Chapter 1

The Book of Hope

It is said that the heart has reasons that reason does not understand. This may or may not be true. However, the foolish impulses of passion often mislead human beings. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain what happened on that sad morning in July.

The train had reached the end of the tracks, and the throng of passengers spilled out of the cars. In the crowd, a small, muscular man was hiding his face behind thick sunglasses and a cap. Despite his air of mystery, nobody could suspect that underneath his jacket, that citizen hid a .38 revolver. He appeared to be about fifty years old and walked with light steps, looking forward, careful not to lose sight of the beautiful brunette in jeans and a black blouse who walked hurriedly through the crowd.

The thirty-five-year-old woman looked back apprehensively, sensing she was being followed. She repeated this motion three or four times before entering the tunnel to cross under the avenue. She bent down, pretending to tie her shoelaces, trying to figure out if someone was indeed following her.

The church clock indicated that it was 8:15 a.m. At that time, the city was crowded with people too busy to notice the unfolding scene. Though she was afraid to, Lucia came out on the other side of the avenue and entered a park. She was no ordinary woman. Her beautiful appearance attracted the attention of men, but she was not
a person without scruples. She valued honor, dignity, and honesty.

The situation began almost without her noticing it, and gradually, she became entangled in a web of circumstances from which she could not free herself that morning. Walking along, she began to replay the last arguments she had had with her husband as though she were watching a movie. There were terrible scenes of jealousy, aggression in public, endless nights of discussions, and finally, betrayal that wrapped up the scenes.

Among beautiful trees and wild vegetation was a young blond man sitting on an old bench and reading a newspaper while carelessly smoking a cigarette. When he saw Lucia, he ran to meet her with open arms.

Evaldo, the jealous husband following her, hid behind an old cashew tree to watch. He seemed indecisive and was sweating despite the cold weather; he exuded pain and hatred, clenching the gun in his hand. The rest of the story is easy to imagine. The blond man was shot four times and fell dead on the spot. Lucia was struck with two shots to the chest. Evaldo tried to fire the last shot into his own head, but there were no more bullets in the gun. Then he knelt before his beloved, and, weeping, reached out to hold her bloodied body.

“Why did it have to end this way?” he screamed.

Sentenced to several years in prison, Evaldo wasted away, consumed by pain. He loved Lucia. He had met her at a train station during the carnival of 1990. At the time, he was thirty-five years old and at the end of his dancing career. She, a beautiful dancer in a samba school, was fifteen years his junior. Their love was intense from the beginning, and together they followed their dreams. They lived in a yellow townhouse and had two children who filled their lives with joy. But all that was gone now. Evaldo served his sentence, and Lucia, who survived the attack, wanted nothing to do with her husband.

“I couldn’t care less if he rots in jail,” she would say to her friends.

But at night, lying alone and watching the children sleep, she
wept in silence, not knowing the reason why.

One day during lunch at the clothing factory where she worked as a seamstress, a coworker approached her.

“I don’t think you’re happy,” the coworker said.

“I don’t know. Is anyone truly happy?” Lucia replied.

“Lots of people. But for you to be happy, you need to know God’s plan for you.”

“What plan? What are you talking about?” Lucia asked.

“No one came into this world to suffer. God has a wonderful plan for each person, and happiness is the process of discovering it.”

“Are you a Christian?” Lucia asked.

“Yes, I am,” her coworker responded.

“Let me tell you, I don’t have even the slightest interest in religion. I’m sorry, but I think it’s better if we stop right here.”

“I’m not talking about religion. I’m talking about your life. Are you happy the way it is?” asked her coworker.

This conversation was the first of many between Lucia and her coworker. As time passed, the friendship between the two started to grow. However, Roberta, her coworker and friend, did not say a word to her again about spiritual matters.

One day in October, Lucia sought out Roberta at lunch.

“I don’t know what to do. My life is in complete chaos,” Lucia said.

“What’s the matter?” asked Roberta.

“My thirteen-year-old daughter is pregnant. What did I do to deserve this?” Lucia asked. “I work myself to death in order to support my two children, and their father is in jail. I’m alone. I don’t know what else to do.”

“You’re not alone.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why don’t you give Jesus a chance?” Roberta suggested.

“There you go again with the issue of religion,” said Lucia.

“You know, Lucia, every human being has problems,” replied
Roberta. “The difference is our attitude toward them. And this attitude depends on the certainty that we are never alone.”

“But I am,” Lucia insisted. “My relatives are far away, and I haven’t heard from them for many years.”

“No, my friend, you’re not alone,” Roberta responded. “I’m here.”

“Thank you!” Lucia exclaimed.

“I’m not just talking about our friendship, but about Someone who can really help you,” Roberta said. “I’m talking about Jesus. Don’t say anything; just listen to this Bible verse.”

Roberta went to her work table and pulled out her Bible.

“‘Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!’” (Isaiah 49:15, NIV), she read.

Lucia’s eyes reflected emotion.

“Is that in the Bible?” she asked.

“Look with your own eyes,” said Roberta.

“But why do you think this book is the Word of God?” Lucia asked.

“There are several reasons,” Roberta responded. “The first is that the Bible writers claim they wrote by divine mandate. Paul says: ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ [2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV]. This text has two ideas. The first is that all Scripture is inspired by God, and the second is that God gave us His Word for instruction. It is useless to try to be happy without the knowledge of the Word of God.”

“I don’t know, my friend,” said Lucia skeptically. “I love to see the way you trust this book, but anyone could have written this and then claimed it was inspired by God.”

“True, but there are other reasons to believe that this book is inspired by God,” said Roberta. “For example, there is the unity of thought. The Bible was written over a period of fifteen hundred
years. Moses was the first author and lived fifteen centuries before John, the last of the writers. Most of the writers didn’t know each other. However, if you read the Bible, you will find that there is a unity of thought that’s incredible. It’s as if, on a certain day, the forty writers met and agreed on what each would write.”

Lucia seemed disconcerted. For the first time, she was showing some interest in spiritual matters. Until that day, she seemed to have merely existed, never wondering about her purpose in life. She looked at the clock and realized she still had fifteen minutes of break time left.

“You know, it’s hard for me to believe in these religious things,” Lucia confided. “The people I’ve met over the years who believed in the Bible were the ones who most disappointed me.”

“Maybe because they only knew the theory but never knew the Author personally,” Roberta suggested.

“How is that possible?” asked Lucia.

“Look what it says here: ‘You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me’ ” (John 5:39, NIV), Roberta quoted. “The One who said that was Jesus Christ Himself. He wants you to know Him and discover that you can trust Him and His promises.”

“Hmm.”

“There’s more. Listen: ‘And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ ” (John 8:32, NKJV).

“What will it free me from?” asked Lucia.

“From all that you’re feeling,” replied Roberta. “Fear, anguish, despair, loneliness. Jesus said, ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ [John 10:10, NKJV]. Do you understand? He wants you to have abundant life. But for that to happen, you need to trust the Bible.”

The factory siren sounded, indicating it was time to restart their work, and the two headed back to their job posts.

Lucia said, “We need to talk more about this.”
The Only Hope

Roberta smiled.

The afternoon hours passed quickly. At the end of the work day, Lucia was waiting for Roberta by the exit.

“I want to know more about what we were discussing earlier,” said Lucia, “but I need to go home now. I promised my kids that I would come home early today.”

“I can go with you,” Roberta offered. “We can talk on the way to your house.”

“It won’t make you late?” Lucia asked.

“A little, but it’s OK,” Roberta replied.

On the bus, Roberta spoke of the prophecies as further proof of the inspiration of the Bible.

“Listen to what the prophet Isaiah wrote more than two thousand years ago,” said Roberta. “It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in” [Isaiah 40:22]. You know, for centuries, science claimed that the earth was flat, but the Bible has said it is round. Christopher Columbus proved the truth of the Bible when he got to America on October 12, 1492.”

“This is awesome,” said Lucia. “I didn’t know that.”

“There are many things that people overlook,” said Roberta. “For example, there is the extraordinary way the Bible describes human history in prophecy, from the days of the Babylonian Empire to the present day.”

“Where is that?” asked Lucia.

“Here, in Daniel chapter 2,” replied Roberta. “We can read it when we get to your house. In this prophecy, the Bible presents the parade of empires that dominated the world since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, passing through the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire under the command of Alexander the Great, and later the Roman Empire. It also mentions the fall of Rome, and the failed attempts of other nations to dominate the world. The Bible says that after the division of the Roman Empire into
ten barbarian nations close to its borders, no other empire would ever arise again with such scope and power. In our day, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth and put an end to sin’s history.”

“In our day?” Lucia asked. “Are you kidding me?”

“I am not kidding,” Roberta said. “See what it says here: ‘And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever’ ” (Daniel 2:44, NKJV).

“Who are these kings?”

“It refers to the present day when there is no longer a kingdom that dominates the world,” Roberta explained. “In these last days, God will establish His kingdom forever, and it will happen with the return of Jesus to earth.”

Back home, while Lucia prepared dinner, the two friends kept talking.

“You know, Roberta, when you talk, everything seems easy to grasp, but I always thought the Bible was a difficult book to understand,” Lucia admitted.

“In the beginning, my friend, you need the help of someone who knows about it,” Roberta said. “But with time, you’ll see that the same Spirit that inspired the Bible writers will enlighten your mind to understand the message. There is a Bible story that shows how important it is to have help in the beginning.”

“What story is that?” asked Lucia.

“I’ll read it to you,” Roberta offered. “‘Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” Then
Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him’ ” (Acts 8:26–31, NIV).

“Does that mean I’m like the eunuch, and you’re like Philip?” Lucia asked.

“More or less,” said Roberta.

They both laughed. Lucia was surprised that she was laughing; ever since she’d learned about her daughter’s pregnancy, she could only cry.

“I thank you with all my heart for what you are doing for me,” said Lucia. “You’ve spent your valuable time and patience dealing with my stubborn, hard-headed attitude. But tell me, how can I keep studying the Bible by myself?”

“Every time you want to study a particular subject, you need to find the Bible verses or chapters that talk about that subject,” Roberta explained. “You should never quote the Bible on a topic by reading a single verse. You need to have a complete idea of the subject.”

“That’s very interesting,” said Lucia.

“Oh, and there is a very serious warning,” added Roberta. “‘I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll’ ” (Revelation 22:18, 19, NIV).

“You mean you cannot change anything that is written?” Lucia asked.

“No, dear. God’s Word is eternal,” said Roberta. “Isaiah declares: ‘The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever’ [Isaiah 40:8, NIV]. God is eternal. His love for human beings is also eternal. And, consequently, His Word is eternal. Therefore, He is sad when a person ignores the teachings of the Bible.”
“Really?” asked Lucia.

“In the days of Israel, the leaders of the people had forgotten the Word of God and taught doctrines and traditions of men,” Roberta explained. “That’s why the Lord Jesus said, ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules’” (Matthew 15:8, 9, NIV).

“You mean, if I love God but do not value His Word, He will not accept my worship?” asked Lucia.

“Exactly!” exclaimed Roberta. “But do not be afraid, for God loves us unconditionally. The sole purpose of His Word is to help us to be happy. The Bible says, ‘Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near’ [Revelation 1:3, NIV]. The word blessed means ‘happy.’ Although this verse refers primarily to the prophecy in the book of Revelation, it can be applied to the entire Bible. Happy is the person who not only reads, but keeps the Word of God in his heart.”

It was late at night when Roberta took the bus home. Her heart was overflowing with joy because there is nothing better than sharing the life-changing message of the gospel.

At home, Lucia entered her pregnant daughter’s bedroom. Thirteen is the age a girl begins the journey into womanhood. How would a girl so young bear the consequences of such a dangerous choice? Lucia wished she knew how to help her daughter. She sat on the bed while the girl slept, covered her with a blanket, and wept as she looked at the face of her child. She would be forced to become an adult long before she was ready. Lucia kissed the girl’s face and left.

Lying in bed, unable to sleep, Lucia imagined what life could have been like if she had known the Word of God while she was still young. Maybe her story would have been different; maybe she would have been a better wife and mother.

She remembered the last verse Roberta had read: “I have hidden
your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11, NIV).

It was not the end of the story yet. She was still alive and had the opportunity to change the course of her life.

The following day she received a Bible as a gift. Roberta had signed it, writing, “I am certain that this Holy Book will help you find the way to happiness.” Lucia was touched by those words.

From that day on, she would not begin or end her day without spending time with the Word of God. In her life, the brightness of a sunny day began to emerge. The clouds that once seemed to choke her were still there, but she was no longer sunk in pessimism. Bible promises lit her way, and she liked to constantly repeat, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105, NIV).

Several weeks later, on a Sunday, Lucia woke up early and asked her children, “Would you like to visit your father?”

The three went together to the prison for the first time in three years. The journey was tense, and the depressing environment did not help. They had to wait for a long time, and the guard explained that he was in a group studying the Bible.

Finally, Evaldo arrived.

Sandro, their eleven-year-old son, took the initiative and ran to hug his father. They both wept. Their daughter followed. Lucia looked tenderly at the scene. She still loved him. Her heart was pounding, and tears were falling.

*If I had known the Word of God before, she thought, everything would have been different.*

“Forgive me, forgive me!” he pleaded.

“I’m the one who should apologize,” Lucia said.

The four came together in one embrace.

“Do you think there’s still hope for us?” he asked shyly.

In time, there would be. Two years later, Evaldo came home on parole.

The whole family found the only hope.
The Book of Hope

You can find hope and purpose for your existence.

Learn more about what God has prepared for your happiness.

1 In the Bible, God’s Word is written in human language. 
   *1 Thessalonians 2:13*

2 God’s love is expressed in His Word. *Isaiah 49:15*

3 The Word of God brings hope and encouragement in times of difficulty. *
   *Romans 15:4*

4 Knowing God through His Word frees humans from emotional, intellectual, and spiritual prisons. *
   *John 8:32*

5 The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Bible. *
   *John 16:13*

6 There is danger in not following the whole Word of God. 
   *Revelation 22:18, 19*

7 The Bible is relevant for today. *
   *2 Timothy 3:16, 17*

8 God uses people to assist us in understanding His Word. *
   *Acts 8:26–31*

9 The Word of God is more important than human traditions. *
   *Mark 7:13*

10 When examining the Word of God, we find Jesus and salvation. 
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   *John 5:39*