



FRESH ENCOUNTERS WITH THE

GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

**Feasting on**

**God's Word**

**KRISTI McLELLAND**

Author of *Rediscovering Israel*

“*Feasting on God’s Word* not only shows Kristi’s extensive knowledge and experience in understanding the original culture and context of the Bible, but also that she loves and appreciates it in a way that has changed her life. I believe there is no one better than Kristi to lead us to change how we approach Scripture. By feasting, meditating, and portioning out the Word of the living God, we stop being merely passive believers and become engaged, active followers of the Jewish Jesus.”

—**Rabbi Jacob Rosenberg, PhD,**  
Adat Hatikvah Messianic Synagogue

“Amanda and I had the privilege of hearing Kristi teach these very passages while we were with her in Israel a few years ago. It made the Scriptures come to life in ways we never expected. We are so grateful that these rich teachings can now stir the souls of believers everywhere.”

—**TobyMac,** contemporary Christian artist

“Kristi McLelland has done it again! *Feasting on God’s Word* offers profound and enlightening perspectives on the timeless wisdom contained within the Scriptures. My heart was captured by the statement, ‘Remember, the living God meets you right where you are, but He never leaves you there!’ Let God, through Kristi, take you somewhere. You will quickly understand why she is one of our most popular, rock-star professors!”

—**Edward M. Smith, PhD,** president,  
Williamson College, Franklin, TN

“You may think I’m being dramatic to say that reading this book has changed the way I approach the Bible, the way I view the Sabbath, and the way I see Jesus and want to walk with Jesus. In all honesty, though, it just scratches the surface of what this book has brought alive in me. There’s no way you can read this book and not fall head over heels for Jesus and the Bible in a new and fresh way.”

—**Melinda Doolittle,** recording artist

“Kristi’s writing in *Feasting on God’s Word* will appeal to those seeking spiritual nourishment through reading the Scriptures. The examples in this work will whet the appetite of those wanting to encounter the living God in the Bible for themselves.”

—**Curtis Zackery,** pastor, author of *Soul Rest*



# Feasting on God's Word

KRISTI McLELLAND



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*For everyone who has journeyed or will journey to Israel with me:*

*Thank you for being part of the adventure of my life.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Feasting on God's Word* is a compilation of some of the most meaningful scriptural passages connected to my experiences in Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. If you've ever experienced a good meal alone, you understand as I do that it is not a *feast* unless it is shared with others!

It has been meaningful to partner in another work with a friend who values embodied learning in the lands of the Bible and the Text in context as much as I do. I am grateful to Rebekah Joy for shaping my experiences and teachings into the written feast you are about to enjoy.

The photographs in this book feature a combination of my, Rebekah Joy's, and photographer Killian Rose's journeys through Bible lands.

I am grateful to Harvest House for inviting me on another writing adventure. My appreciation runs deep for the opportunity to work alongside this exceptional team, with Bob Hawkins at the helm and Steve Miller as my editor extraordinaire. Special thanks goes to Sherrie Slopianka and Lindsay Lewis for their marketing expertise, along with Becky Miller, Brad Moses, and Kim Moore. It is always an enriching experience to feast with the Harvest House team as we share meals and stories, and grow together while working together.

And to you, the reader: Thanks for pulling up a chair to this biblical table and sharing in this feast with me!

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SHEPHERD WITH FLOCK IN ISRAEL

# An Invitation to Feast

I am thrilled that you've chosen to join me for this adventure! Since 2008, I have been serving the Western church by teaching the Bible in its original historical, cultural, linguistic, and geographic contexts. I function like a time machine; I want to take you back into the world of the Bible to get a better sense of what the biblical authors meant by what they wrote, and to better understand what the biblical characters did and said. Together we will discover cultural idioms or expressions, nuances recognized only when we look through the contextual lens, and so much more!

## **GOING HOME WITH JESUS**

One of the honors of my life has been the opportunity to take hundreds of people to Israel. On these biblical studies trips, we sit in the very places where the Story of the Bible happened. We sail in a boat across the Sea of Galilee. We hike through the Wilderness of Zin. We read John 4 around Jacob's Well. We visit ancient Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Capernaum.

If you have ever dated someone and the relationship advanced to the point of meeting the parents, you likely experienced getting to know that

someone better by interacting with their family. Maybe you noticed that your significant other had similar mannerisms or ways of speaking as their family of origin. Perhaps you even visited the home or city where they grew up. Being within their historic context provided you with additional insights about the person.

Journeying through the land of Israel is like going home with Jesus. Being in the town He was born in, the city He grew up in, as well as the region where He ministered and lived as an adult invites us to get to know Jesus in His Jewish world.

## INTERACTING WITH SOMEONE

On the morning of October 7, 2023, I was sitting in a restaurant at the Newark International Airport, waiting for my flight to Tel Aviv, Israel. I anticipated joining up with more than 300 men and women for our biblical study trip together. We had been preparing for this journey for more than a year. I had hosted numerous Zoom calls with trip participants, sharing about pilgrimage, hearing why they had chosen to make financial sacrifices and carve out time to go to Israel, and becoming familiar with their names and faces. The day of departure had finally arrived.

As I waited, my phone lit up, notifying me that my flight to Tel Aviv had been canceled due to “unrest in the region.” My heart seized. I knew something had gone terribly wrong. I will never forget how helpless, heartbroken, and gutted I felt as I sat in the airport, now waiting for a flight to take me back home.

News outlets later reported that October 7, 2023, was the bloodiest day for Jews since the Holocaust. It has been referred to as “Israel’s 9/11.” Since that dark day, I have wondered why reaching for my Bible was my immediate reflex and instinct. I didn’t pick up my Bible to read or learn something. I reached for my Bible because *I needed to interact with Someone.*

Jewish culture has gifted us with rich imagery when it comes to humans interacting with the living Word and the living God of the Bible. It's the metaphor of feasting on the Scriptures, taking them in, and letting them do their work in us.

While I love taking teams to Israel and providing that unique, embodied experience, I am also passionate about being a bridge between the West and the Bible lands through my roles as a professor, Bible teacher, and author. I am excited about exploring this Bible-as-a-feast concept together in the pages to come.

The Bible was given to us that we might know who the living God is, what He is like, and what it means to walk with Him. The Bible is living and active and so are we. When we touch the sacred Scriptures, it is life with life. Jews believe this produces eternal life, the good life, the marrow of life. As I've studied the Bible in the land of Israel and led team members in studying the Scriptures on-site, I have seen that the Bible itself is an adventure. In some ancient way it is happening to us as we interact with it.

## **LED BY A SHEPHERD**

The Jewish way of teaching is extremely visual. When Jesus or other rabbis are speaking, they can see the objects they are talking about—as can their disciples and listeners. To provide a visual framework and anchor for you, every chapter in *Feasting on God's Word* begins with a relevant picture from the lands of the Bible. Even in book form, I want to be a bridge between you and Jesus' world.

In all my years of taking teams to Israel, one photo that has come to mean the most to me is that of a shepherd pictured with his flock. As we feast on some of my favorite portions of Scripture together, I want you to keep this visual in mind. One of the most common metaphors the living God uses from Genesis to Revelation to describe His relationship with us is that of shepherds

with their flocks. I believe this is actually happening to us every time we open our Bibles. The living God is present as Father and Shepherd, ready to take us by the hand and lead us somewhere. I don't know about you, but I want the living God to lead me anywhere He wants to take me.

One of the first practices Jewish parents teach their children is how to ask great questions. Rabbi, theologian, and prolific author Jonathan Sacks said, "In Judaism, to be without questions is not a sign of faith, but a lack of depth."<sup>1</sup> Jews are not a people who look for certainty in the Scriptures; they know how to eat the mystery.

The Hebrew word *yeshiva* refers to a Jewish religious institution. In essence, to yeshiva is to study, process, ponder, feast, and digest together. As you begin this feast, here are some questions to yeshiva with your community:

What is your current relationship with your Bible?

What are some of your favorite portions throughout the Bible, and why?

What is all that you are feasting on in the Scriptures teaching you about who the living God is, what He is like, and what it's going to mean to walk with Him?

Great food is best experienced with great people. Thank you for pulling up a chair and joining me at this biblical table as we feast on the best and truest Story ever told!

PART 1

# The Living Word

*Scripture is the ongoing rapport between heaven and earth, between Christ and his church, between God and his children. It does not just tie us to the past; it binds us to the living Lord of the heavens. It is the living voice of God.<sup>1</sup>*

**HERMAN BAVINCK**

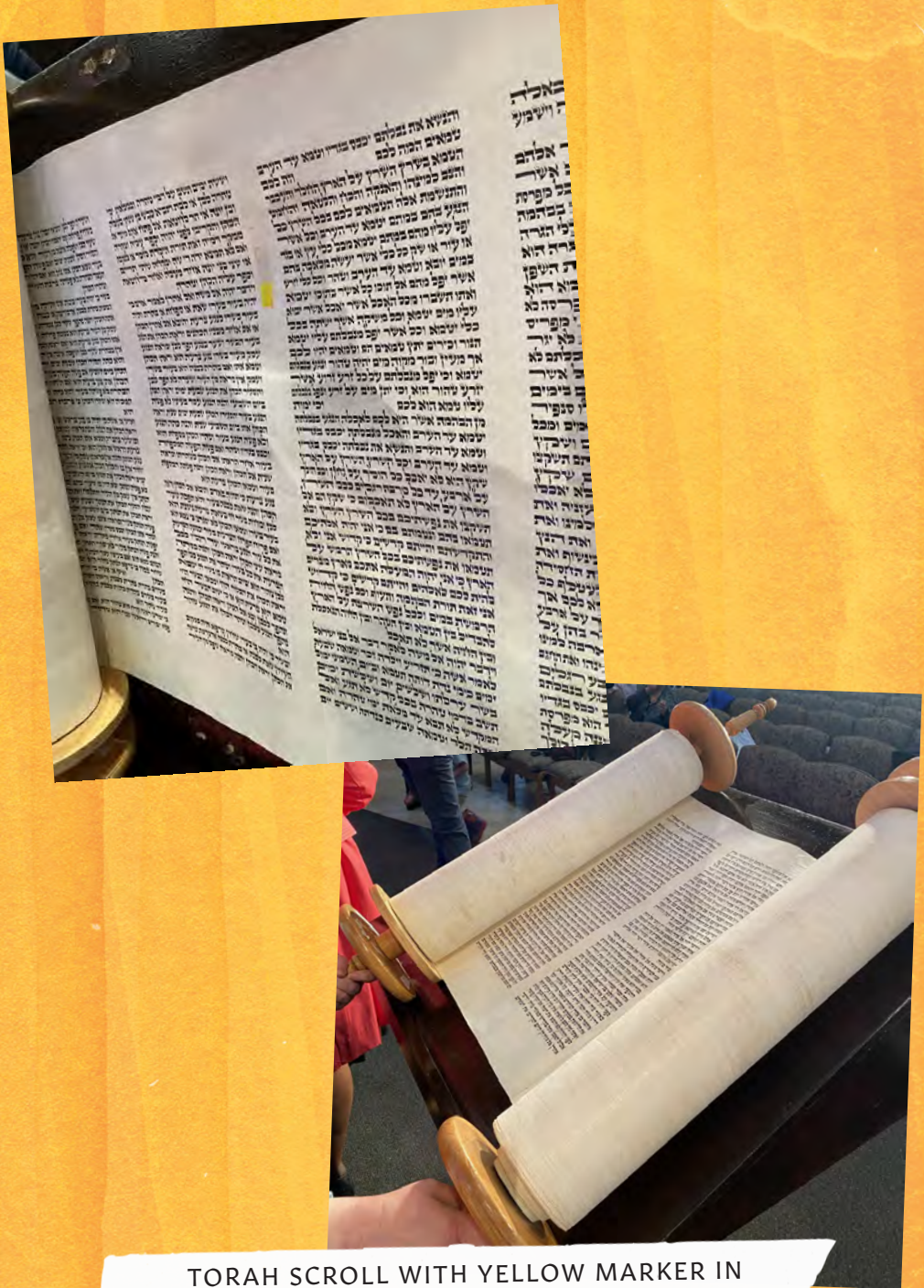


CHAPTER 1

# Interacting with the Bible

*To encounter the words of Scripture is  
to encounter God in action.<sup>1</sup>*

TIMOTHY WARD



TORAH SCROLL WITH YELLOW MARKER IN COLUMN BY WEEKLY PARASHA (PORTION)

## Interacting with the Bible

I grew up in rural Mississippi. My parents and I attended a very small church. At its zenith, it might have had 300 members. I put my trust in Jesus as my Savior when I was nine years old. One of the first changes my parents noticed in me was a deep curiosity for the Bible. I started pestering my parents and pastor with questions. Even as a young girl, I knew the Bible was going to be an important part of my life.

In the years since I first studied in Egypt and Israel, there have been three postures for approaching and interacting with the Word of God that have guided me. These ways of relating with—not just *reading*—the living Word and the living God quicken me, encourage me, convict me, and remind me of the best and truest Story ever told: the Story of the Bible.

We never simply read the Bible, we interact with it. According to Hebrews 4:12, “The word of God is alive and active”—and so are we. Us with the Bible is life with life. It is dynamic. Have you ever considered the reality that you have a relationship with the Bible? When I was chatting with a friend about this one day, he told me that he and the Bible were “taking a break right now.” I appreciated his honesty! What is your relationship with the Bible like at this season in your life? How often are you interacting with the Word of God? What have the Scriptures been saying to you?

Is it a friendly relationship? Is it confusing, comforting, frustrating, exciting, or perhaps a mixture?

We want to be a people moved by the Spirit of God as we are informed by the Word of God so we are a people of God who bring heaven to Earth. The living God as our Father has prepared the feast for us; we posture ourselves to receive it. I often pray Psalm 81:10 as I open my Bible: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." We are not orphans, and we are not fatherless. We do not have to scrape and scrounge our way through the Bible.

## FEASTING

The first posture for interacting with the Bible is pulling up a chair to the biblical table and *feasting* on the Word of God. Tradition says that the ancient Greeks loved study, but the Hebrews loved to feast. The Bible was given to us by the living God that we might feast on it. Upon reading the Scriptures, Jewish people go forth and embody them. Rather than merely knowing, they want to flesh out and carry the Scriptures in their very beings.

Psalm 19 richly illustrates the nourishing effects of the living Word in us. It says,

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes...

They are more precious than gold,

than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the honeycomb.  
By them your servant is warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.<sup>2</sup>

I love the language used in verse 7: “The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.” We don’t often think of the law as something that refreshes our soul. Have you ever woken up on a Sunday morning and thought, *I’m so excited to go to church this morning; I sure hope our pastor preaches from the book of Leviticus!* I don’t know anyone with that much enthusiasm about Leviticus and the specific instructions it contains. So, what does it mean that the law of the Lord refreshes or revives our soul?

The rest of verse 7 says, “The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.” I like to use this as an example of how words in the Bible can have different meanings than those in our Western culture, where being “simple” may be used to describe a person who is basic or slow of learning. But for the Jewish people in the world of the Bible, being simple was desirable as it could carry the idea of being open. We are not orphans; we are not fatherless. We do not have to open our Bibles and dig out something to feed ourselves. We are not alone in the moment. When we approach the Word of God, we do so as sons and daughters postured to receive. Rather than having to feed ourselves, we are readying ourselves to inherit and take in whatever the living God is ready to say and do as we interact with the Text.

Later in verse 8 we read, “The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.” I am an Old Testament nerd and I love the prophets. I sometimes hear people say that the God of the Old Testament is angry, then Jesus shows up in the New Testament and is kind. The manifold love of the living God is seen and known from Genesis to Revelation. When the psalmist says the commands are like radiant light to us, I am reminded that none

of the prophets of Israel ever went out and got the word of the Lord. Rather, the word of the Lord found them. Over and over throughout the Old Testament, we read this phrase: "The word of the LORD came to..." For example, "*The word of the LORD came to Abram...*"<sup>3</sup> "*The word of the LORD came to Jonah...*"<sup>4</sup> "*The word of the LORD came to Elijah...*"<sup>5</sup> "*The word of the LORD came to [Jeremiah]...*"<sup>6</sup> "*The word of the LORD came to Samuel...*"<sup>7</sup>

Rather than feeling the pressure to open our Bibles as if we have to get or find the Word of the Lord to feed ourselves, we are being invited to approach the Bible as a feast that has been prepared for us. We don't so much want to read it as we want to eat it. I don't know about you, but I love food! If I have the option of feasting rather than studying, I'm choosing to feast! The best food is experienced with people you know and love. If you go to a great restaurant with great food, you want to experience it with great people. This is one of the gifts of the Bible. We are continuously invited to feast on these portions together.

Psalm 19:10 describes the decrees of the Lord as "more precious than gold, than much pure gold." It continues, "They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb." While studying in Israel, I learned about a beautiful tradition rooted in this passage. Rabbis sometimes visit kindergarten classes, bringing wax paper and honey with them. They place the wax paper on a table in front of the children, pour some honey on the wax paper, then invite the children to dip their finger into the honey and taste it. As the children are enjoying the honey, the rabbi will look at them and say, "This is what the Word of the Lord tastes like; it is good for you. Take it in; it will do its work."

We agree with the rabbis and sages of Israel that the Scriptures really are as sweet as honey from the honeycomb. And we don't have to strive and strain to find that honey. We are sons and daughters pulling up our chairs to the biblical table with a Father who is ready to feed us the honey, to serve us the feast.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the prophets speak of *eating* the Scriptures. In Ezekiel 3, an angel twice tells the prophet Ezekiel to eat the scroll.

After the first directive, Ezekiel writes, “So I opened my mouth, and *he gave me the scroll to eat*. Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, *eat this scroll I am giving you* and fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.”<sup>8</sup> Neither time did Ezekiel have to go search out the Word of the Lord; rather, it came to him via an angel. Echoing Psalm 19, Ezekiel experienced the Word of the Lord tasting sweet like honey. The prophet Jeremiah writes, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight.”<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of unimaginable loss, Job speaks to how highly he esteems the Word of the living God. Job says, “I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.”<sup>10</sup> In the New Testament, Jesus quotes a passage from Deuteronomy when He is tempted by the devil. He says, “It is written: *Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”<sup>11</sup>

Remember, the first posture for interacting with the Word of God is that it’s not so much meant to be read; it is meant to be feasted on. As I said earlier, great food is best experienced with great people. The Scriptures are best experienced together as a community. The living Word is a rich table for us to gather around. The living God breaks the Scriptures down into bite-sized pieces and fills our mouths.

We want to take in the Word of God so that it becomes part of us. As we carry it with us, it guides, informs, and strengthens us through the journey of life—as Psalm 19 so beautifully conveys. The Scriptures are to be enjoyed, processed, pondered, discussed, and lived out in embodied faith.

My faith and life have been transformed as I’ve approached the Bible in a more sabbathed way. I know I am not alone in the moment. The living God is more faithful than I will ever be, and in the interaction, I am trusting God’s fidelity to be proven in my life as I respond to this invitation to live forward in faithful obedience to Him.

Speaking of food and feasting, every now and then, maybe as an appetizer

when out with friends, I'll enjoy some tater tots. Sometimes I attend a messianic Jewish fellowship in the city where I live. I always look forward to the moment in their Shabbat service when all the children are invited to gather up front. The rabbi takes off his prayer shawl, known as a *tallit* in Hebrew, and holds it like a canopy over the children, praying for them before sending them off to their ministry classes or Shabbat (Sabbath) school. The best part about this is that the children's ministry is called the Torah Tots—is that not the sweetest thing ever? I'm still looking for the application to become a Torah Tot!

### HAGAH

Another posture for interacting with the Word of God is found in Psalm 1. The book of Psalms is by far the largest book in the Bible. The psalter opens with this grand pronouncement:

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.<sup>12</sup>

The word “meditate” is our focus here. What image comes to mind when you think of meditation? I often envision it as a quiet, contemplative practice. This is a great example of how cultures and languages define words differently. In the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, this word “meditate” is the word *hagah*. It carries the idea of growling the way a lion does as it devours its prey. When was the last time you bit your Bible? *Hagah* is energetic, focused, active, and all in.

The psalter begins with the wisdom that it is through consistent meditating on the law of the Lord that one will be blessed. Do you view interacting

with the living Word of the living God as a discipline, something to be done and checked off a mental list? Or as an invitation to feast, to *bagab*, to devour the Word of God?

In the Western church, we talk a lot about spiritual disciplines and practices. I believe—and have experienced it in my own life—that interacting with the living God and the Bible each day cultivates the reflexes of the kingdom in our lives. I've been an athlete my entire life, and I learned early on about muscle memory. I'm now a golfer—I would happily golf every day! As I spend time at the driving range practicing swings, I'll take one or two clubs and hit fifty balls with each in an effort to cultivate muscle memory in my body. Then, when I'm out on the course playing a round of golf, my body recalls how to hit with my pitching wedge and is well-practiced in hitting with my driver.

Spiritually, this is what it means to cultivate memory with the Word of God so that it is stored inside of us. Not for knowledge's sake, but so when we get bumped, the kingdom of God flows out of us rather than something else. When you are angry, lonely, or scared, what comes out of you? What are your spiritual reflexes? Have you ever been pressed and come out sideways on someone? I certainly have. Cultivating the reflexes of the kingdom of God help us pull from what has been stored up in moments when we are pressed. What would it look like for you to give more of yourself to interacting with the living God by chewing on and digesting the written Word of God so that the reflexes of the kingdom become more automatic in your life as a follower of Jesus?

In *The Message* translation, Psalm 119:11 says, "I've banked your promises in the vault of my heart so I won't sin myself bankrupt." Similar to the concept of compound interest with money, our investment in the living Word is us storing up Scripture, adding to the very fabric of our being. The Word of God is meant to travel this world inside us, shaping and forming us, cultivating the way of Jesus in us as His ambassadors in this world.

I was very close to my father. He passed away during my senior year of college when I was twenty-one. It's difficult to lose a parent at any age and this was an extremely hard loss for me. After my dad passed, my mom told me I could have anything of his that I wanted. Because I was so close to my dad, I wanted to have something that would be especially meaningful to me. I chose his Bible because every morning that I can remember when I was still living at home with my parents, my father would sit at our kitchen table reading his Bible. Before I even knew how to read, I recall waking up, walking into the kitchen, seeing my dad, and being so curious as to what was in that book that compelled him to sit at the kitchen table each morning and read it.

Are you a person worth imitating and following? As your children and the generations after you watch your life, what are they learning about who the living God is and what He is like? There's an invitation for all of us here. There is no time like the present to start cultivating new reflexes of the kingdom. Taking time to *hagab*, to actively meditate on the Word of God, is a large part of that.

One of the commitments I made throughout the pandemic of 2020, when I was unable to take teams to Israel, was to not consume more news or social media compared to my time in the Word. I wanted to let the voice and perspective of the Lord, in the midst of worldwide suffering, loss, and unknowns, be the voice and perspective that ruled and reigned in my heart. I certainly had some bad days, like everyone else during that unprecedented season. Yet I was able to hear and perceive God because I kept coming back to the biblical table. I trusted the living God to feed me, to give me the honey, to illuminate the portion of the feast that would nourish me in the moment, to show me who He is and what He is like. I trusted His faithfulness in the midst of so much uncertainty.

During the pandemic, a thirteen-year-old girl, whose family I've known for years, came to me and said, "Miss Kristi, I want to be baptized and I'd

like for you to do it.” I was in this season of being extra mindful to allow the Word of the Lord to rule my life, and I readily agreed to get into this baptism process with her. As we talked it over, I told her that Jesus’ central teaching in the entire Bible is the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5–7. If you and I really want to follow Jesus, we need to embody the Sermon on the Mount.

This young woman’s baptism was about thirty days out, so we made a commitment to read and *hagah* the entire Sermon on the Mount every day. Once a week I picked her up, took her for ice cream, and we sat with our Bibles, discussing what the living God was showing us. That was a big daily commitment for us both, but we agreed to this as part of her spiritual preparation for baptism. We had great conversations each week. The last time we sat down together, days before her baptism, she looked at me and said, “Miss Kristi, I feel like the Sermon on the Mount is getting inside of me.” Through the repetition of feasting on this portion of Scripture, by taking time to *hagah*, the Word was becoming part of her. I noticed that neither one of us opened our Bibles that day, yet we both talked about the Sermon on the Mount from a place of the Word of God living inside of us.

Where is the Word of the Lord? It is meant to be inside of you. It is meant to be inside of me. The Word of the Lord—the Story God graciously allowed to be scribed for us—has been feeding the church for 2,000 years and is intended to travel with us.

## PARASHA

Our third posture for interacting with the Bible comes from the Hebrew word *parasha*, meaning “portion.” I grew up in a Christian home where daily Bible reading was encouraged and practiced. We called this our quiet time. In Jewish liturgy, the *parasha* is the portion of Torah read in synagogue each week during the Shabbat (Sabbath) service. The entire congregation takes in the *parasha*; they *hagah* and feast on it together. Once again, we see the rich

imagery of taking in our portion of the living Word, feeding on it, and letting it have its way in us as we are being formed as followers of Jesus.

Jewish congregations each have their own large Torah scroll known as the *Sefer Torah*. These scrolls can cost tens of thousands of dollars and are typically stored in the *aron kodesh*, or holy ark. There are several differences between Torah scrolls and English Bibles. Torah scrolls are in Hebrew, with the text being written and read from right to left. Another key difference is that there are no chapter headings, chapters, or verses. The first English Bible to include sections, chapters, and verses did not go into print until the year 1560. It was called the Geneva Bible. For 1,500 years, the church interacted with Scripture in Story form, without it being broken down into chapter and verse.

In synagogues, when the congregational scroll is taken out of the ark, the people rejoice and celebrate, singing and dancing as they welcome the Word in their midst. They often stand for the reading of that day's *parasha*. They revere the presence of the Scriptures among them. When I attend a Shabbat service—such as at the local Messianic community I previously mentioned—this is one of the experiences I most anticipate!

## THE WORD FINDS US

I've experienced powerful moments when the Word of God met me, when the reflexes of the kingdom proved true in my life.

On an entryway table just inside my front door is a stone memorial marker with the date June 30, 2016. Above the date is the Hebrew verb *zakhar*, which means "to remember." We will dive deeper into *zakhar* in a coming chapter. This memorial stone is one of the first objects I see when I walk in my door, and one of the last when I walk out. It marks what has become one of the most important stories, eras, and chapters of my life.

Back in the summer of 2016, I took the leap of my professional career. I had been on staff at a church for seventeen years and knew that it was time to go.

But I am Captain Safety; my risk meter is zero. Can you relate? If something feels even remotely dangerous, I'm not interested. The way I was raised, leaving a job without having a job is not typically a wise decision. I was terrified.

Through therapy, I've learned that I engage in what's known as catastrophic thinking—yes, it's as awful as it sounds! What that means is this: When something can possibly go wrong in my life, my mental rat gets on its wheel and I start thinking through and ruminating on the worst possible scenarios and situations, trying to figure out how I'm going to live through them. Unfortunately, my emotions follow those thoughts. When I'm catastrophic thinking, nobody makes it. I'm dead, you're dead, everybody's dead! Then I suddenly come to my senses and realize that none of those scenarios have actually happened, but I'm a mess.

This is where I was at during the summer of 2016 after leaving my job of seventeen years. I had panic attacks for the first time in my life. I couldn't sleep. I'm an early riser but waking up at 5:00 a.m. with nothing to do other than think about not having a job or plan for what was next added to my undone state. June 30, 2016, was my final day as a staff member at that church. I left that position and entered the wilderness. I knew for quite some time that I was supposed to take that leap; I just didn't have the courage to do it until then.

Another nugget I learned about myself during that season is that sometimes known bondage is easier than unknown freedom. Enduring a difficult situation can be more comfortable than having faith that there is better elsewhere. A lot of my fear during that season stemmed from being a female Bible teacher in the South. I was forty-two years old at the time and deeply concerned that if I left the church where I had served for seventeen years, I would no longer have opportunities to teach the Bible. Forty-two years old is quite young for feeling like your best days are behind you. I was heartbroken in that wilderness. On my early morning walks with my dog Chester—a schnauzer named after G.K. Chesterton, one of my favorite

theologians!—I would cry as I asked the living God, “Where are You in the midst of my wilderness?”

Have you ever taken the step you believed God led you to take, only to discover the following steps were not revealed to you as quickly as you preferred?

During that time, three of my friends decided to take me on a trip to see another friend out of state. I got on the plane, struggling and undone. I didn't know my next steps and was scared. I lowered my tray table and the reflex of the kingdom found me, compelling me to open my Bible. If you've ever wondered what a seminary-degreed, Bible college professor, and teacher does when they don't know what to do... I opened my Bible, pleaded with the living God to speak to me, then dropped my finger on a page! After all my writhing in the wilderness, the verse I placed my finger on was Psalm 78:19, which says, “Can God really spread a table in the wilderness?”

In that moment on that airplane, I felt as if that portion of Scripture had jumped off the page and lodged in my ribs. I started carrying this word from the living God in me. I carried it on a sticky note. I had it on my bathroom mirror for a few years. There is rarely a day that goes by that I don't think about this verse; it was the *parasha*, the portion that found me, that I feasted on. Rather than catastrophic thinking, I focused on the ways the living God provided for the Israelites through their forty-year wilderness journey. I realized God allowed me to walk through this wilderness of uncertainty so I could better learn who He is and what He is like. This portion of Scripture invited me to move from anxiety to deeper faith.

When I take teams to Israel, we often hike through the Wilderness of Zin. Since June 2016, when I hike with a team in Zin, I remember that one line of Scripture from Psalm 78:19 that met me so powerfully, grabbing me and not allowing me to let go. I couldn't forget that portion of Scripture if I tried, it has become such a part of me. I learned the faithfulness of God in my wilderness season. The living God hasn't failed a people yet; we won't be the first.

## PULL UP A CHAIR

How would it change your relationship with the living Word and the living God if you shifted your perspective from being disciplined to read and study the Bible, to pulling up a chair to the biblical table, eating the feast that's been prepared, and interacting with the living God via His Word?

We are being invited to lay down striving and straining, to reject the idea that we are fatherless orphans, to come to the table as sons and daughters, to posture ourselves to receive the portions the living God has for us.

When it comes to our interactions with the Word of God, we never simply read it. We interact with it. We are not meant merely to master the Scriptures; that's not the point. Through the Bible, God as our Father has given us the best and truest Story ever told. We are invited to feast on it, to *hagah*, to take in our daily *parasha* of the Word. As we experience the Scriptures and the living God of the Bible, we find ourselves located *in* the great Story. We have a part to play as the New Testament church. We are following Jesus, walking in His way and inviting heaven to Earth.

Whether you realize it or not, you have a relationship with the Bible. What is it?