise faithful. Moses walks away from what Egypt offered and identifies with the people of God (Hebrews 11:7–8, 11, 24–26). Their actions show that they regarded what God revealed as trustworthy enough to order their lives around it. The way I describe it is that God gives the unction, and we are responsible for the response.

Biblical faith is not the ability to suppress every question, manufacture emotional certainty, or convince yourself that the outcome you want is the one God has promised. It is a response to what God has revealed, expressed through belief, trust, and obedience. If you have spent years feeling ashamed because you could not force yourself to feel certain, this understanding gives you a different place from which to examine your response. You can ask whether God has already made something clear, whether trust in His character needs room to grow, or whether you have delayed obedience while waiting for confidence to arrive first. It also helps you examine the decisions you have called acts of faith, because a choice does not become faithful simply by being bold, risky, or difficult for other people to understand. If faith begins with God’s revelation, then what we call faith must be rooted in something He has

actually made known.

Without studying the passage, you could return to Hebrews 11:1 for years and continue hearing faith described primarily as believing intensely in something you cannot see. You may have memorized the verse, highlighted it, and listened to several sermons built around it without realizing that the rest of the chapter offers a fuller picture. Exposure made the verse familiar. Engagement helped you understand how the writer develops faith through trust and response, and that understanding gives the Word room to reshape the way you approach uncertainty, obedience, and the desire to feel completely sure before you move.

Exposure → Engagement → Edification

Exposure occurs whenever the Word comes within reach. You hear a passage preached, read a devotional, follow a Bible plan, listen to a podcast, or open Scripture for yourself. Exposure introduces you to the character of God, the story of redemption, and the promises, warnings, wisdom, and instruction found throughout the Bible. Truth must come within reach before it can be understood, though contact with the Word does not guarantee comprehension.

Engagement requires remaining with the text long enough to investigate what it communicates. You begin noticing context, asking what the writer was addressing, examining unfamiliar language, and considering how a passage fits within the wider witness of Scripture. This process helps you separate the text itself from the interpretations people have placed upon it, including interpretations you may have carried for years without realizing they needed to be examined. It also allows you to receive teaching without surrendering your discernment, as the Bereans demonstrated when they welcomed Paul's message and searched the Scriptures to determine whether what they heard was true (Acts 17:11).

Edification occurs when the truth you understand begins building you. Scripture was given to teach, correct, train, and equip God's people (2 Timothy 3:16–17), so acquiring biblical information cannot be the final destination. The Word must reach beneath the answers you know and examine the beliefs,

motives, wounds, values, and patterns directing your life. It begins showing you where achievement, approval, usefulness, culture, pain, or survival has carried more authority than what God has said, and it changes how you think, trust, choose, relate, and obey.

You may spend years exposed to Scripture while depending upon borrowed conclusions because no one taught you how to engage the text. You may also become highly skilled at Bible study, fill notebooks with accurate observations, and remain resistant to what those observations require. Exposure places the Word within reach, engagement develops understanding, and edification allows that understanding to participate in the Spirit's ongoing work of formation.

The pages ahead will help you continue through that process. We will begin by learning how to approach Scripture, ask useful questions, recognize context, and use study resources without becoming overwhelmed. From there, we will examine what happens when the truth you are studying meets the beliefs and patterns already shaping your responses. Your understanding of God, identity, trust, relationships, boundaries, and decision-making has been influenced by your history, family, church experiences, culture, disappointments, and the conclusions you formed while trying to survive. Studying Scripture gives you a way to examine those influences beneath the authority of the Word instead of allowing them to remain unchallenged. As a clinician, I value tools that help us understand thought, emotion, behavior, and the effects of trauma, and I will draw upon evidence-based concepts where they help illuminate the human experience. They do not carry the same authority as Scripture. The Word remains the primary instrument through which we learn who God is, recognize what is true, and evaluate the beliefs from which we are living.

Sis, Pick Up Your Sword is not simply a book about taking better Bible notes. I want you to know how to investigate a passage and use available resources responsibly, but I also want you to recognize when a truth you can quote has not yet reached the belief directing your response. The goal is not to collect enough information to sound impressive in Bible study. It is to become increasingly grounded in what God has revealed so that His truth can expose what is false, correct what has become distorted, and strengthen what needs

INTRODUCTION

to be built. As we move through these pages, I will ask you to look honestly at what has shaped the way you understand God, Scripture, and yourself. Your history has influenced the conclusions you carry, but it does not have the final authority to determine what is true. I have had to examine my own assumptions, church experiences, survival patterns, and carefully defended beliefs, so I am not asking you to do work I have avoided. I may snatch your edges a little along the way, but I will do it with love and with full awareness that the Word has snatched mine too.

You do not need another spiritual performance or another reason to blame yourself for not understanding a process no one taught you. You need a way to approach the Word with confidence, ask better questions, and allow what you learn to reach the places where you have been trying to survive, prove yourself, earn love, or make sense of what happened to you. That is the work we are going to do together. The Word is already within your reach. Sis, it is time to pick up your sword.

|

EXPOSURE TO THE WORD

exposure

noun | \ ik-'spō-zhər \

the condition of being presented to view or made known.

1

Double-Edged Sword

The first shell casing struck the top of my foot before I understood what was happening. It was hot—not mildly uncomfortable, but hot enough to make me instinctively shift my weight while trying not to lose my grip on the loaded weapon in my hands. Before I could fully process what had happened, another casing landed near my toes. That was the moment I realized flip-flops had been a terrible choice for the gun range. In my defense, I had watched enough episodes of *The First 48* to know that shell casings eventually ended up on the ground. What television had failed to communicate was that they did not arrive there cold.

The burning across the top of my feet exposed how little I understood about the weapon I had chosen to carry. I had not shown up at the range because I was careless. In fact, the entire reason I was there was because I had tried to be responsible. Once I decided I wanted to purchase a firearm, my Type A brain immediately concluded that I needed a concealed-carry class first. I did not want to buy a weapon and figure everything out on my own. I wanted to understand what responsible ownership required, so I registered for an eight-hour course and made a day of it.

The morning was devoted to instruction. We learned about firearm safety, proper storage, legal responsibility, and the circumstances under which a weapon could and could not lawfully be used. We ate barbecue for lunch, then went to the range for the practical portion. I learned a lot that day, but one

principle stayed with me: possession created responsibility. Once I chose to possess a firearm, I became responsible for understanding the laws governing it. I could not carry or use a weapon irresponsibly and assume that good intentions would erase the consequences. If I injured someone or violated the law, saying that no one had explained a particular rule to me would not undo the damage. Ignorance might explain what happened. It would not remove my responsibility for what I had chosen to carry.

By the time we reached the range, I knew considerably more than I had that morning. Still, those hot shell casings exposed another level of my inexperience. There were practical realities of handling a weapon I had never encountered and therefore had not thought to prepare for. I had taken the class. I had listened carefully. I genuinely wanted to be responsible. And I was still standing on a gun range in flip-flops. That experience taught me the difference between access, information, and proficiency. Owning a weapon did not mean I knew how to use it. Hearing instruction did not immediately make me skilled. Even after completing the course, I would still need practice, judgment, restraint, and humility about what I did not know. Training did not make the weapon more powerful. It made me more aware of the power I had chosen to carry, and that awareness changed the way I handled it.

Possession Creates Responsibility

Owning a firearm came with responsibilities I had to be taught. Carrying the Word of God comes with responsibilities we discuss far less often, and many of us carry it with far less consideration than I gave that weapon. We own several Bibles. We have Scripture available on our phones, tablets, and computers. We receive daily verses through notifications, devotionals, sermons, podcasts, and social media posts. We underline familiar passages, save inspirational graphics, and quote Scripture when offering encouragement or advice. We know the Bible is powerful. Paul describes Scripture as profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness so that God's people may be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The psalmist presents God's Word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). Jesus

relied on Scripture when resisting temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11). Many of us have carried the Bible into church, into conversations, and through difficult seasons for years.

Yet we may never have been taught how to handle it. We were told to read Scripture without being shown how to determine what a passage means. We were instructed to obey the Bible without learning how context, audience, history, and literary form shape responsible application. We inherited conclusions from families, churches, denominations, communities, and Christian culture without always knowing how those conclusions were reached. Some of us learned to read until a sentence stood out and immediately connect it to whatever we were experiencing. Others became almost entirely dependent on pastors, teachers, and devotional writers to explain Scripture. Some of us were discouraged from asking questions, as though uncertainty revealed weak faith rather than an opportunity to learn. In some cases, we became confident enough to repeat or teach what we had never carefully examined. Using Scripture carries responsibility, because the moment we say “the Bible says,” we are doing more than offering a personal opinion. We are invoking divine authority. That authority belongs to Scripture, not to us.

If we misunderstand a passage, remove it from its context, or place our own assumptions over it, sincerity does not transform our interpretation into truth. A person can be deeply wounded by something God never said and spend years believing the wound came from Him. A woman may be taught that forgiveness requires the immediate restoration of trust, even though Scripture does not treat forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation, and restored access as identical realities (Matthew 18:15–17; Luke 17:3–4; Ephesians 4:31–32). Someone grieving or struggling emotionally may be told that anguish reveals deficient faith, despite the Bible’s honest accounts of lament, fear, exhaustion, and spiritual distress among faithful people (Psalm 13; Psalm 42–43; 1 Kings 19:1–18; 2 Corinthians 1:8–9). A church member may raise legitimate concerns about a leader’s conduct and be warned not to “touch God’s anointed,” even though the passage commonly quoted refers to God’s protection of the patriarchs and does not exempt modern leaders from biblical accountability (1 Chronicles 16:19–22; Psalm 105:12–15; 1 Timothy 5:19–21).

The people offering those interpretations may genuinely believe they are helping. They may be repeating what someone they trusted taught them. They may never have learned to distinguish between what the passage says and what Christian culture has said about it. Good intentions matter, but they do not make us proficient carriers. The Word of God is not defective. Scripture does not become dangerous because something is wrong with it. The danger emerges when something powerful is placed in our hands and we do not yet understand what it was designed to do, what it was not designed to do, or how easily it can be aimed at the wrong target. That is why Paul's description of Scripture in Ephesians 6 deserves more than a passing reference. He calls it a sword.

What Comes Before the Sword

Paul's instruction to take up the sword appears near the conclusion of his letter to the Ephesians. By that point, he had already spent most of the letter explaining what God has accomplished through Christ. Believers have been chosen, redeemed, forgiven, and adopted through God's grace (Ephesians 1:3–14). Those who were spiritually dead have been made alive with Christ, not because of their own works, but because of God's mercy (Ephesians 2:1–10). Jews and Gentiles, once divided from one another, have been reconciled to God and brought together into one body through the cross (Ephesians 2:11–22). Only after establishing who believers have become in Christ does Paul turn to how that new identity should shape their lives—unity, maturity, truthfulness, anger, forgiveness, sexuality, worship, marriage, family, work (Ephesians 4:1–6:9). The armor comes after all of that:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God.”

—Ephesians 6:10–11, ESV

Paul does not begin by telling believers to make themselves stronger. He does not instruct them to manufacture courage, suppress fear, or become

spiritually impressive enough to overpower the enemy. He tells them to draw their strength from the Lord. The armor of God is not a celebration of Christian self-sufficiency. It is an acknowledgment that our own strength is insufficient for the conflict we face, especially for those of us who learned to survive by becoming capable, prepared, useful, and easy to depend on. We can carry that same posture into our relationship with God and assume spiritual maturity means becoming strong enough not to need help, feel uncertainty, or admit we do not know something. Paul presents a different picture. We stand because God supplies what we need to stand.

The repeated emphasis throughout the passage is not on chasing the enemy. It is on remaining firmly established. Paul tells believers to stand against the schemes of the devil, withstand in the evil day, and continue standing after taking up the armor God provides (Ephesians 6:11, 13–14). His description of spiritual warfare is less theatrical than Christian culture sometimes makes it. He is not teaching believers to become fascinated with darkness or preoccupied with identifying demonic activity behind every inconvenience. He is teaching them how to remain faithful when deception, temptation, accusation, fear, and opposition try to move them away from the truth. The armor gives them stability. The sword gives them a way to respond. Paul writes:

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

—Ephesians 6:17, ESV

The sword belongs to the Spirit before it is placed in our hands. We do not create its authority. We do not make Scripture powerful through the intensity of our delivery. We do not strengthen it by attaching our opinions to it, and we do not weaken it by admitting that we need help understanding it. We receive the Word as something given by God, and we submit ourselves to its authority before attempting to use it with anyone else.

A Weapon for Answering Deception

The sword is the clearest item in Paul's list for direct response and the only piece of the armor explicitly presented as an offensive weapon. The belt stabilizes, the breastplate guards the body, the shoes prepare the feet, the shield extinguishes flaming arrows, and the helmet protects the head. The sword, however, equips the believer to answer when falsehood advances at close range (Ephesians 6:14–17). Paul is not writing a technical manual about Roman combat, and we should not force every detail of the metaphor beyond his argument. The pieces function together, but the sword serves a distinct purpose: it lets the believer not only withstand what opposes the truth, but respond to it. Spiritual opposition frequently advances through distorted ideas, and the Word of God gives us a way to confront those distortions with what God has actually revealed.

Genesis tells us the serpent's first recorded strategy was to distort what God had said and cast suspicion on His character (Genesis 3:1–5). Jesus described the devil as a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Paul warned that believers could be deceived and led away from sincere devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning (2 Corinthians 11:3). The enemy does not always need us to reject Scripture entirely. Sometimes it is enough for us to misunderstand it.

If we believe God is harsh, unreliable, or withholding, that belief will shape the way we relate to Him. If we confuse condemnation with conviction, we may remain beneath shame Christ has already addressed (Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 7:9–10). If we assume suffering always proves disobedience, we may misjudge ourselves and others, much like Job's friends did (Job 4–5; 8; 11; 42:7–9). The sword equips us to answer distortion with what God has actually revealed. But that requires knowing the difference between what God has revealed and what we have merely assumed.

The Devil Knows Scripture Too

One of the clearest warnings about mishandling Scripture appears during the temptation of Jesus. After fasting for forty days in the wilderness, Jesus was approached by the devil with a series of temptations, each one aimed either at distorting His identity or persuading Him to act outside the Father's will (Matthew 4:1–11). When Satan challenged Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3—human beings do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God (Matthew 4:3–4). Satan then took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and told Him to throw Himself down. This time, the devil quoted Scripture. He pulled from Psalm 91:11–12, a passage celebrating God's protection of those who trust Him, and tried to turn that promise into permission for Jesus to manufacture danger and force the Father to prove His faithfulness through a dramatic rescue (Matthew 4:5–6). Jesus answered:

“Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”
—Matthew 4:7, ESV

Notice what Jesus did not do. He did not reject Psalm 91. He rejected Satan's use of it. A person can quote a verse accurately and still apply it falsely. Biblical language can support a conclusion the passage was never meant to authorize. One part of Scripture can be isolated and applied in a way that contradicts the broader witness of Scripture. Satan knew the words. Jesus handled them rightly. He understood that God's promise of protection did not authorize reckless behavior meant to force God's hand. Faith trusts God's character. Presumption creates a crisis and demands God respond on our terms.

The temptation of Jesus dismantles the assumption that the presence of a Bible verse automatically settles an argument. We still have to ask whether the passage has been understood in context, whether its application reflects its purpose, and whether the conclusion agrees with the rest of Scripture. Otherwise, we may mistake a biblical quotation for a biblical interpretation. The devil did not need to invent a fake verse. He quoted a real one and aimed

it deliberately. Paul warned that the enemy disguises himself as an angel of light, which means deception rarely announces itself (2 Corinthians 11:14). Most of us will never handle Scripture with that intent. We are far more likely to repeat what we were taught, or to reach for a passage because it confirms what we already believe. That is part of what makes deception dangerous: sincerity does not make us immune to it. We can believe we are defending truth while misrepresenting what God has actually said. That should sober every one of us who carries the Word.

People Are Not the Target

Before Paul places the sword in our hands, he tells us what we're actually fighting:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.”
—Ephesians 6:12, ESV

Paul continues, naming rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over the present darkness, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). People are not the enemy. That does not mean people never behave sinfully or cause real harm. Paul is not minimizing abuse, betrayal, oppression, manipulation, injustice, or human responsibility. Scripture repeatedly calls people to repentance, confronts those who misuse power, and requires communities to address wrongdoing rather than ignore it (Isaiah 1:16–17; Matthew 18:15–17; Ephesians 5:11; James 5:1–6). He is locating those human realities within a larger spiritual conflict. Our struggle is not ultimately resolved by destroying, humiliating, controlling, or defeating another person. Anyone carrying a weapon has to know the intended target. The woman who disagrees with us is not the enemy. The person asking difficult questions is not the enemy. The believer who is confused, wounded, immature, or still learning is not the enemy.

Scripture was not entrusted to us so we could slash people into submission, win every theological disagreement, or end an uncomfortable conversation

by announcing what God supposedly said. Yet the Bible has often been used within Christian culture as though people themselves were the target. We use verses to silence pain instead of listening. We use biblical language to force agreement instead of making room for careful examination. We quote instructions about submission, forgiveness, obedience, or unity without considering the surrounding context or the responsibilities Scripture places on everyone involved. Those responses may contain words found in the Bible. That does not mean Scripture has been handled responsibly. Quoting Scripture is not the same as interpreting it. Biblical words can still be used unbiblically—and when we forget who the enemy is, we can turn a weapon meant to confront lies into a way of injuring the people God calls us to love.

The First Cut Is The Deepest

There is another reason Scripture has to be approached with humility: the sword does not only address what is in front of us. It exposes the person carrying it. The writer of Hebrews says:

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.”

—Hebrews 4:12, ESV

The verse continues by describing the Word as penetrating deeply, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The next verse declares that no creature is hidden from God’s sight—everything is exposed before the One to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:12–13). The surrounding context gives the image its weight. The writer of Hebrews has been warning believers through the example of Israel in the wilderness. That generation witnessed God’s power and received His promises, yet many hardened their hearts through unbelief and disobedience. They heard the good news, but hearing alone did not benefit them, because it was not joined with faith (Hebrews 3:7–19; 4:1–11). Outward proximity to God’s Word does not guarantee an obedient response to it. Scripture penetrates beneath religious

language, public behavior, and spiritual appearance. It exposes whether we are responding to God in faith or just staying familiar enough with His words to appear obedient. The Word can reveal that what we have called discernment is actually fear. What we have called service may be driven by the need to feel indispensable. What we have called peace may be conflict avoidance. What we have called wisdom may be our preference dressed in spiritual language.

This is why serious engagement with Scripture can become uncomfortable. We often approach the Bible hoping to confirm that someone else needs to change. We want reassurance that our interpretation is correct, our anger is justified, our plan is wise, and our understanding of God requires no revision. But the Word does not only affirm us. It examines us. Before we use Scripture to correct someone else, we have to let it correct us. Before we use it to expose deception around us, we have to let it expose what is operating within us. Jesus warned against focusing on the speck in another person's eye while ignoring the log in our own, instructing us to deal with ourselves before attempting to correct another person clearly (Matthew 7:1–5). Responsible handling begins with submission.

Regulations for Responsible Handling

None of us comes to Scripture as a blank slate. We bring our histories, traditions, wounds, loyalties, fears, politics, preferences, and previous teaching right along with us. Those influences do not automatically make our interpretations wrong, but they do mean humility is necessary. Familiarity with an interpretation does not prove it is faithful. Affection for the person who taught it does not make it true. Repetition does not turn a cultural assumption into a biblical command. At the same time, responsible study is not an invitation to become arrogant or suspicious of everyone who teaches us. God gives teachers to the church to equip His people and help them mature (Ephesians 4:11–14). We need trustworthy scholarship, mature community, historical perspective, and the humility to learn from believers whose knowledge exceeds our own. Receiving teaching, however, is not the same as surrendering our responsibility to examine it. The Bereans were

commended because they received Paul's message eagerly while examining the Scriptures daily to determine whether what they heard was true (Acts 17:10–12). Teachable, without becoming passive. That is the posture this book is meant to help you develop.

Later, we will learn a practical strategy for approaching a passage before deciding what it means—one that considers what surrounds the text: its context, history, audience, literary form, and relationship to the larger witness of Scripture, rather than treating an isolated sentence as though it arrived without a setting. We will also build a repeatable study process that helps us slow down, observe what is present, investigate responsibly, and respond faithfully. That process grew out of the structure that first helped me become more intentional in my own study, but our goal reaches further than filling in prompts or organizing notes. We are learning how to handle the Word. The tools will not remove every difficult question. They will not make us incapable of error or eliminate our need for teachers, Christian community, and the Holy Spirit. What they will give us is a more responsible place to begin, and a clearer way to recognize when further study is needed. Before we can use those tools, though, we have to accept why we need them.

Entrusted With a Weapon

The morning of my concealed-carry class taught me that possession created responsibility. The afternoon at the range taught me that responsibility required more than knowing a few rules. I needed training, practice, judgment, and humility about what I did not know. I also needed closed-toe shoes. The Word of God deserves even greater care. Scripture is the sword of the Spirit—God's truth entrusted to His people for a spiritual conflict that cannot be won through human strength, cultural wisdom, emotional certainty, or good intentions. It confronts lies, exposes motives, corrects distorted beliefs, reveals God's character, and equips us to remain faithful.

When Scripture is mishandled, people can be wounded beneath the banner of divine authority. Human preferences can be presented as God's commands. Cultural assumptions can be baptized as biblical truth. A verse can be pulled

from its context and made to support the very thing the larger witness of Scripture opposes. That is why this book will not simply encourage you to carry the sword. Most of us already do. The question is whether we are willing to learn how to handle it responsibly.

There is no shame in needing training. None of us can be expected to know what no one taught us. But once we recognize we have been entrusted with something powerful, we have to accept the responsibility of learning how to use it faithfully. That is the decision in front of you at the beginning of this journey. You can remain a passive owner of Scripture—reading occasionally, repeating what you have heard, hoping your sincerity compensates for what you have never examined. Or you can become a responsible student of the Word. Possession gave you responsibility. Now you need training.