

Word on the Street

Word on the Street

lessons from biblical
characters told in a
way that'll change the
way you look at you,
them, and your God

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GEORGE



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To Maryfaith Boberg

and the example of her letters to Wilfred Jones

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Introduction: Fruit Loops and Origami

Have you ever yawned in church?

I have. And contrary to popular belief, holding the bulletin in front of your mouth doesn't fool the man behind the pulpit one bit.

Growing up as a preacher's kid, I've mastered bulletin origami and built forts out of hymnals to pass the time. I've heard more sermons about David than I've seen episodes of *The Cosby Show*. Well, almost. I don't remember exactly when I learned about Moses and when I figured out that disobeying Mommy was sin. Thankfully, the Bible's been a part of my life for as long as I can remember.

So I know a lot of the stories—and the three points and a poem that go with them. To make the Bible introspectively new, I've had to discover where in the Word I transact with God—the part that confronts me, that makes me make a choice. There's no neutral ground with God, and his words require that I walk away different in spirit and actions.

I ask myself tough questions. Not the subterfuge of unknowns, like Cain's wife and Abraham's Bosom—the nitty-gritty, rubber-meets-the-road questions that push against my comfort zone. Evaluations of my faith and motives and perspective—the kinds of questions in this book.

Maybe they're the questions you've been asking yourself or maybe the ones you, like me, have been avoiding. Or maybe you're new to the faith and haven't gotten around to these yet. What's great about God is that he'll have your heart prepared only for what he wants to work on at present. His insights, like his mercies, are new every morning.

You probably know all the characters, too—know that David goes with Goliath, that Jacob pairs with Esau, that Paul comes with Silas in the collector set. And it's easy for us to think of them as bearded fogeys in turbans and robes riding camels far from our daily experience. It's easy to write off their achievements of faith as mythical and distant.

I tried with this book to put the saints on your street—mine anyway—to see them as people we might know or become. Hence, the following studies bear the name of their fictitious businesses. So walk the street. Stop in each shop, and look around. Get the goods on how to live this Christian life.

The publisher and I are making morning devotions easier for you by putting portions of the Scripture passages (some of which are abbreviated in this book for space) at the beginning of each study. It's like putting vitamins in your Fruit Loops, I guess; but it makes sure you get some Bible with your breakfast—without having to flip back and

forth between two books. Read the Scripture passages first: that's where God's going to do business with you.

When you get done with each devotional, check out the questions on the flip side of "Word has it . . ." Yep, those are the questions I mentioned. Hey, if I had to answer them, you can't plead the fifth.

Mikey liked it. You might, too.

If you learn even a fraction of what I did in writing this book, the ministry I've hoped to have in your heart through its pages will be a success.

Faith & Perspective

Sunstill Timepieces

Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, “Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us.”

So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors.

The Lord said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you.”

So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. And the Lord confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. As they fled

from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.

Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, “O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon.”

So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day.

Joshua 10:1–15

After a year of marriage without one, I finally broke down and bought a TV. It took some doing. Actually, it took the Trade Center terrorist attack and a wife tired of watching our date-night movies after hours at my office break room.

No, it wasn't an extrication from stinginess or Franciscan asceticism. I was afraid a picture box would rob me of this book, my YMCA routine, and Sunday afternoon naps—the ability to wield the phrase *carpe diem*.

I don't think Joshua and his wife ever caught *Roman Holiday* or *Sleepless in Seattle*. Joshua liked to *do* things. Spy on giants, walk around walls, chase Canaanites. Forty years wandering in the wilderness could cause any eighty-year-old warrior to try sky surfing—or at least ask his doc-

tor about attention deficit disorder. He had wasted enough time because of stupid stuff.

So, now he's chasing the armies of five Canaanite cities—something he's been waiting to do since his back felt the soreness of slave labor. The sun starts to slide, and he has more men to kill than he has hours to kill them. (I've never had that problem, but I would assume that would be stressful for a commander-in-chief.) If he doesn't catch the retreating hoards, they might have a chance to regroup and attack his men on their terms. If he chases them into the dark, his army could be easily surrounded by fleeing armies that scatter throughout the blackened mountains.

Joshua stops to pray. Not to explain the situation to God, not to cry out for generic help, not to ask for faith to do what's right—he jumps right to the point and tells the sun to stand still. The sun stays up for another twenty-four hours and resumes its routine the next day. God answers—as if Joshua were Moses, the Mount Sinai transcriber, or David, the man after God's own heart, or Solomon, who got to ask God for a guaranteed anything.

Joshua is the only one who will ever get to command heavenly bodies. (So, don't press your luck on the last day of your next vacation.) In fact, Joshua never asked again, even when a later battle took him into a second day of fighting. He simply took advantage of his granted time and the constant availability of the God of the universe. He used the extra time for God's glory (unlike King Hezekiah who shows up later in the hills Joshua conquered).

God often promises us audience for prayer, as well as strength to accomplish his tasks. He gives us days and

sunlight sufficient for *his* will. He told us that we could cash in our collection of sacrifices for heavenly payouts, redeem days for eternal rewards, and see a guaranteed return on his invested Word. If we ask specific requests of the Lord, he'll give us specific answers and moments to realize his perfect timing.

Word has it . . .

“Call to me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3).

Could you boldly ask God for more hours to do what you did today?

Do you pray over specific decisions at both home and work?

What kings should you keep chasing in your life?

Can you remember recent specific answers to prayer?

Would today be redeemed for stubble or precious stones?