

What the Bible Doesn't Say

By Amanda Smith

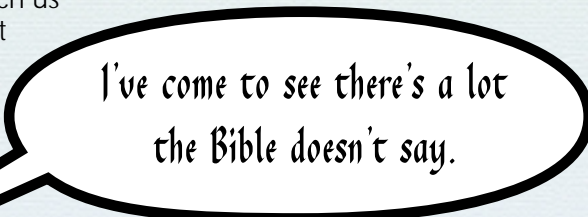
I went to Bible College to get all the answers. But one of the major lessons I learned while there was that the Bible doesn't tell me everything I'd like to know.

Now, don't misunderstand me. The Bible is God's Word to us, full of insight into his nature and the history of his relationship with his creation. It teaches us how much he loves us and how we can respond to him. It tells us many stories of the faithful and the not-so-faithful. It provides general guidance on how to live our lives and how to run our churches.

As Bible-believing Christians, we want to know what God wants us to do in our everyday lives. It's only natural for us to consult Scripture on the details. Still, I've come to see there's a lot the Bible doesn't say.

Scripture doesn't give child-raising techniques for every situation.

The writer of Proverbs tells us, "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it" (22:6), and "Do not withhold discipline from a child" (23:13). Deuteronomy 4 and 6 remind us to teach our children about the Lord. Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20, 21 teach us that



I've come to see there's a lot the Bible doesn't say.

children should be obedient to their parents, and that parents should love their children and avoid exasperating them. These are words of deep wisdom. But what does the Bible say about whether my son should have candy after supper and how old my daughter should be before she dates? Does it tell me whether time-outs are effective or how to get my screaming baby to sleep? Does it tell me which school is best for my children or how much TV they should watch? Of course it doesn't.

Scripture isn't just a list of healthy marriage tips.

We know a man should leave his parents and cleave to his wife (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31),

and that husbands and wives should love, submit to, and be faithful to each other (Colossians 3:18, 19, Ephesians 5:22-33, Exodus 20:17). But what does the Bible say about whose family to visit for Christmas, whether it's appropriate to raise important relationship issues at bedtime, and who takes out the trash on Wednesdays?

Scripture doesn't address all our questions about money management strategies.

The Bible tells us we cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24) and that we should be generous and use our resources to help others and further God's work (1 Corinthians 16; Matthew 25:35-40). But how does it answer such questions as "Do I invest in real estate or a mutual fund?" "Is it wise to rent or buy?" "What's a good interest rate?"

Scripture doesn't address everything we'd like to know about church planning and administration procedures.

We do have a lot of advice in Scripture about the church. We know congregations are to follow the example of the apostles, spread the word about Christ to unbelievers, and build up believers. We know we should continue to celebrate Christ's work through communion and respond to him in Christian baptism. We know we should work together in love for the sake of the growth of God's kingdom (Acts 2:42-47, 1 Corinthians 11).

But what time should our service begin? Should it be contemporary or traditional? Should we use an organ or guitar? Pews or folding chairs? Hymn books or an LCD projector? How often should the elders meet? How many deacons do we need? Scripture is silent on these issues.

What should we do when Scripture doesn't answer all our questions?

When I first discovered the Bible doesn't answer all my questions, I was disappointed. But soon I came to see this is a strength, not a weakness. If Scripture were too specific on some of these issues, the answer would be relevant only for the culture and time in which it was penned. For example, how could Scripture possibly speak on how much TV our children should watch or whether we should use an LCD projector in our

services? How could it tell us an appropriate age for dating since dating was unheard of in Bible times and young girls were often married in their teens? Instead of giving us the details, Scripture provides us with vision and allows us, considering our own time and culture, to make decisions to accomplish that vision. It tells us what the motives of our hearts should be, then lets us decide which actions we will take to express those motives. God allows us to take ownership of his general precepts and apply them in ways that are appropriate.

Of course, it is good to consult Scripture whenever we have a question about life, but we should not force Scripture to answer questions it is not trying to answer. That would be like trying to find a recipe for apple pie in a book on growing apples. Instead, we should accept what Scripture offers: solid, life principles we can apply ourselves. To continue the metaphor, we should read the book on growing apples, follow its advice, and grow big, juicy apples. Then we can decide for ourselves whether they taste better with a little cinnamon and flaky pastry or with pork and mashed potatoes.

What does Scripture offer us?

We should not be disappointed when we can't find a specific scriptural answer to our questions. Scripture offers us answers, but not always in the way we want them. When we ask "Who should take out the trash on Wednesday?" Scripture answers, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1).

When we ask "What time should our service begin?" Scripture answers, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3) and "How, then, can they call on

the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14).

As you read Scripture, approach it as a guidebook instead of a step-by-step instruction manual. You will begin to notice that the Bible often says the same thing in different ways. God loves us and wants us to be whole and in a relationship with him. This means he wants

good things for our marriages, our children, our money, and our churches. But he does not want these things for their own sake. He wants our marriages to be happy so that we will be whole, and come to him, and bring others to him. He wants our children to be well-raised so they will be whole, and come to him, and bring others to him. He wants our churches to be healthy so that we will be whole, and come to him, and bring others to him. He wants our money to be used effectively so that—yes, you guessed it!—we will be whole, and come to him, and bring others to him. For example, the story of Jonah is about a disobedient man who was swallowed by a fish, but it's also about coming to God and bringing others to him. The parable of the Good Samaritan is about helping others, but it's also about coming to God and bringing others to him.

After we have asked our questions of Scripture and found these general principles, then the conversation begins. When we know the ideals of Scripture but not the details of how to apply them, we are driven to consult our Lord to ask him to guide us as we fit his message into our 21st-century lives. After all, if we had a book that answered every possible question that ever arose in life, we would have no reason to consult the author! ■

Amanda Smith is a freelance writer in Cincinnati, Ohio.

God loves us and wants us to be whole and in a relationship with him.

