

It was Tuesday late afternoon when Michael looked out the kitchen window and noticed the heavy clouds. He just finished dinner and was thinking of tackling that paper he has been putting off for sometime. This time, as an incentive to finish the paper, he thought of rewarding himself by going to the neighborhood bookstore. He frequented this bookstore and enjoyed scanning the new published titles that give him a quick overview of what people are thinking about or concerned with at the time. He used to check out the bestseller lists of non-fiction put out by major newspapers. Lately he has been wondering if there

was a best selling book for the year? How about for the decade? Why stop there, how about the best selling book ever? If there is such thing wouldn't it be a great experience to get his hands on it, go through it, and enjoy exploring it. Yet, there is that paper! He reminded himself of the self-control exercise he has been focusing on for a while now and said to himself "Here's my chance to practice: Finish the first draft of the paper, THEN go the bookstore and explore these "best book" notions".

He walked to his room, sat at his desk, closed his eyes, and prayed quietly as he usually does. He asked his Best Friend

Jesus to complement his efforts to produce a paper that truly expresses his thoughts and what he learned thus far; took a deep breath and got started. He finished the draft in about forty-five minutes, gave it a quick reading, fixed a couple of obvious syntax errors, and decided to leave it till he gets back from the bookstore for a final fine-tune. He headed to the bookstore.

At the bookstore he was pleasantly surprised to find it less busy than usual, as he expected given the weather. This would allow him a more relaxed conversation with the Advisor at the Customer Service

# Unlike Anything

## Else

By Reid Fanous



desk. He headed to the thirty something Advisor who smiled at him with the usual question: "Can I help you?" His tone of voice was encouraging enough for Michael to say: "Um, I was just wondering if you carry the ..." he bit his tongue before continuing "... best selling book ever? If there were such thing, I mean!" The Advisor looked him straight in the eye, took a moment or two, which felt like a year or two to Michael, to discern the background where this request is coming from, then quietly said: "Yes! Would you like to see it?" Michael couldn't hide his eagerness: "Yes please". As the Advisor exited the booth, to guide Michael to where "such" book is located, he said "With over six billion copies sold worldwide, currently going at the rate of 100 million copies sold or given away every year, and translated to more than 2,400 languages covering about 95% of the world's population, this book is not only a best seller, but certainly unlike anything else". Upon hearing this Michael's excitement was rapidly building up: First his notion of the best selling book ever was not that outlandish as he feared, and more importantly he was about to get his hands on such book.

He followed the Advisor through the Literature isles while the Advisor continued: "the Book may be described as a great story, great literary achievement, and great history book." "Wow! Makes me wonder who is the author?" Michael was getting curious. By this time they were passing through the Science and Engineering isles, the Advisor stopped, looked at Michael and said: "Get this: While the Book reads as if it were written by one person, the Author did not physically write the book, but He rather let about forty of His close and dedicated friends and servants write it. Yet, a good number of these writers didn't personally meet each other. Indeed, most of them were not even alive during the same time period." Then he proceeded on to the Astronomy section with Michael in toe. Michael was getting suspicious, either the Advisor is pulling his leg, and the whole notion was just a mirage; or his growing guess about the identity of this Book is true. Meanwhile, he became aware of another person that has been following them through the isles, but was staying on the other side of the bookracks, as if he

/ she didn't want to be seen. At the next isle intersection, where the Biography rack ended, but before proceeding on to World History, Michael made a sudden stop, the Advisor traced a few steps back toward Michael who asked, with a touch of smugness in his voice: "How big is this book?" "Well, it really is comprised of 66 books, totaling about 800,000 words, give or take" came the answer. "Gee, how long did it take to write all this?" Michael exclaimed. The Advisor ran

"Um, I was just wondering if you carry the *best selling book ever*? If there were such thing, I mean!"

his fingers through his hair, dropped his lower lip, looked up and quietly said: "little over 1,500 years!" At this point, with twinkling eyes Michael jumped with assured self-satisfaction and said: "I knew it! You've all along been talking about the B..." but before finishing his sentence, the person he was suspecting of following them appeared from behind the Biography rack they were standing at, and turned out to be a she. With a steady and bashful voice, she said: "I'm sorry if I appear like eavesdropping, but I over heard a good part of the tail end of y'all conversation, and was interested if the book is the one I had in mind. So I followed you but with one isle in-between us so I wouldn't interrupt you. Then the Advisor's voice grew familiar to me, and when I realized that it is of Mr. Semaan, my Sunday school teacher .." "Sarah?" The Advisor wondered, "good to see you here. Are you looking for a particular book?" "That's alright Mr. Semaan, would you please continue showing ..". She looked at Michael, whose mouth and eyes were wide open; but then he collected himself and said: "Well, my name is Michael, and I was always wondering about what is the best book ever? But now I know, it is the Bible." Sarah said: "Turned out to be the right question to the right person! Mr. Semaan can tell you a whole lot more about the Bible." Mr. Semaan, feeling the temptation to indulge in self-importance, gently said: "Well, I can see a line forming at the Customer Service booth of other patrons who seem to want to inquire about a thing or two. But now since Sarah is here, would you be kind enough to show Michael the Bibles' section, and use the

opportunity to review the facts you learned in our last Sundays' class about the Bible?" With these words he nodded at Michael, wished him good shopping, and turning to Sarah, he said: "See you this coming Sunday at Church, hopefully by then the weather would have cleared out to hold the class outdoors like you guys suggested a couple of Sundays ago." With those words, he headed back to his booth.

Sarah led the way, with Michael following and saying: "I hope I wasn't too slow coming to grips with what Book Mr Semaan was referring to." Sarah turned back and said, while she was still moving forward: "Not at all. As a matter of fact, Mr. Semaan

has a knack for approaching things from different and very interesting angles. That, can some times throw people off. It was a coincidence that we were talking about the Bible in our last Sunday school class. He observed that in spite of the extremely wide circulation of the Bible, the average American has four Bibles at home; yet less than half the population can name the first book of the Bible! Let's see, is it..." Michael was quick to say, "Genesis!" "Alright, looks like you belong to the knowledgeable half. Also, another tidbit that grabbed my attention goes something like this: well over half the population cannot name half of the Ten Commandments" Sarah quipped.

By that time they arrived at the Bibles' section and Sarah said: "surely you already have at least one at home?" Michael nodded in agreement, then said: "I'm sure you've been reading the Bible, but do you understand it all?" Sarah said: "You're right as far as the reading part, actually I read it every day, twice; and no I do not understand all I'm reading, but it really doesn't bother me at all." Michael asked: "How come?" then he suggested if they go for a cup of coffee at the bookstore coffee shop. Sarah said: "Sure, but I have to leave soon to prepare for a quiz tomorrow". Michael sighed "Tell me about it! I got a paper myself due tomorrow and I MUST fine-tune it before the end of the day - How is 7:00 sharp to hit the door out?" Sarah agreed, and as they headed to the coffee shop, she set her cell phone alarm to 7:00 PM. Sipping their coffees, Sarah continued: "As for understanding it all, I guess this is one of



the miraculous features of the Bible: I feel it addressing us in a unique way tailored to each of the practically unlimited phases of life we go through: Be it childhood, adolescence, youth, full adulthood, highly educated, or less educated, rich or poor, in good or poor health, and so forth. So far I read the Bible at least twice over, and every time I understand quite a bit more than the time before. It's like growing up with the Bible in a sense, that each reading takes me a step or two up where I can see more, and dig deeper. I became very comfortable with the notion that what I don't understand is simply due to a lower degree of maturity on my part than that required to understand. Actually, that's where faith comes in and supports my inadequate spiritual maturity. How often do you read the Bible?" Michael was comfortable now and said: "Actually I read it every day, twice. Got to admit, that if for some reason I don't read, and the reason is typically just being lazy, I go through the day with a real sense of loss, or hunger." Sarah commented: "Didn't Jesus say in Matthew 4:4: 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God', and since the Bible is truly God's word, then you just gave a live illustration of this verse". Michael continued: "Yea, it truly is food, and just as David said "your words are sweeter than honey". It is like we listen to our Father through reading the Bible, then we talk to Him through our prayers. It is very interesting to me that within the covers of the Bible we find drama, justice, wisdom, management, architecture, finance, art, music, poetry, and most importantly God's revelation of Himself to us. With the Nativity just around the corner, did you know that the Old Testament contains over one thousand

hints and pointers to the coming of the Messiah? There are 61 major promises about the Nativity alone: Where will He be born? The manner of His birth, the descent into Egypt, the massacre of children, the wise men, from the house of David, tribe of Judah, family of Jesse, and lots and lots of other shadows and hints". Sarah said: "This is new to me - I really hope you'd be able to come to our Sunday school one time – you sound like you have some cool ideas and concepts to share with others". Before Michael could answer, Sarah's phone chimed announcing it is 7:00 PM, he smiled and said: "It's time to run, thanks for the invite, I would love to attend one of Mr. Semaan's classes. What's the web site of your church?"

**Collected data / sources**

Bible

Matt 4:4

Ps 119:103

Knowing the Bible 101: A Guide to God's Word in Plain Language – Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz

Bestselling book in the world

Since invention of the press in 1455 > 6 B copes of the Bible have been printed in > 2000 languages

Great story

Great literary achievement

Great history book

Great book of prophecy

Great holy book

It is God's revelation of Himself to people

Hebrew (mostly OT) & Greek (mostly NT)

66 books

Written by about 40 different authors

Stories and Storytellers - The Economist 12/13/07

Written down over a period of > 1,500 years

Entire history of God's relationship with man and creation

The Battle of the Books - The Economist 12/22/07

Almost 800,000 words

100 million copies are sold or given away every year

50 million Bibles have been published in atheist China

There are 900 English translations of the Bible

Gideon's International gives away a Bible every second

2,426 languages covering 95% of the World's population

You can read it on your "Psalm Pilot", mobile phones, MP3, iPods, then eBible

Average American has 4 Bibles at home

Yet: < 1/2 Americans can name the first book of the Bible (can you?)

Only 1/3 know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount

1/4 do not know what is celebrated at Easter

60% cannot name 1/2 the ten commandments

Notes collected from a TV Sermon by Dr. Edwin Young, of Second Baptist Church of Houston on Sunday before Christmas 2007

OT has > 1000 hints and promises about the Messiah's coming – some are obscure

300 Clear promises

61 major promises about the Nativity alone: Where will he be born? Manner of his birth? Descent into Egypt, Massacre of children, wise men, House of David, Tribe of Judah, Family of Jesse, - Shadows and hints

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