

RIGHTLY DIVIDING *the* WORD *of* TRUTH



SHARI S. ABBOTT



RIGHTLY DIVIDING *the* WORD of TRUTH



PREVIEW

That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. (Psalm 26:7)

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Foreword

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

Such a simple verse. Yet even though I grew up an avid Bible reader and consider myself a capable Bible teacher, I did not always understand what Paul meant by “rightly dividing.” One day, my dear friend Tad, who had spent countless hours in my Bible studies, pulled me aside and asked me to reflect more deeply on the apostle Paul’s counsel. Over the years, as he listened and watched my teaching, he sensed that beneath my confident exterior—my pride in knowing Scripture and my joy in counting myself among the saved—stood a troubled soul. He recognized that there were still parts of God’s Word I found hard to explain or reconcile, but I did not want to admit that. He understood that this struggle was keeping me from fully experiencing the liberty of grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

I vividly remember the specific conflict that weighed on me then. It was a distant but constant nagging I had tried to ignore for as long as I could remember. My inescapable, deeply hidden spiritual fear was the thought of someday standing before My Savior and giving an account of my life. I thought I knew grace. I believed I understood the forgiveness of the cross and what it meant to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Yet I was constantly troubled by thoughts of being judged “according to my works,” as Paul described in Romans and John prophesied of in Revelation.

My friend somehow sensed that my inescapable fear was my realization that my life could never withstand such scrutiny—that any judgment of my works would expose me as the fraud I felt myself to be. He also reasoned that the root of this fear lay in my lack of understanding about how to rightly divide the Word of Truth. At the time, I had no idea that was the key to reconciling Paul’s description of the Judgment Seat of Christ and John’s prophecy about the Great White Throne judgment.

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

Now I suspect that many readers of this book are in the same place as I once was. You love the Scriptures, you believe God and trust Him, yet at times the Bible still feels confusing. Take heart—I believe a whole new world is about to open to you through this book and its careful, thoughtful presentation by a skilled author, Shari Abbott.

As you read, you will soon learn that “rightly dividing” calls us to make careful distinctions about time, place, speaker, and audience as the Bible takes us on a six-thousand-year journey of progressive revelation unveiled by God.

Many of us have been taught that ALL of the Bible was written directly to us in the Church and that there are no so-called “distinctions” in Scripture to be made. But consider whether God has designed anything in life to work that way. Everything worth knowing or important to discover is built on discernment gained through recognizing distinctions.

My vocational career was spent in the medical field, where fine distinctions underlie accurate diagnoses and are critical to correct selection among an endless array of treatment options essential to good outcomes. What is learned about one individual, or about groups of similar people, if applied without distinction to all others, would lead to misdiagnoses and treatment options that prove tragic for some.

I cannot emphasize enough why and how the subject of this book matters so greatly to all of us in the Body of Christ. At a time when biblical knowledge is declining and doctrinal confusion is increasing, we need Christians to read and use the Bible the way God intends—so their faith is strong, their walk is steady, and their witness is clear.

I have known Shari Abbott as a fellow Bible teacher, an expert Christian apologist, a talented author, and a close friend for many years. I know as well as anyone how seriously she takes her labor for the Lord. In 2011, God called her into a full-time apologetics ministry to help believers move from “I know this is true, but I don’t quite understand it” to “I see how this fits, and I can explain it to someone

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else.” The mission of her ministry is simple and needed: to equip Christians with knowledge, encourage them with understanding, and empower them to share Jesus with others.

One thing that stands out about Shari’s work is her commitment to clarity. She wants rightly dividing to be both understandable and attainable for everyday believers. By walking through the basic distinctions God has built into His Word, Shari shows how rightly dividing protects us from error and opens our eyes to the beauty of God’s plan and purposes.

This book is simple enough for a new reader of Scripture and a helpful refresher for those who have studied the Bible for years. While other books on this topic may depend on complex charts and lots of details, this one focuses on helping you internalize a basic framework you can actually use.

As you read the chapters of *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, I encourage you not to rush. Take your time and read this book with an open Bible. Look up the verses and ponder God’s words, using the tools of rightly dividing to become a better workman and to understand the verses in context. Understand that rightly dividing is not just a phrase; it is a skill.—and like any worthwhile skill, it grows stronger with use.

It is my sincere joy to commend this book, its author, and the Reasons for Hope* Jesus ministry to you. My prayer is that, through these pages, the Holy Spirit will sharpen your understanding, strengthen your faith, steady your daily walk, and deepen your love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

May you finish this book not only with a clearer approach to studying the Bible, but also more in awe of the God who has spoken, and more eager to be an unashamed workman—rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

Scott Hamlin

Retired CFO and COO, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital
Servant and Unashamed Workman for Christ Jesus

Introduction

For countless Christians, the Bible is a source of profound inspiration, comfort, and truth. Yet, many also confess to finding it to be a confusing book, and at times, to be contradictory. After all, it's not a single volume but rather a library of 66 distinct books, written over 1,500 years by 40 different authors from every walk of life—from kings and scholars to fishermen and shepherds. The pages of the Bible contain a vast array of literary styles, including history, law, poetry, and prophecy, each with its own rules of interpretation, and with many literary devices that must be understood.

WHY MUST WE RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE WORD OF GOD?

How does a believer today make sense of all the Bible has to say? How do we reconcile a command given to ancient Israel with an instruction given to the early Church? How do we distinguish a promise for a future kingdom from a principle for our present lives? Without a reliable method for navigating this divine library, readers can easily become lost, misapply verses, and draw confusing conclusions. This confusion can create doubt and foster doctrinal error. It can even cause believers to shy away from large portions of Scripture, considering them irrelevant or finding them incomprehensible.

The Bible itself provides the key. In his final letter to his beloved apprentice, Timothy, the Apostle Paul issues a charge that is as relevant today as it was in the first century:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

This command reveals that God doesn't want His children to be confused by His Word. He has provided a path to clarity.

“Rightly dividing” is a translation of the Greek word, *orthotomeō*, which conveys the image of a craftsman making a precise and straight cut. It is the skill of a stonemason ensuring a perfect fit, a farmer plowing a straight furrow, or a carpenter building a structure that is true and sound. In the same way, the student of the Bible is called to be a skilled workman, handling God’s Word with the care and precision it deserves. We’ll discuss this further in chapter one.

WHY IS RIGHTLY DIVIDING SO IMPORTANT?

Rightly dividing is the difference between confusion and clarity. It is the key that unlocks the beautiful, consistent, and progressive story of God’s plan for the ages. It allows us to understand who is speaking, to whom they are speaking, and in what context. It protects us from the danger of claiming promises that were never made to us or taking on burdens we were never meant to carry. Failure to rightly divide can lead to serious doctrinal error, as Paul himself warned in the verses that follow his directive to rightly divide.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

I have written this book for every Christian who desires to move from being a sometimes-confused reader to a confident workman. It is a guide for those who want to understand not just what the Bible says, but what it really means—for the original audience and for us today. It will equip you with the foundational principles and practical tools to “cut straight,” to discern the vital distinctions God has placed within His Word, and to see the magnificent tapestry He has woven from Genesis to Revelation.

The reward for this labor is a faith built on solid ground, an unshakable assurance in God’s promises, a deeper, more intimate communion with the Author Himself, and a confidence to share your faith.

As you read this book, you’ll find repetition. First, a definition

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of key understandings for rightly dividing and then a “digging deeper” for a clearer understanding and to reinforce the concepts. We all learn well and remember better by repetition, so understand that concepts repeated will be concepts remembered.

THE “-OLOGIES” OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

One thing to keep in mind as we approach rightly dividing is to begin with an understanding of Systematic Theology. Systematic Theology is defined as the organized study and presentation of biblical doctrines by arranging theological topics into logical categories (“-ologies”) to create a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the Christian faith.

Each “-ology” is a distinctive doctrine:

Theology Proper—the study of the doctrine of God.

Paterology—the study of God the Father.

Bibliology—the study of the Bible.

Christology—the study of Jesus.

Pneumatology—the study of the Holy Spirit.

Angelology—the study of the angelic beings,
fallen and unfallen.

Anthropology—the study of humanity.

Soteriology—the study of Salvation.

Ecclesiology—the study of the Church.

Israelology—the study of Israel.

Eschatology—the study of last things or end times.

We will not address each of these “-ologies” in this book, but all are worthy of individual study. Even a basic knowledge will help in rightly dividing and rightly applying what the Bible says.

COVENANT, REFORMED, AND DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGIES

We would be remiss if we left this section without addressing Covenant, Reformed, and Dispensational Theology.

- Covenant Theology is a biblical and hermeneutical framework for reading and understanding the Bible through the lens of God’s covenants with humanity, especially the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenant, as well as through three theological covenants—the Covenants of Redemption, Works, and Grace. Understanding the Covenants is important, but how we understand them differs through the lenses of Reformed and Dispensational Theology—distinct “camps” within the church that have differing views about Israel and the Church, biblical interpretation, and eschatology (end times).
- Reformed Theology emphasizes the unity of God’s people throughout history and a continuity between Israel and the Church, with the Church inheriting and fulfilling the promises to Israel. It has a more typological (and allegorical) approach to Scripture. And when it comes to the end times, Reformed Theology sees the Church as the spiritual continuation of the Old Testament people of God.
- Dispensational Theology, in contrast, views a significant distinction between Israel and the Church, defining them as two distinct people groups under different covenants and with separate destinies. It approaches Scripture with literal interpretation, especially for Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel’s future. And it understands Scripture to teach a distinct future national and literal kingdom for Israel after a yet future rapture of the Church and world-wide seven year tribulation.

Dispensational Theology is also called Dispensationalism, and it is the theology upon which rightly dividing is built. While the word “dispensation” is often thought to refer to time periods,

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the Greek word actually carries a meaning defined by God's relationship and work with humanity. The Greek word "oikonomia" means: administration (of a household or estate); spec. a (religious) "economy" -- stewardship.

RIGHTLY DIVIDING MADE SIMPLE

There are many books about rightly dividing, but most are lengthy, in-depth, technical, and intimidating. This book has a different goal: it is not to be comprehensive but instead to be comprehensible—that is, to make the essentials clear and give a concise overview of the key principles that will help you quickly learn how to read and study the Bible.

Be sure to use the pages at the back of the book. They're designed for your notes as you read—jot down insights you want to remember, verses to revisit, and questions you want to explore further.

Now, let's jump in and begin the journey to becoming an unashamed workman, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

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Chapter 1

WHAT DOES “RIGHTLY DIVIDING” MEAN?

Let's begin by breaking down the foundational command given by the Apostle Paul to his young protégé, Timothy. This single verse serves as our blueprint, our divine mandate for how we should approach the Word of God:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

This charge is not merely a suggestion; it is a command packed with profound implications for every believer. It speaks of a specific attitude (study), a noble identity (a workman), and an essential method (rightly dividing).

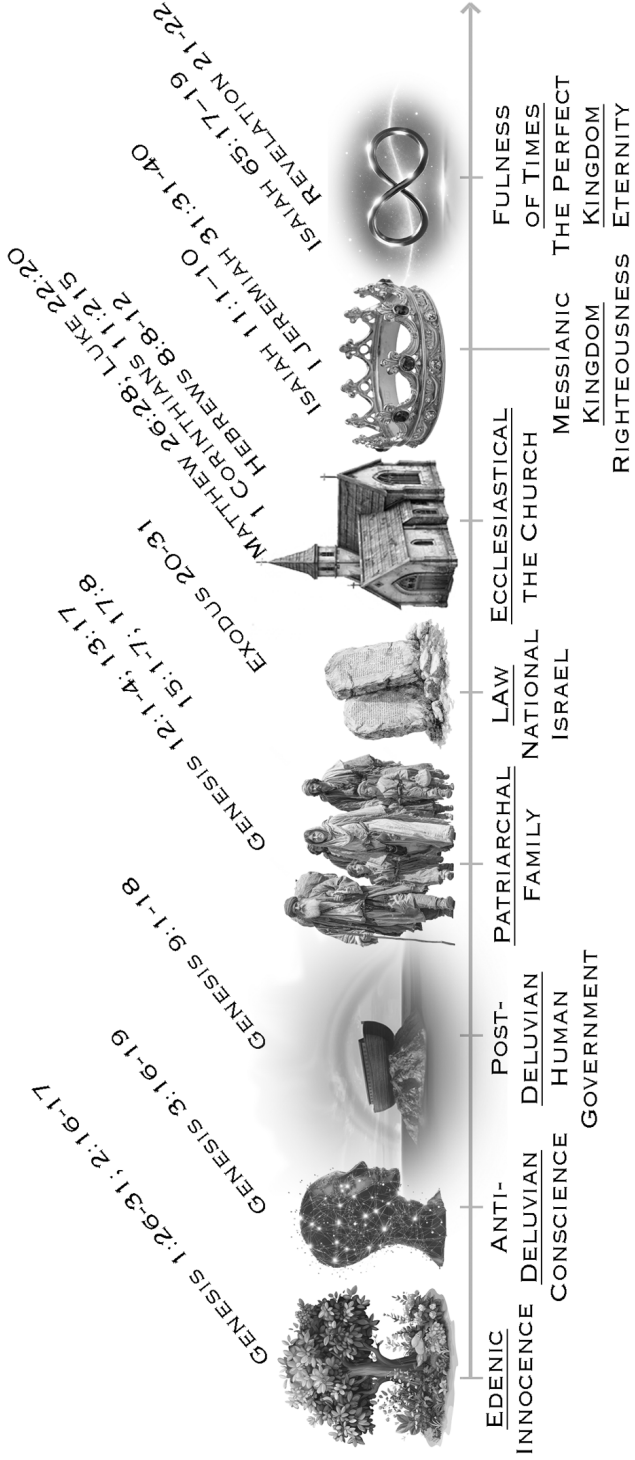
Let's explore each of these components to fully grasp the significance of handling God's Word correctly.

STUDY! THE ATTITUDE OF A DEVOTED HEART

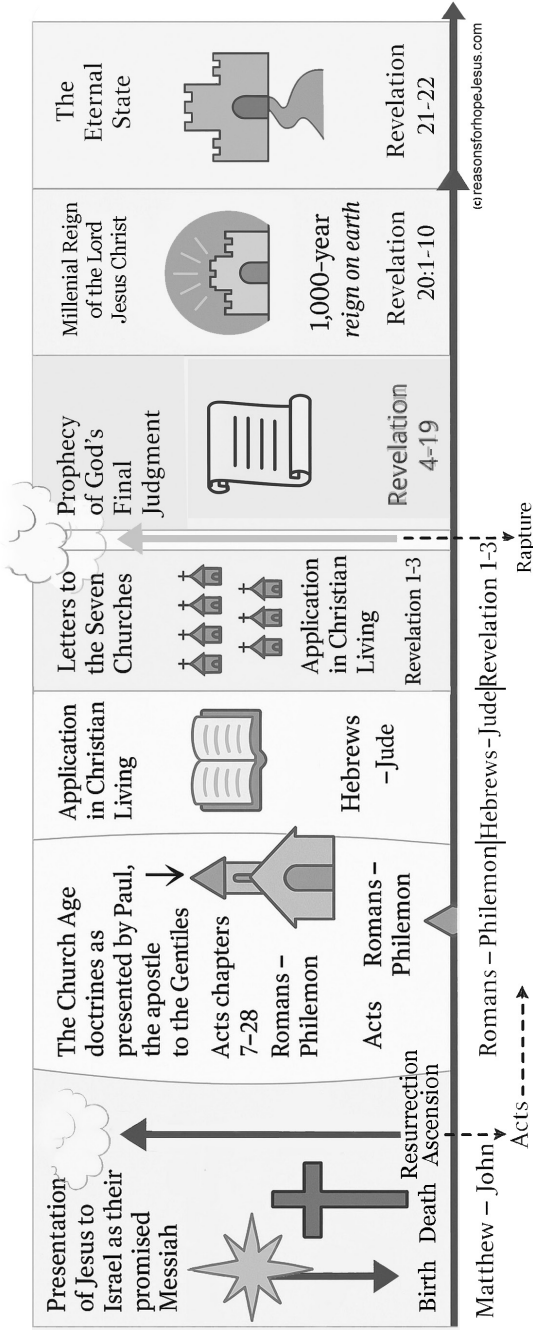
We all understand the word “study.” From our earliest school days, we know it involves focus, repetition, and a desire to gain knowledge and understanding. The Greek word for study is “spoudazo,” which means “to make an effort, be prompt or earnest, give diligence, be diligent, endeavor, labor, or study.” In Ephesians 4:3, this word is translated as “endeavoring;” in Hebrews 4:11, it appears as “labor” (KJV) or “be diligent” (NKJV, et al.); in 2 Peter 1:10, it is “give diligence;” and in 2 Peter 3:14, it is “be diligent.”

The Eight Dispensations

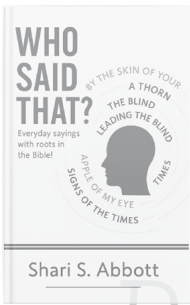
APPENDIX



The Books of the New Testament – Rightly Divided for Right Handling



Books & Resources from this Author

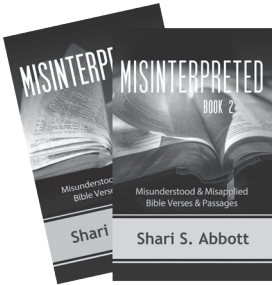
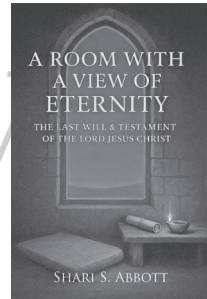


[Who Said That? Common Everyday Sayings](#)

This is a great book to give to unbelievers. It's simply a look at everyday sayings originating from God's Word. At the end of the book is a gospel presentation.

[A Room with a View of Eternity—The Last Will & Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ](#)

Take a seat at the Master's table. Learn about the Lord's final words to His faithful disciples (John 13-17), and the riches He gives to all who are His.

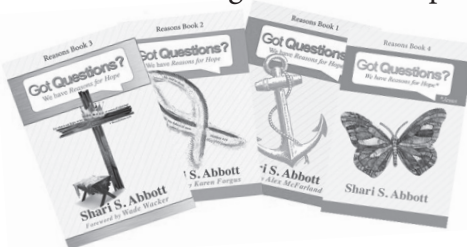
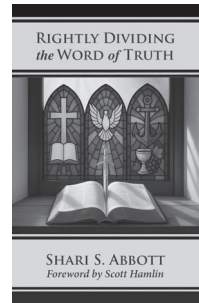


[MISINTERPRETED 1 & 2](#)

Misunderstood & Misapplied Bible

Verses & Passages—Sometimes Scripture is wrongly taught with an intention to deceive, but most often it is unintentional. As Christians, we must be diligent in discerning truth —God's truth from His Word.

[Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth](#) — With simple explanations and Scripture-centered teaching, this book will help you discover how a right understanding of Scripture brings clarity instead of confusion, confidence instead of doubt, and joy as you see how every part of the Bible fits together in God's perfect plan.

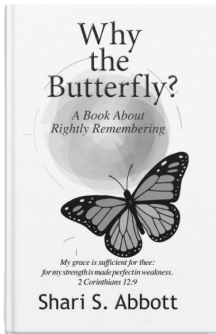


[Got Questions?](#)

[We have Reasons for Hope](#)

[Reasons Books 1, 2, 3 & 4](#)

30 questions and 30 answers with reasons for hope.



Why the Butterfly? Rightly Remembering Jesus —

This book isn't about butterflies. . .it's all about Jesus! Discover how rightly remembering will establish your heart, anchor your soul, and transform your mind. A quick read that will give you a heavenly perspective on this journey we call life!

Remember Me - A Course About

Rightly Remembering Seven video study sessions that teach rightly remembering.

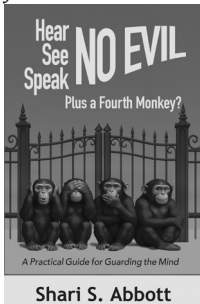
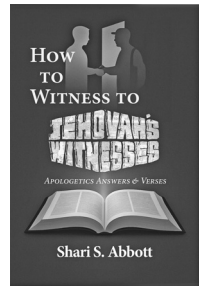


Fun with Shuns Learn the key doctrines of the Christian faith by understanding the many words in the Bible that end in “-tion”. The study includes five short videos. If you can't fully explain why you believe what you believe, then you need this study. DVD and

book for group or individual study.

How to Witness to Jehovah's Witnesses~

Apologetics Answers & Verses Get prepared to defend what you believe and be able to present biblical truth the next time a Jehovah's Witness comes to your door. Don't be out-witnessed by a Jehovah's Witness.



Hear, See, Speak No Evil—Plus a Fourth Monkey Three little monkeys, with their proverbial quip, “Hear No Evil, See No Evil, and Speak No Evil,” date back as far as 17th century. What biblical lessons do these monkeys offer? And what about the newest warning. . .post no evil?



[Quotable Quotes ~ Words Worth Remembering](#)

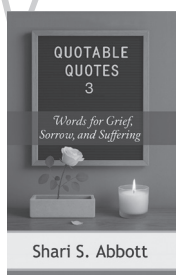
[Quotable Quotes 2 ~ Words Worth Repeating](#)

Timeless wisdom from Christian voices across the ages. Carefully chosen quotations are paired with Scripture references to encourage you to delve deeper into the biblical truths that relate to the insightful quotes—as a way to draw closer to the heart of God.

PREVIEW

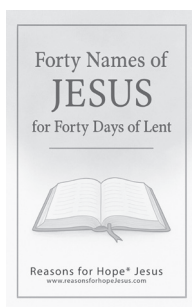
[Quotable Quotes ~ Words for Grief, Sorrow, and Suffering](#)

a treasury of Christ-centered comfort for dark seasons with carefully selected quotes from trusted voices, paired with Scripture and brief devotional reflections.



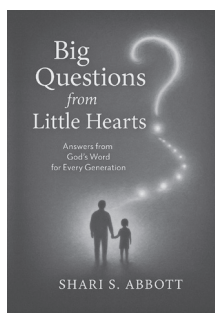
[Forty Names of Jesus for Forty Days of Lent](#) —

A devotional book with short daily readings to inspire your mind and deepen your love for “The Risen Christ,” your Shepherd, Savior, and King. When the forty days are complete, continue by exploring more names and titles of Jesus.



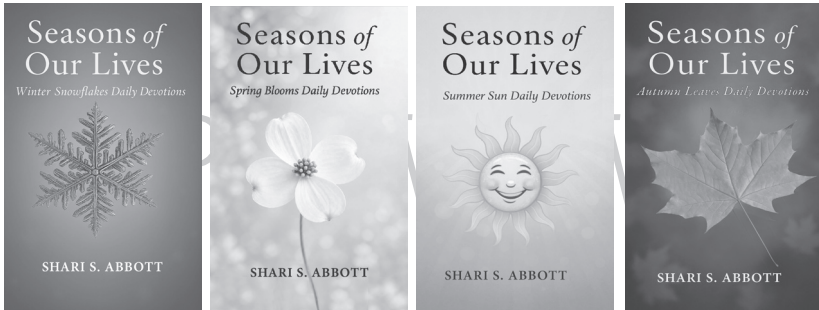
[Big Questions from Little Hearts—Answers from God’s Word for Every Generation](#)

When little hearts start asking big questions, will you be prepared to answer? *Big Questions from Little Hearts* will help. More than 130 questions children ask and answers that give gentle clarity and simple biblical truth.

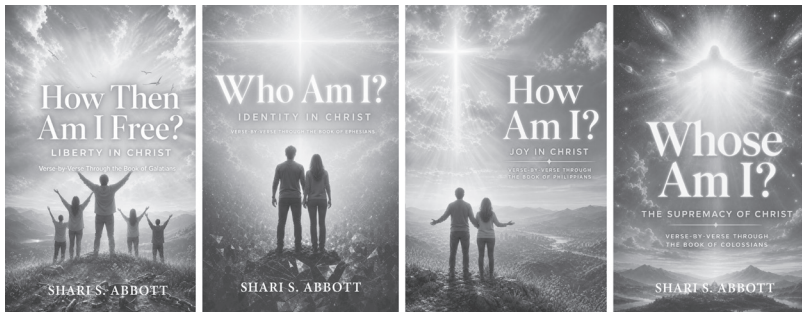


Seasons of Our Lives Daily Devotions

Each daily reading pairs a chosen Scripture with a warm, gospel-centered reflection, a probing question, and a heartfelt prayer, helping you see God's mercy, faithfulness, and love in every season of the soul.



Verse-by-Verse through the Books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians



Commentaries that explore the letters Paul wrote to four churches:

- Galatians ~ Liberty in Christ
- Ephesians ~ Identity in Christ
- Philippians ~ Joy in Christ
- Colossians ~ Supremacy of Christ

