



# *When All Else Fails*

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS when I felt inadequate. Inexperienced. Unsure of myself. A friend and I were on the interstate, on our way to visit our friend Sarah.\* She was a beautiful woman who earnestly desired to follow Jesus. Due to chemical imbalances in her brain and other factors, she'd landed in the psychiatric ward of a local hospital.

We chatted as we drove, but our talk slowed as we neared the hospital. *What could we say to bring encouragement?* We both wanted to be used by Jesus, for His love to flow through us and touch Sarah's life!

I parked the car, and we bowed our heads, pleading with God to touch our lips with His words, to touch our hearts with His love, and to pour through us to minister to our hurting sister. We opened the car doors, grabbed our Bibles, and headed inside. We had to leave our purses at a little locker reserved for visitors. Then they took us to Sarah's room.

Even now, it brings tears to my eyes: the pain she was in, the hopelessness, the tears running down her cheeks. I hugged her tightly, my tears mingling with hers, then sat next to her on the bed.

*What could we say to make a difference?* She remained unresponsive. We simply listened to her pain. We held her. We cried. We prayed. Nothing. No change. Finally, in desperation, I turned to my Bible. Opening it, I looked into Sarah's eyes. "May I read promises from God's Word?"

No response. For a fleeting moment, I almost gave up. *It might not make any difference.* I opened my Bible to a favorite Psalm—chapter 91. I began to read, inserting her name into the verses, praying as I went.

"[Sarah] dwells in the secret place of the Most High [and she] shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. [Sarah] will say of the Lord, 'He is

*“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

Hebrews 4:12, NKJV

my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust” (Ps. 91:1, 2, NKJV).

Suddenly, Sarah’s eyes focused intently on my face. Her sobs slowed as I continued reading, “[God] shall cover [Sarah] with His feathers, and under His wings [she] shall take refuge” (verse 4).

The sobs ceased. The rocking stopped. The Word of God flowed into her heart and brought with it healing, life-giving power, and transformation! I’ve experienced the power of God’s Word at work in my own heart many times, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen such an immediate, radical response in anyone like I did that day.

God’s Word is the most powerful cleansing agent I know. Paul talks about how God wants to wash His church with the water of the Word (Eph. 5:26). But how do we let God’s Word transform us? How do we take it deep into our hearts and use it to its full potential?

I’ve discovered three things that help me more fully experience the power of His Word in my life.

First, **commit**. Commit to spending time in God’s Word. How can His Word wash me if I never let it come close? Or if I skim its surface without really studying it for myself? Allow God’s Word to wash you! Allow Him access to your heart and life.

Devote 15–30 minutes each morning to reading the Bible. I keep a yellow highlighter on my bedside table. In the morning, during my time with God, I highlight any promise in my reading. My favorite promises are about the change God wants to work in my life.

- The forgiveness He can give (1 John 1:9).
- The peace He can bestow (John 14:27).
- The grace He can impart (2 Cor. 12:9).
- The abundant life He can provide (John 10:10).
- The joy He can restore (John 16:24).
- The plan He can unfold in my life (Jer. 29:11).

Choose one of your morning promises and write it out in your journal, on a 3 x 5 card, or on a scrap of paper. I tape verses over the sink so I can think about them while washing dishes. Others are taped to my computer at work, and another one sits by my nightstand so I can think of that Scripture as I drift off to sleep.

Second, **consent**. Consent to accept what His Word shows you. Our pastor says, “The Word that cuts you, study it more deeply.” Often, when I come across a passage in the Bible that cuts against my pride or selfishness, I automatically want to push it away. However, every time I open God’s Word with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to show me my heart, He is faithful to answer that prayer. Why should I shy away from the convicting power of the Holy Spirit? God’s Word is *supposed* to show me my heart! After all, Hebrews 4:12 says, “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing [to my deepest heart and thoughts].”

If you read something that cuts a bit, stop. Take some time to think on that passage. Pray for God to reveal any sin you might be unintentionally

cherishing. Ask Him to cut it out of your life. One time I was memorizing Hebrews 12:14 while washing dishes. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord,” I repeated as I scrubbed a plate. Ironically, at that time, I was at odds with a certain woman. My bitterness was buried so deeply that I couldn’t sense it. I was actually feeling rather pleased to be at peace with all people!

I felt a sudden jolt as my eyes went to the next verse: “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Heb. 12:15, NKJV). Instantly, I felt conviction in my heart! *Jill, you’ve got bitterness bottled up. This bitterness is affecting you, and it will spread to your marriage, your friends, and your ministry.*

At that point, I had a choice: I could push the Word of God away because it was cutting too close to home, or I could open my heart to the Lord and ask Him to change me from the inside out!

Finally, **claim**. Claim His promises for your life. Are you struggling with temptation? Does it feel like you fall back into the same habits and patterns? Do you long to break free, but don’t know how? That’s where the Word of God comes in. Jesus said in John 6:63, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (NKJV).

God’s Word brings life-giving, life-transforming power. When He created this planet we call home, He spoke, and it took place. Air and water, sun and stars, vegetation, flowers, and animals—*everything* came into existence simply because God spoke. That same power is inherent in the Word of God. As we speak His Word over our lives, He’s at work to cause what He said to come to pass in our lives.

Pull out those cards or your journal where you’ve written those Bible promises. Don’t just glance—read them aloud. Speak those words over your life and the lives of others. It doesn’t matter if you *feel* any different. The promise isn’t based on *feeling*! Simply trust Him. Trust that the work He’s begun in your life will be completed (Phil.1:6).

I don’t know where your heart is right now. Maybe reading the Word bores you, frustrates you, or cuts too deeply. Perhaps you’re where I’ve spent too much of my life: too busy to stop and dig for treasure, too stressed to stop and claim promises, too self-sufficient to stop and turn to His Word for spiritual strength and power. But every time I stop what I am doing, *commit* to spend time in His Word, *consent* to let it change me, and *claim* His Word in my life, incredible things happen! **7**

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\*Not her real name

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