

A man in a checkered shirt and jacket is shown from the chest up, holding a magnifying glass in his right hand and a small blue book in his left. The background is a stylized, painterly cityscape with a prominent clock tower. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and greys.

TRISHA WHITE PRIEBE

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**SHERLOCK
HOLMES
DEVOTIONAL**

UNCOVERING THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

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TRISHA WHITE PRIEBE

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DEDICATION

To Randy and Faith White

My mom, the English teacher, spent her summer breaks reading to my brother and me from paperback classics and crimson hardcovers with her golden voice and vibrant expression. And I can hear my dad, the high school chemistry teacher, hunched over his lab table—test tubes in hand and Bunsen burner aglow—shouting, “I’ve found it!” when an experiment succeeded. Loving Sherlock Holmes was written in my DNA.

CONTENTS

Introduction	11
1. The Art of Listening	13
2. Death of a Detective	17
3. Man behind the Mask	23
4. An Unlikely Friendship	27
5. Meeting Mycroft	33
6. Hooked	39
7. Game of Proof	43
8. The Power of Restraint	47
9. Observation Skills	53
10. Home Sweet Holmes	59
11. A Study in Silence	65
12. The Art of Deduction	71
13. The Power of Possibility	77
14. Age of Reason	83
15. The Mail Mayhem	89
16. Thicker than Blood	93
17. Mother Knows Best	97
18. Playing Favorites	101
19. By Mistake	107
20. Matron of Honor	113
21. The Prince of Crime	119
22. Justice for Hire	125

23. Fulcrum Files	129
24. On Purpose.	135
25. All in a Name	139
26. Good Chemistry.	143
27. Crime 101.	147
28. Class Act.	153
29. Truth and Consequences.	157
30. The Moriarty Effect	163
31. The Master Plan	167
32. The Mind's Eye	173
33. The Grand Finale	177
34. Survival Guide	181
35. Balancing Act	185
36. For the Love	189
37. Death Grip	195
38. Next to Godliness.	201
39. Forget It	205
40. Genuine Lies	209
41. The Not-So-Humble Holmes.	213
42. The Sincerest Form of Flattery	217
43. A Matter of Perspective	221
44. Crime Files	225
45. Mind over Matter	229
46. A Note on Music	233
47. Work It Out	237

48. The Greatest Game	241
49. Inside Evil	247
50. Holmes Study	253
51. The Iron Fist	257
52. Fed Up	261
53. Stating the Obvious	267
54. Downward Bound	273
55. Character Matters	277
56. Confession	281
57. A Mysterious Society	285
58. The Deadly Sin	289
59. Person of Interest	293
60. In the End	297
Complete list of Sherlock Holmes Stories	302
Sources	305



INTRODUCTION

To read and love Sherlock Holmes is to forget that he is a work of fiction.

Millions of people spanning three centuries have been impressed and inspired by this towering genius with the piercing stare and unyielding determination who could solve the most formidable of crimes in the time it took the average person to compose a simple grocery list.

So real is this detective that people often talk about him as if he were a human being and not the creation of Arthur Conan Doyle's brilliant imagination. Entire literary societies argue with conviction that no obituary was ever printed in London's *The Times*, meaning Holmes wasn't only real, but he also never actually died.

Meaning, in the minds of some, he could still be alive and well somewhere.

Sound crazy to argue over the life and death of a fictional character? Maybe. But crazier things have happened. As one of the three most easily recognizable characters in the world (the other two being Santa Claus and Mickey Mouse), Sherlock Holmes is a household name, responsible for uniting readers in all stages of life and igniting conversations fueled by observation, passion, and intelligence.

Whether each reader was first introduced to *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by a parent, a teacher, or a personal voyage into the stories by a weak lamplight at bedtime, the truth remains: A century after stepping onto the page and into the hearts of readers, Sherlock Holmes is, indeed, alive and well. More people read and admire this fictional character today than ever before.

The reason is simple.

Through Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, collectively called *the canon*, Holmes continues to leave endless clues that teach us timeless truths about ourselves. And if we take the time to apply careful deduction—as Holmes would have done—we can even learn an object lesson or two about the enduring mysteries of God.

So whether this is your first study of Sherlock Holmes or whether, like me, you are a closet Sherlockian at heart, it is my sincerest hope that what you find in the following pages only deepens your understanding of the Master and the mastermind.



1.

THE ART OF LISTENING

“There is no part of the body which varies so much as the human ear.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE CARDBOARD BOX

Sherlock Holmes. The world’s first consulting detective whose services are equal parts eccentric and extraordinary.

For more than one hundred years, writers have created variations and spin-offs of the unconventional detective—crafting characters who are wholly unsympathetic and utterly brilliant. Novelists and scriptwriters alike in the twenty-first century often attribute the inspiration behind their curmudgeon characters to the detective in the deerstalker cap.

Sherlock Holmes is truly *the man, the myth, the legend*.

Literature is littered with famous detectives—G. K. Chesterton’s Father Brown, Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin, Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple, and Carolyn Keene’s Nancy Drew—to name a few, but none are as well known or fiercely loved as Sherlock Holmes. He is timeless in his fan base and enduring in his readership. Students of the great detective cherish their well-worn copies of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories with as much loyalty today as they did in 1887 when Sherlock Holmes first dashed onto the published page.

So what makes Sherlock Holmes great? Simply put, he had abnormally sharp senses. He could hear and see things missed by the ordinary man. In fact, in one of Doyle's short stories, "The Adventure of the Three Gables," it is even implied that the mastermind could smell things missed by everyone else—identifying a stranger on his doorstep as coming from the odorous Old Nichol, an area of East London where the worst criminals did their horrific deeds.

This uncanny attention to detail enables Sherlock to solve the most intimidating crimes without so much as a hint of anxiety. Fans of Sherlock Holmes read the mysteries—not to see *if*, but to marvel *how* he will solve them.

"The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" is another of the fifty-six original short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes. The story begins, so Doyle writes, on "a blazing hot day in August. Baker Street was like an oven, and the glare of the sunlight upon the yellow brickwork of the house across the road was painful to the eye."¹ Enter Miss Susan Cushing, a woman with a placid face and large, gentle eyes. She had received a package in the mail containing two severed human ears. Miss Cushing is understandably horrified, but the police are convinced it was nothing more than a practical joke, played on Miss Cushing by medical students with too much time on their hands and an extra cadaver in their possession. Sherlock Holmes does not agree with the police and quickly begins to make his case that the ears were actually the evidence of a grizzly crime.

Sherlock Holmes will be right, of course. Sherlock Holmes is always right.

As the story unfolds, Holmes makes the famous statement: “There is no part of the body which varies so much as the human ear.”² And while in the story he was speaking specifically about the *organ* that detects sound, the same could be said about the *act* of listening.

One of the most passionately debated topics within Christianity today involves hearing the voice of God. Few Christians would deny that God speaks to His children, but how, where, when, and why are matters of endless debate.

Where should I go to college? Whom should I marry? What career should I pursue? Where should I live?

These questions—and others like them—are just the tip of the iceberg as it pertains to knowing and doing God’s will. Like Samuel in the Old Testament, we wish to say, “Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:9 ESV), yet we aren’t entirely sure what we should listen for in response. We know our obligation is to hear and heed, but how?

The answer lies in the indisputable, indestructible, all-sufficient Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Bible is alive and active. The opposite of an outdated volume left to gather dust on a shelf, the Bible works like a surgeon, carefully cutting away the dead parts of our hearts and breathing life into our weary souls. Better still, the Bible contains the answer to every question we will ever ask that pertains to our

obedience to God. Our heavenly Father does not act as a type of Easter Bunny, hiding His will in tiny colored eggs and waiting for us to discover them. He wants us to know His will for our lives.

We need no extra system. God has given us everything we need for life and godliness.

The truth is that God is and always has been more devoted to His will than we will ever be, so that if we go to Him in prayer with a humble heart and the desire to obey, He will always meet us with grace and guidance in a voice that is unmistakably His.

Prayer and Bible reading are the clearest means we have to hear the voice of God.

“Speak, for your servant hears.”

1 SAMUEL 3:10 ESV



2.

DEATH OF A DETECTIVE

“There is nothing like firsthand evidence.”

A STUDY IN SCARLET

Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* when Dr. Watson, looking for a roommate, arrived at the chemical lab in the hospital where Holmes was working.

The scene was set. Sherlock Holmes sat in:

A lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test tubes, and little Bunsen lamps, with their blue flickering flames.¹

Holmes sat alone, hunched over his table, absorbed in his work. When he eventually realized someone had come to visit, he jumped up, test tube in hand, and ran around the room yelling, “I’ve found it! I’ve found it!”²

Can you imagine? This little charade probably should have scared Dr. Watson from ever wanting to live with the great detective. Instead, it spawned the most famous crime-solving duo in history. Dr. Watson did, of course, become

Holmes' roommate and lifelong friend.

From that first story, *A Study in Scarlet*, published in 1887, readers chose to believe Sherlock Holmes was a real person and not the cleverly crafted character from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's imagination. Ask any Sherlock Holmes devotee if the detective is merely a work of fiction, and then prepare yourself for an adamant response: "Absolutely not!"

An estimate of Holmes' age, based on the birth year 1854, taken from "His Last Bow," means he would now be 161 years old, and still some devotees claim the detective is alive and well.

When Doyle eventually decided he was tired of writing about the detective—believing Sherlock Holmes was preventing him from pursuing other literary goals—Doyle decided to kill off his creation. Easy enough.

Readers couldn't demand more stories if the lead character was dead.

Right?

The public was so outraged by the death of their beloved detective that they wore black armbands in a show of solidarity and mourning. Thousands of people canceled their subscriptions to *The Strand Magazine*, where Doyle's short stories were published, and letters from devastated readers poured in from around the world.

Fans of Sherlock Holmes took—and still take—the detective seriously.

It was in the fourth chapter of that first story where it all began, *A Study in Scarlet*, that Holmes uttered the famous line, “There is nothing like firsthand evidence.”³

He was right, of course.

The Bible is full of exhortations to know God personally. We have the ability—and even the mandate—to gather firsthand evidence about our heavenly Father. Two great tools in our toolbox for gathering these facts are prayer and Bible reading.

Prayer was designed for pursuit of relationship with Him. One of the great gifts Christ gave us when He laid down His life was the ability to bypass a priest in order to gain personal access to God. No longer are we at the mercy of another human being to represent us before the Almighty. With a mere thought or whisper, we are transported into the throne room of God.

Scripture reading, too, was designed for us to learn more about our Savior. In centuries past, people were too poor or too illiterate to read the Bible for themselves. In medieval times, the Catholic Church opposed Bible reading by the common man. Throughout the ages various people have maintained a mind-set that scripture reading was intended for pastors or scholars.

These people are partially correct.

Bible reading is for pastors and scholars *and everyone else*. Diligence, not intelligence, is the primary key to unlocking

the mysteries of the Bible.

Though it is good for us to sit under the careful instruction of pastors or teachers who love God, nothing has the power to change us like a firsthand relationship with our heavenly Father. We must study the scriptures for ourselves, tracing God's hand in the workings of history and piecing together the clues of His character. If it was important for Jesus to withdraw from the crowds in order to spend time alone with His Father (see Matthew 26:36), certainly it is no less essential for us to do the same.

We should ask ourselves the following three questions whenever we approach a passage in the Bible: *What can I discover about God? What can I learn about the world? What can I apply to my life?*

We ought to devote ourselves to daily, personal worship. We should also participate in the privilege of corporate worship at church with brothers and sisters in Christ, compelling those with whom we worship to admire God the way we do.

C. S. Lewis, who was a contemporary of Conan Doyle, reflected on the Psalms, writing:

Just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?" The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise

God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.⁴

Little is more powerful than a Christian whose life is invested in the pursuit of God.

*Taste and see that the LORD is good.
Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!*

PSALM 34:8 NLT



3.

MAN BEHIND THE MASK

“You see, but you do not observe.

The distinction is clear.”

A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA

Sherlock Holmes is a master of disguise.

Throughout the four novels and fifty-six short stories in which he is featured, Sherlock often conceals his identity in order to get a closer look at the criminal or to gain better access to critical evidence. His creative disguises include an Italian priest, an elderly scholar, an old woman, an asthmatic old master mariner, and an Irish-American spy.

In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Sherlock Holmes was so convincing when he masqueraded as a drunk groom that even his faithful sidekick, Dr. Watson, became confused, saying:

It was close upon four before the door opened, and a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes, walked into the room. Accustomed as I was to my friend’s amazing powers in the use of disguises, I had to look three times before I was certain that it was indeed he.¹

Unfortunately, despite Holmes' amazing powers in the use of disguises, one person outsmarted Holmes in this same story. A woman named Irene Adler was also a master of disguise, and while dressed like a young boy, she slipped out from under Holmes' nose and got away with the much-sought-after photograph that Holmes needed to close his case.

Given Holmes' general opinion of women, it is ironic that Irene Adler outsmarted him. In the only story in which Holmes was ever defeated, Holmes was beaten by a woman's wit. The final lines of "A Scandal in Bohemia" read: "And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the woman*."²

"A Scandal in Bohemia" is a short story about two clever people who sought to outsmart each other by using disguises. Either person could have won the challenge simply by seeing what was in front of his or her eyes. The truth was there all along.

So it is with God's Word.

Sometimes when we hit the speed bumps of life, we are tempted to read our Bibles and think—if not actually say—"Nothing in this Book was written to me! None of it applies to my specific situation." A quick search of your Bible's index will not find verses under the headings "unemployment," "stress," or "cancer," it's true. God's Word is silent about how, specifically, to navigate the teenage years in a public school or

how to vote at the next election.

But God's Word remains wholly relevant to the events of our lives.

A closer look at the Bible will reveal God's desire for how we handle all of the issues we face. More surprising still, the Bible addresses every believer in every country at every age in every situation. Despite vast differences in time and place, God's Word, inspired thousands of years ago, was written for our edification.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is speaking to first-century believers when he writes about the Israelites who grumbled and complained. Paul then makes a leap of many miles and many more years and says to his audience, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction" (1 Corinthians 10:11 *ESV*).

If Paul believed it was appropriate to use a biblical example from a previous millennium to speak to the needs of his current audience, surely we can choose to do the same. The key is a willingness to spend the time and effort to study the scriptures and apply them appropriately.

To be certain, Bible reading is hard work. Why else do so many believers who love God struggle with consistency of spending time in the Word? If it were easy, everyone would do it.

Wisdom requires that we see God's Word—true and timeless—and apply it to our lives. So that we can walk with

Adam and Eve, travel with the Israelites, mourn with King David, and sit with Paul, all while applying the lessons each has to teach us to our situations. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV).

If God were not certain that the men and women in the Bible had something of significance to offer to our lives, He would not have included them in a Book that has stood the test of time.

Reading the Bible is never less strenuous than the process of reading, but it is always more valuable than simply reading for reading’s sake. If we come to the pages of scripture and do not see in them the guidance to navigate everyday life, we should say as Holmes did: “You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear.”³

We must ask God to remove the blinders from our eyes so that we can see clearly the truths He has laid out for us. There is perhaps no shorter track to spiritual destruction than not reading and applying the Word of God in the way that He intended.

*Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law.*

PSALM 119:18 NIV



4.

AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP

*“If you will treat me as a friend and trust me,
you may find that I will justify your trust.”*

THE ADVENTURE OF ABBEY GRANGE

Sherlock Holmes is the definition of *peculiar*, no question about it.

From our first glimpse of this unconventional character, we see that he is poor enough to need a roommate, yet demanding enough to be without one. He is usually right, yet generally untactful. He is incredibly smart, yet often unwise. A collection of Sherlock Holmes’ adventures reveals that he is brusque, stubborn, messy, and arrogant.

At first glance, Sherlock Holmes’ personality leaves little by way of redemption.

So what could readers possibly have seen in Holmes to warrant fifty-six short stories and four novels? Furthermore, what is it about this prickly detective that has drawn readers to him like moths to a flame for more than a century?

Many classic characters with unsavory qualities have appeared on the published page and been left to gather dust in the library (Grendel’s mother, anyone?). No one has offered to write a spin-off series honoring the White Witch from

Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. No fan clubs have been constructed to study Shere Khan, the evil tiger who appears in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*, in greater detail.

And yet, entire societies devote their time and energy to Sherlock Holmes.

One indispensable characteristic that sets Sherlock apart from other heroes and antiheroes is his allegiance to his roommate and friend, Dr. Watson. Despite Sherlock's antisocial tendencies (an understatement if we're being honest), it becomes clear fairly quickly in each story that he is fiercely loyal to his friend.

In "The Adventure of Abbey Grange," Sherlock Holmes is speaking to Lady Brackenstall—the long-suffering wife of an abusive man who has been murdered—and a conversation ensues that is perhaps more personally revealing than Holmes intended it to be.

"I hope," said the lady, "that you have not come to cross-examine me again?"

"No," Holmes answered, in his gentlest voice, "I will not cause you any unnecessary trouble, Lady Brackenstall, and my whole desire is to make things easy for you, for I am convinced that you are a much-tried woman. If you will treat me as a friend and trust me, you may find that I will justify your trust."¹

What Sherlock Holmes habitually lacks in tenderness or humility, he makes up for in loyalty and trust. He is reliable to a fault. This loyalty takes Sherlock Holmes, the two-dimensional character, and makes him three-dimensional. Sherlock Holmes becomes human in the eyes of his readers. The loyal Sherlock is a person, flawed without a doubt, yet worth salvaging, and even worth getting to know and learning to admire.

It is possible, without the addition of Dr. Watson, that there would be no Sherlock Holmes.

So it is for those who identify themselves as children of God.

Who could possibly imagine that Christ—perfect, holy, lovely—would be called *the friend of sinners*? History is plagued with people boasting unsavory qualities. Five minutes spent watching the evening news will reveal the unsavory Sherlock Holmes in every human heart. And yet Isaiah 53:5 tells one of the most amazing stories in the Bible: “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (ESV).

Our friendship with Jesus Christ is the redeeming quality that takes our personality from unsavory to save-worthy. God’s greatest gift to us is His own presence.

And once we form a friendship with God, we glorify Him best by trusting Him.

To be sure, David did not stand confidently in the Valley of Elah believing he was strong enough to kill a giant. One-hundred-year-old Abraham did not anticipate the birth of his son believing his wife could overcome her inability to bear children. Noah did not build an ark because of any vast experience with floods. These individuals, and scores of others like them, obeyed God for one reason: they trusted Him. And in trusting God, they found that He justified their trust.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

PSALM 37:4–6 ESV

Notice the words *He will! He will! He will!*

Trusting God has little to do with understanding His motive and everything to do with obeying His will. This kind of trust leads to the only productive change in our lives. So obeying and trusting God are vitally connected. And the good news? No man has ever trusted God and found in the end that He is anything other than trustworthy.

John Calvin once said we must “never think it strange that He should gather to salvation those who have been the worst of men, and who have been covered with a mass of crimes.”²

This is good news! We were once the worst of men and now we can be the children of God! Because of Jesus, we can form our own unlikely friendship with God.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

PROVERBS 3:5 ESV

