

# *14-Day Jesus-Centered Bible Reading Plan*



## *14-Day Jesus-Centered Bible Reading Plan: Introduction*

You might have read about Jesus in the New Testament. But did you know Jesus is all throughout the Bible? From the very beginning, when God created the world, he said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.” God didn’t create Jesus when he came to our world as a baby. Jesus was always there, a part of the very core of who God is. Jesus came to reveal God to us in the New Testament, but we can see Jesus revealed in the pages of the Old Testament, too. Sending him as our Savior was always the plan.

So in this 14-day reading plan, let’s go back to the beginning. Let’s explore how Jesus is woven all throughout the beginning of our world, then skip ahead to Matthew and dive deeper into Jesus’ arrival and early ministry on earth. Finally, we’ll land in Philippians to explore how the good news of Jesus continued after Jesus returned to heaven.

In every chapter you read, you’ll see Jesus. Don’t believe me? Just look for the blue-letter verses in Genesis, pointing out Jesus’ presence. You’ll also find thought-provoking questions and reframing concepts that help you see how the Bible truly is Jesus-centered. Throughout these two weeks, it is our prayer that you draw closer to Jesus as you ponder his presence throughout time—including his presence in your life today.

Day 1: Genesis 1

Day 2: Genesis 2

Day 3: Genesis 3

Day 4: Genesis 4

Day 5: Genesis 5

Day 6: Jesus in Matthew

Day 7: Matthew 1

Day 8: Matthew 2

Day 9: Matthew 3

Day 10: Matthew 4

Day 11: Matthew 5

Day 12: Matthew 6

Day 13: Jesus in Philippians

Day 14: Philippians 1



## *Discover Jesus in Every Book of the Bible...*

The following pages come from the one-of-a-kind Jesus-Centered Bible. Learn more about what makes the Jesus-Centered Bible unique on the following pages. If you enjoy the features found in this 14-day reading plan, you can get the full Bible from these great places:

[group.com](http://group.com)

[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

[christianbooks.com](http://christianbooks.com)

Your favorite local Christian retailer





## THE HEART BEHIND THE JESUS-CENTERED BIBLE

In a way, we are all like caterpillars longing to emerge into our butterfly life—where the numbing rhythms of everyday life are replaced by the deep sense that who we are and what we do *really matters* in the world. Life can be ugly, but we long for beauty. We want to be released from the captivity of our diminished dreams and set free into a life that deeply satisfies. And what is our pathway into that kind of life? A lot of us have been seduced into traveling the false roads of financial success or physical pleasure or social popularity. But anyone who has ventured down these roads very far knows there is always a dead-end around the bend.

A little over 150 years ago, the British pastor C.H. Spurgeon was the most famous person in the world—but it's likely you've never heard of him. He earned the nickname “the prince of preachers” when he was just 22 because of his inspiring sermons as the pastor of London's famous downtown church, New Park Street Chapel. Every Sunday he'd preach twice, to congregations of 6,000 people, before the days of microphones and amplification. Today, he still has more books in print than any pastor in history, including more than 2,500 sermons.

Spurgeon's path out of a caterpillar life was guided by a very simple conviction—he “beelined” everything in his life and ministry to Jesus. Of course, “beeline” is a funny word to us—it means that no matter what he was preaching or teaching about, Spurgeon was always headed to Jesus. He lived and urged the Jesus-centered life. Once, a young pastor asked Spurgeon to critique his preaching, and the older man was blunt: “That was a poor sermon.” When the young man asked for an explanation, Spurgeon replied: “Because there was no Christ in it.” The young man protested that his chosen Scripture verse had nothing to do with Jesus. Spurgeon responded: “Don't you know, young man, that from every town, and every village, and every little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London? And so from every text in Scripture there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures, that is Christ.”

Spurgeon's passion for Jesus, and his determination to track everything in the Bible back to the “metropolis” of Christ, is the light we need to find our way through a life that can seem like a dark jungle. And as we draw near to the heart of Jesus, the transformation we experience will feel like we've been set free into a life that is bursting with fruit—everywhere we go, with everyone we meet, we leave a trail of good impact. When we, like the Apostle Paul before us, can say, “I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2), then we are caught up in a caterpillar-to-butterfly transformation. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we discover our true identity and purpose in life.

And that's the heart that fuels the passion behind the *Jesus-Centered Bible*—the story of God contained in its pages revolves around a person, not a set of principles. Here, you'll take the plunge into a Jesus-centered life as you experience him in every book, from every vantage point, and in surprising new ways. There has never been a Bible like this before, where every page points you to Jesus in a fresh way. This Bible will energize you. Challenge you. Change you. And, like the “rabboni” from Nazareth himself, draw you back again and again and again.

Rick Lawrence, *General Editor*

# BLUE-LETTER TEXT

Many Bibles use red-colored text to highlight Jesus' words in the New Testament. The *Jesus-Centered Bible* highlights blue letters to point out references to Jesus throughout the Old Testament. From Genesis to Malachi, it's amazing how often the things Jesus said and did, and prophecies that specifically reference him, are woven into the ancient texts. The blue-letter text and explanations jump off the page, so you get an unforgettable experience of the breadth and depth of Jesus in all of Scripture. And that makes perfect sense, because Jesus is the focal point for all of the Bible. Jesus offers us a perfect way to see and understand the God described in the Old Testament. In *Ruthless Trust*, author Brennan Manning writes: "It must be noted that Jesus alone reveals who God is... We cannot deduce anything about Jesus from what we think we know about God; however, we must deduce everything about God from what we know about Jesus."

When we get to know Jesus, we get to know the God we can't see, because Jesus gives

us a "perfect mirror" of God. And as you "taste and see" God's plans for Jesus unfold throughout the Bible, you get a clearer understanding of his plans for your life, too. The more you draw near to Jesus, the more obvious his purpose for you becomes.

Blue-Letter Text Editor Ken Castor, along with General Editor Rick Lawrence, worked together to find and unveil Old Testament examples of Jesus threading into the narrative. In the end, they selected close to 700 blue-letter texts to highlight—and could've chosen many more if space had allowed. Likely, as you get used to reading the Old Testament through a "blue letter" filter, you'll uncover your own "beeline to Jesus" passages. We encourage you to read with a blue highlighter, marking these passages for yourself and scribbling your own beeline connections in the margins. As you do, you'll discover a growing conviction in your soul—that all of life, and all of God's message to his people, orbits around the redemptive presence of Jesus.

Blue-Letter Text & Explanation

<sup>7</sup> Who will come from Mount Zion to rescue Israel?  
When the LORD restores his people, Jacob will shout with joy, and Israel will rejoice.

**15** *A psalm of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?
- <sup>2</sup> Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts.
- <sup>3</sup> Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends.
- <sup>4</sup> Those who despise flagrant sinners,

What a wonderful inheritance!

- <sup>7</sup> I will bless the LORD who guides me; even at night my heart instructs me.
- <sup>8</sup> I know the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.
- <sup>9</sup> No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice.\* My body rests in safety.
- <sup>10</sup> For you will not leave my soul among the dead\*

**1** PSALM 14:7—David longs for salvation to come from Zion. Paul, in his letter to the followers of Jesus in Rome, references Jesus when he says: "The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness" (Romans 11:26).

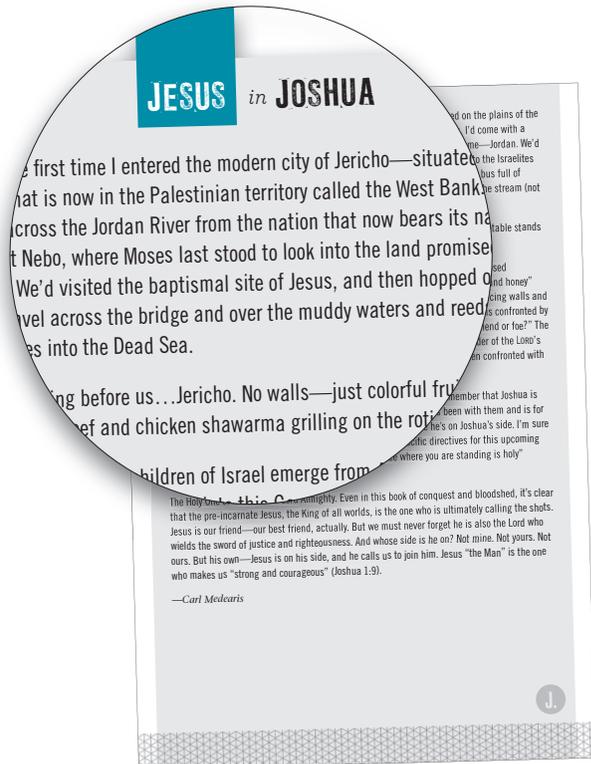
# JESUS IN EVERY BOOK

Whether you're a lifelong biblical scholar or have just been introduced to the Story of God for the first time, our Bible Book Introductions are designed to give you a surprising, profound, and personal experience of the "hovering presence" of Jesus in every nook and cranny of this ancient collection of God-breathed writings. The Bible is often called "God's Word," and the apostle John begins his Gospel with this stirring connection to Jesus:

In the beginning the Word already existed.  
The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He existed in the beginning with God.  
God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.  
The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it (John 1:1-5).

Simply, the only way to truly understand the message and significance of the Bible is to embrace its central focus, which is the person of Jesus. The "good news" of the Bible is that we have a champion and a rescuer and a lover who will set us free from our captivity to the expectations and limitations of a broken world. Jesus is our promised Messiah, the one who will save us, and his story is a thread that runs through all of Scripture. Close your eyes and stab your finger anywhere in the Bible, and you'll find the fingerprints of Jesus.

The artists, writers, pastors, and theologians who crafted our one-page Jesus-Centered Bible Book Introductions are all connected to the Simply Jesus movement. It's a loose collective of friends and allies from all over the world who are "ruined by Jesus and ruined for Jesus." It's our hope that you experience Jesus' singular presence through these thoughtful, creative, and story-based "on-ramps" to all 66 books of the Bible. To learn more about our writing team, go to page A16.



# REFRAMING JESUS INSIGHTS

Beauty is in the details, and that's never truer than when our focus is on Jesus. When he performed his first miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana, the guests observed to the host that he'd obviously saved his best wine for the end of the party, instead of serving it at the beginning, when it's customary to lead with the finest vintage (John 2). The metaphor embedded in this story is an overriding truth about Jesus: He makes every little thing beautiful, and always turns the mundane into the "best wine at the party." But we have to pay attention to find the true depths of his beauty. And that is our aim in the 150 Reframing Jesus Insights that we've scattered throughout the Old and New testaments.

These short pieces offer interesting context, surprising backstories, and penetrating theological insights that highlight the beauty of Jesus threaded through Scripture. When we understand the true impact of Jesus on the people around him, we're drawn to worship him. And when we focus on the details of the things he says and does, we're astonished by his goodness.

We recruited a small team of college, university, and seminary professors who share our passion for a Bible that proactively points the reader to Jesus no matter where the finger lands in its pages. Their Reframing Jesus pieces function like a smart, engaged friend who knows how to spot Jesus in all the obscure places he likes to hang out. To learn more about our writing team, go to page A18.

## // 1 SAMUEL 17

allowed to sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine.

me reply. 41Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him, 42sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy. 43"Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods. 44"Come over here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!" Goliath yelled.

ow about 45David replied to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46Today the LORD will conquer

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## J. REFRAMING JESUS

### 1 SAMUEL 17:40-51

#### JESUS LOOKS BEYOND HUMAN LABELS

If there's one thing we learn in the pages of 1 Samuel, it is this: God frequently messes up all the "rules" we set up for how life should work. Young shepherds, for example, shouldn't defeat giants. And when Jesus comes on the scene, he lives out God's values. He has a habit of breaking the "rules," and it drives the religious leaders crazy. During Jesus' time, there are strict labels about who is "in" and who is "out"—people deemed acceptable by the religious establishment and those who are rejected and labeled as "sinners" by the religious elite. But Jesus rips up those labels and throws them away. Knowing that even society's outcasts are people made in the image of God, Jesus dines with them, speaks to them, touches them, and befriends them. Jesus' life beyond labels reveals the dignity of each human being.

# THE JESUS QUESTIONS

One of Jesus' favorite teaching strategies was to ask surprising, personal, and specific questions—a recipe that made people think deeply, long after their encounter with him. In the spirit of his love for time-bomb questions, we've scattered more than 100 of our own surprising questions about Jesus, and questions about our relationship with him, throughout the New Testament. Every question is designed to help you slow down and chew on a truth about Jesus and how you relate to him—and to get you thinking long after you've moved on. A few sample questions:

- What does it mean to be shrewd, and why are Christians typically bad at it? (Luke 16:1-9)
- Good friendships are based on mutual giving—what can we offer Jesus that he doesn't already have? (Romans 16:1-6)
- What's the one thing you'd want Jesus to know about you if you sat down to dinner with him? (1 Corinthians 11:20-26)
- How are other people's expectations of you and Jesus' expectations of you similar—and different? (2 Corinthians 3:1-6)
- Which word comes closest to describing the way you see Jesus—*nice*, *fierce*, or *mysterious*? Explain. (Revelation 5:5)

HOW IS A  
 RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS  
 AFFECTED BY THE FACT THAT  
 WE CAN'T SEE, TOUCH, OR  
 AUDIBLY HEAR HIM?  
 (ACTS 1:9)

WE CAN'T SEE, TOUCH, OR  
 AUDIBLY HEAR HIM?  
 (ACTS 1:9)

WE CAN'T SEE, TOUCH, OR  
 AUDIBLY HEAR HIM?  
 (ACTS 1:9)

*The Ascension of Jesus*

<sup>9</sup>So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?"

<sup>10</sup>He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. <sup>11</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>12</sup>After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. <sup>13</sup>As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. <sup>14</sup>"Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"

<sup>15</sup>Or in; also in 1:5b. <sup>16</sup>Greek, a Sabbath day's journey. <sup>17</sup>Greek, brothers.



# JESUS ANSWERS LIFE'S ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

At some point in our lives, we all grapple with the BIG questions that represent the universal mysteries of our humanity. To borrow a phrase from Winston Churchill, life can seem like “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” And so, in the *Jesus-Centered Bible*, we address humanity’s nine biggest questions, and highlight how Jesus answers these questions, over and over:

- What’s my purpose in life?
- Is God real?
- Why do bad things happen?
- What is the meaning of life?
- Is this all there is?
- Will everything be OK?
- What is truth?
- What is love?
- What is right and wrong?

Not only will you discover Jesus’ penetrating responses to each of these questions, you’ll also marvel at how sensitive he is to your raw reality. Along the way, you’ll learn to trust more deeply in the only One who can guide you through life’s toughest challenges. By sinking into Jesus’ own responses to these nine questions, you’ll tackle your uncertainties, with his perspective as your context. Jesus will help you make sense of your personal struggles, doubts, and fears. No question is too big, and no answer is too small.

## J. JESUS ANSWERS LIFE'S ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

### MATTHEW 5:17-20—ESSENTIAL QUESTION: WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG?

The Pharisees have super-charged the quest for “what is right and wrong” and made it into a kind of extreme competition. They have taken the basics of the “law” that God delivered to them—ways of relating to him and to each other—and exploded that simple outline into hundreds and hundreds of tiny rules and regulations designed to guarantee “righteousness.” And here Jesus says that “unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!” And then, through the rest of Matthew 5, he drives home his point by comparing common standards for what’s right and wrong to the standard he’s set. He’s saying it’s essentially impossible to live a “righteous” life by working harder at it—our solitary hope for living righteously is to allow the only Righteous Presence in the universe to live in us, to live through us. We will know right and wrong not when we try harder to meet God’s standards of righteousness, but when we yield ourselves to Jesus, who will help us to live righteously from the inside-out.

# A SAMPLER GUIDE TO ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS JESUS ANSWERED

Jesus has a job description, first prophesied in the book of Isaiah and then repeated by him at the start of his ministry (Luke 4:18-19): “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.” Setting captives free is at the core of Jesus’ heart. And that’s why our deepest human questions—the questions that go right to our core—always find an answer in Jesus. Here we’ve pointed to a sampling of those times when Jesus answered our nine essential questions.

## **WHAT’S MY PURPOSE IN LIFE?**

Matthew 28:18-20  
Mark 1:16-20  
Mark 2:14-17  
Mark 9:50  
John 21:15-18

## **IS GOD REAL?**

Matthew 6:1-6  
Luke 7:1-10

## **WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN?**

Matthew 7:24-27  
Matthew 13:24-30  
John 9:1-5  
John 11:1-44

## **WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?**

Matthew 25:31-46  
Mark 4:1-20  
Luke 14:25-33

## **IS THIS ALL THERE IS?**

Mark 5:1-17  
Luke 6:17-23  
Luke 20:27-40

## **WILL EVERYTHING BE OK?**

Matthew 10:25-28  
Luke 8:22-25  
Luke 12:22-31  
John 6:16-21

## **WHAT IS TRUTH?**

Luke 4:1-13  
John 6:53-69  
John 15:1-8

## **WHAT IS LOVE?**

Matthew 11:28-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
Mark 8:34-9:1  
Luke 13:34-35  
Luke 15:3-7

## **WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG?**

Matthew 5:17-20  
Matthew 21:28-32  
Matthew 23:1-36  
Mark 2:23-28  
John 4:43-54

# JESUS *in the* OLD TESTAMENT

Some Christians have great difficulty with the Old Testament—it's hard to reconcile the God of love revealed in Jesus Christ with the God that they read about in the books of Joshua and Judges, who orders the genocide of entire races of people, such as the Canaanites and the Amalekites. These mysteries are worthy pursuits for theologians and apologists to pursue. But they are not the object of my focus when I read the Old Testament. I read these epic books in much the same way as the early Christians did. As Jesus left the earth, he promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would help them to discern all truth (John 14:26).

In their preaching and in their teaching, the early followers of Jesus used the Hebrew Bible as their sole source for revelation about him. And as they read the Old Testament Scriptures, they did so prayerfully, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. I follow the same practice used by the early Christians—each day I select a passage of Scripture and read it. Then I close the Bible and wait for the Holy Spirit to teach me something about Jesus in the verses I've just read. I sit in silence for 10 or 15 minutes and meditate upon the passage.

**J.** Matthew found Jesus in the book of Hosea—in this ancient prophet's writings there were many references to Christ. Though he did not realize it at the time, when Hosea wrote, "I called my son out of Egypt," he was referencing Jesus (Hosea 11:1).

**J.** My Jewish friends can read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and not find Jesus, but under the sway of the Holy Spirit the early disciples saw descriptions of what would happen to Christ, and so do I.

**J.** The early believers found truths about Jesus' crucifixion buried in Psalm 22, and so do I.

**J.** John, the "disciple Jesus loved," read the account in the Old Testament of Moses lifting up a bronze snake in the wilderness. Those who looked to that snake found healing, a metaphor for the healing we find in Jesus lifted on the cross (John 3:14).

**J.** When John read about the manna that fell from heaven, sustaining the children of Israel during their sojourn across the Sinai Desert, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that this miracle would serve as a precursor to Jesus, who is our "bread of life" (John 6:35).

In that silence I open myself up to what God might have to say to me. Truths usually come to me, and Jesus is revealed to me even as he was for the early Christians. Those first-century Christians did not have the New Testament as we do—it was still being written. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they found Jesus all through the writings of the Old Testament, and so do I.

*We will find great treasure when we meditate on the Old Testament Scriptures as these ancient saints did.*

Read a passage, then close your eyes and pray, asking the Holy Spirit to teach you about Jesus. You will be amazed by what happens. Of course, more in-depth study that draws on commentaries and scholars is always valuable, but it's the devotional reading of the Old Testament under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that will draw you into intimacy with Jesus.

—Tony Campolo

↓ In the book of Acts, we read how Philip encounters an Ethiopian eunuch who is returning from Jerusalem. This God-fearing man is reading the Old Testament, but did not understand its meaning. Philip stops him, joins him in the chariot and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, explains how all of Scripture points to Jesus (Acts 8:26-35).

↓ In Luke 24:13-28, we read how Jesus chides his disciples because they're unable to discern the Old Testament's many prophetic references to his death on the cross. Later, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they recognize that prophecies about Jesus are scattered throughout the Old Testament—more than they'd ever imagined.

↓ The Holy Spirit enables the apostle Paul to find connections to Jesus embedded in the festivals and dietary habits of the ancient Jews. Paul declares that Jesus is prefigured in the rock that gives water to the Jews while they're crossing the desert after leaving Egypt (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

↓ The author of the book of Hebrews sees Jesus revealed in the Old Testament through the promises made to David. God told the iconic king that there would come a priest after the order of Melchizedek who would intercede with the Father on behalf of humanity, and save humanity from their sins (Hebrews 5:5-6).

↓ And, of course, Peter discovers revelations about Jesus all through the writings of the prophets—truths about Jesus that “even the angels” could not grasp (1 Peter 1:12).

# GENESIS

## *The Account of Creation*

**1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.\* <sup>2</sup> The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

<sup>3</sup> Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

<sup>6</sup> Then God said, “Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.” <sup>7</sup> And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. <sup>8</sup> God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

<sup>9</sup> Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. <sup>12</sup> The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>13</sup> And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

<sup>14</sup> Then God said, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years.

<sup>15</sup> Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth.” And that is what happened.

<sup>16</sup> God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars.

<sup>17</sup> God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, <sup>18</sup> to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>19</sup> And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> Then God said, “Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” <sup>21</sup> So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>22</sup> Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

<sup>23</sup> And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> Then God said, “Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” And that is what happened.

<sup>25</sup> God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

**J** GENESIS 1:1—Jesus is the co-creator of all things, and he was there at the beginning of all things (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-16).

1:1 Or *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . . Or When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .*

## GENESIS 2 //

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make human beings\* in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth,\* and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings\* in his own image.  
In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food.

<sup>30</sup> And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

<sup>31</sup> Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

**2** So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. <sup>2</sup> On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested\* from all his work. <sup>3</sup> And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

**J.** GENESIS 1:26-27—We were created to be like God, which is why Jesus told us that we would do the things he did, and even greater things than he did (John 14:12).

**J.** GENESIS 2:15—This describes the “rule” of the first Adam, called a “representation” of Jesus, who would come later to “rule” our hearts (Romans 5:12-19).

<sup>4</sup> This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

### *The Man and Woman in Eden*

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup> neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. <sup>6</sup> Instead, springs\* came up from the ground and watered all the land. <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

<sup>8</sup> Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. <sup>9</sup> The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup> A river flowed from the land of Eden, watering the garden and then dividing into four branches. <sup>11</sup> The first branch, called the Pishon, flowed around the entire land of Havilah, where gold is found. <sup>12</sup> The gold of that land is exceptionally pure; aromatic resin and onyx stone are also found there. <sup>13</sup> The second branch, called the Gihon, flowed around the entire land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> The third branch, called the Tigris, flowed east of the land of Asshur. The fourth branch is called the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. <sup>16</sup> But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—<sup>17</sup> except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” <sup>19</sup> So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man\* to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. <sup>20</sup> He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

<sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused the man to fall

1:26a Or man; Hebrew reads *adam*. 1:26b As in Syriac version; Hebrew reads *all the earth*. 1:27 Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*. 2:2 Or *ceased*; also in 2:3. 2:6 Or *mist*. 2:19 Or *Adam*, and so throughout the chapter.

into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs\* and closed up the opening.<sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

<sup>23</sup> "At last!" the man exclaimed.

"This one is bone from my bone,  
and flesh from my flesh!  
She will be called 'woman,'  
because she was taken from 'man.'"

<sup>24</sup> This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

<sup>25</sup> Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

### *The Man and Woman Sin*

**3** The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

<sup>2</sup> "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. <sup>3</sup> "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

<sup>4</sup> "You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. <sup>5</sup> "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

<sup>6</sup> The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, to o. <sup>7</sup> At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

<sup>8</sup> When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man\* and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup> He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."

<sup>11</sup> "Who told you that you were naked?" the

LORD God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"

<sup>12</sup> The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?"

"The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it."

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild.

You will crawl on your belly,  
groveling in the dust as long as you live.

<sup>15</sup> And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring.

## **J. REFRAMING JESUS**

### **GENESIS 3:15—JESUS WILL FIGHT FOR HUMANITY**

After the serpent leads Adam and Eve into sin, humankind is trapped in a cosmic hostage crisis. But God responds by launching a full-scale covert operation to fight for humanity. His strategy is to squash the serpent through a descendant of Eve—a Rescuer who will give his all to the struggle. And though he would be wounded, this Son of Man would ultimately be victorious in combat. God's scheme pivots on embedding Jesus behind "enemy lines," where he can battle Satan head-on and triumph against sin and death. Reporting on Jesus' assault on the serpent, the apostle Paul describes God's war plans: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you" (Romans 16:20).

**J. GENESIS 2:24—When the conniving Pharisees try to set a theological trap for Jesus by posing a hypothetical question about divorce, Jesus quotes this passage back to them (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8).**

**J. GENESIS 3:1—Satan (the "serpent") is a liar, even "the father of lies," according to Jesus (John 8:44).**

2:21 Or took a part of the man's side. 3:8 Or Adam, and so throughout the chapter.

## GENESIS 4 //

He will strike\* your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

<sup>16</sup> Then he said to the woman,

“I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy,  
and in pain you will give birth.  
And you will desire to control your husband,  
but he will rule over you.\*”

<sup>17</sup> And to the man he said,

“Since you listened to your wife and ate from  
the tree  
whose fruit I commanded you not to eat,  
the ground is cursed because of you.  
All your life you will struggle to scratch a  
living from it.

<sup>18</sup> It will grow thorns and thistles for you,  
though you will eat of its grains.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow  
will you have food to eat  
until you return to the ground  
from which you were made.  
For you were made from dust,  
and to dust you will return.”

### *Paradise Lost: God's Judgment*

<sup>20</sup> Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve,  
because she would be the mother of all who  
live.\* <sup>21</sup> And the LORD God made clothing from  
animal skins for Adam and his wife.

<sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God said, “Look, the human  
beings\* have become like us, knowing both  
good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit  
from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will  
live forever!” <sup>23</sup> So the LORD God banished them  
from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out  
to cultivate the ground from which he had been  
made. <sup>24</sup> After sending them out, the LORD God  
stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the  
Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword  
that flashed back and forth to guard the way to  
the tree of life.

### *Cain and Abel*

**4** Now Adam\* had sexual relations with his  
wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When  
she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the  
LORD’s help, I have produced\* a man!” <sup>2</sup> Later

she gave birth to his brother and named him  
Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd,  
while Cain cultivated the ground. <sup>3</sup> When it was  
time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his  
crops as a gift to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Abel also brought  
a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs  
from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and  
his gift, <sup>5</sup> but he did not accept Cain and his  
gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked  
dejected.

<sup>6</sup> “Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked  
Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? <sup>7</sup> You will  
be accepted if you do what is right. But if you  
refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is  
crouching at the door, eager to control you. But  
you must subdue it and be its master.”

<sup>8</sup> One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s  
go out into the fields.”\* And while they were in  
the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and  
killed him.

<sup>9</sup> Afterward the LORD asked Cain, “Where is  
your brother? Where is Abel?”

“I don’t know,” Cain responded. “Am I my  
brother’s guardian?”

<sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, “What have you done?  
Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from  
the ground! <sup>11</sup> Now you are cursed and banished  
from the ground, which has swallowed your  
brother’s blood. <sup>12</sup> No longer will the ground  
yield good crops for you, no matter how hard  
you work! From now on you will be a homeless  
wanderer on the earth.”

<sup>13</sup> Cain replied to the LORD, “My punishment\*  
is too great for me to bear! <sup>14</sup> You have banished  
me from the land and from your presence; you  
have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone  
who finds me will kill me!”

<sup>15</sup> The LORD replied, “No, for I will give a  
sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills  
you.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain to  
warn anyone who might try to kill him. <sup>16</sup> So  
Cain left the LORD’s presence and settled in the  
land of Nod,\* east of Eden.

### *The Descendants of Cain*

<sup>17</sup> Cain had sexual relations with his wife, and she  
became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Then

**3:15** Or bruise; also in 3:15b. **3:16** Or And though you will have desire for your husband, / he will rule over you. **3:20** Eve sounds like a Hebrew term that means “to give life.” **3:22** Or the man; Hebrew reads ha-adam. **4:1a** Or the man; also in 4:25. **4:1b** Or I have acquired. Cain sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean “produce” or “acquire.” **4:8** As in Samaritan Pentateuch, Greek and Syriac versions, and Latin Vulgate; Masoretic Text lacks “Let’s go out into the fields.” **4:13** Or My sin. **4:16** Nod means “wandering.”

Cain founded a city, which he named Enoch, after his son. <sup>18</sup> Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad became the father of\* Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech.

<sup>19</sup> Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah. <sup>20</sup> Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the first of those who raise livestock and live in tents. <sup>21</sup> His brother's name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute. <sup>22</sup> Lamech's other wife, Zillah, gave birth to a son named Tubal-cain. He became an expert in forging tools of bronze and iron. Tubal-cain had a sister named Naamah. <sup>23</sup> One day Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
listen to me, you wives of Lamech.  
I have killed a man who attacked me,  
a young man who wounded me.

<sup>24</sup> If someone who kills Cain is punished seven times,  
then the one who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times!”

### *The Birth of Seth*

<sup>25</sup> Adam had sexual relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth,\* for she said, “God has granted me another son in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.” <sup>26</sup> When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. **At that time people first began to worship the LORD by name.**

### *The Descendants of Adam*

**5** This is the written account of the descendants of Adam. When God created human beings,\* he made them to be like himself. <sup>2</sup> **He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called them “human.”**

<sup>3</sup> When Adam was 130 years old, he became the father of a son who was just like him—in his very image. He named his son Seth.

<sup>4</sup> After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.

<sup>6</sup> When Seth was 105 years old, he became the father of\* Enosh. <sup>7</sup> After the birth of\*

Enosh, Seth lived another 807 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup> Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.

<sup>9</sup> When Enosh was 90 years old, he became the father of Kenan. <sup>10</sup> After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived another 815 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup> Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.

<sup>12</sup> When Kenan was 70 years old, he became the father of Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup> After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup> Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.

<sup>15</sup> When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he became the father of Jared. <sup>16</sup> After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived another 830 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>17</sup> Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died.

<sup>18</sup> When Jared was 162 years old, he became the father of Enoch. <sup>19</sup> After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>20</sup> Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.

<sup>21</sup> **When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah.** <sup>22</sup> **After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters.**

<sup>23</sup> Enoch lived 365 years, <sup>24</sup> walking in close

**1. GENESIS 4:26b**—This marks the beginning of the worship of the Lord; later, in the book of Revelation, John the disciple says Jesus will be worshiped for eternity (Revelation 4:8b).

**1. GENESIS 5:2**—The Pharisees try to trap Jesus by asking him what looks like an innocent question about divorce, and Jesus responds by quoting this verse (Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6).

**1. GENESIS 5:21-24**—God delights in us “walking in close fellowship” with him, and Jesus has invited us to “walk in close fellowship” by knowing his heart and mind (Luke 24:35).

**4:18** Or the ancestor of, and so throughout the verse. **4:25** Seth probably means “granted”; the name may also mean “appointed.” **5:1** Or man; Hebrew reads adam; similarly in 5:2. **5:6** Or the ancestor of; also in 5:9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 25. **5:7** Or the birth of this ancestor of; also in 5:10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26.

## GENESIS 6 //

fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.

<sup>25</sup>When Methuselah was 187 years old, he became the father of Lamech. <sup>26</sup>After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived another 782 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup>Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died.

<sup>28</sup>When Lamech was 182 years old, he became the father of a son. <sup>29</sup>Lamech named his son Noah, for he said, “May he bring us relief\* from our work and the painful labor of farming this ground that the LORD has cursed.”

<sup>30</sup>After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived another 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup>Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.

<sup>32</sup>After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

### A World Gone Wrong

**6** Then the people began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were born to them.

<sup>2</sup>The sons of God saw the beautiful women\* and took any they wanted as their wives. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not put up with\* humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years.”

<sup>4</sup>In those days, and for some time after, giant Nephilites lived on the earth, for whenever the sons of God had intercourse with women, they gave birth to children who became the heroes and famous warriors of ancient times.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. <sup>6</sup>So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. <sup>7</sup>And the LORD said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the

small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.” <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor with the LORD.

### The Story of Noah

<sup>9</sup>This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God. <sup>10</sup>Noah was the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup>Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence. <sup>12</sup>God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. <sup>13</sup>So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!”

<sup>14</sup>“Build a large boat\* from cypress wood\* and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. <sup>15</sup>Make the boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high.\* <sup>16</sup>Leave an 18-inch opening\* below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper.

<sup>17</sup>“Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. <sup>18</sup>But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives. <sup>19</sup>Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. <sup>20</sup>Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive. <sup>21</sup>And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals.”

<sup>22</sup>So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

### The Flood Covers the Earth

**7** When everything was ready, the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous. <sup>2</sup>Take with you seven pairs—male and female—of each animal I have approved for eating and for sacrifice,\* and

**J.** GENESIS 6:11-13—Jesus compares the condition of the world and the surprise of God’s judgment upon it with the circumstances that will surround the time when he returns to earth (Matthew 24:37-39).

**5:29** Noah sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean “relief” or “comfort.” **6:2** Hebrew *daughters of men*; also in 6:4. **6:3** Greek version reads *will not remain in*. **6:14a** Traditionally rendered *an ark*. **6:14b** Or *gopher wood*. **6:15** Hebrew *300 cubits* [138 meters] long, *50 cubits* [23 meters] wide, and *30 cubits* [13.8 meters] high. **6:16** Hebrew *an opening of 1 cubit* [46 centimeters]. **7:2** Hebrew *of each clean animal*; similarly in 7:8.

# JESUS *in the* NEW TESTAMENT

To truly understand the New Testament, you and I need to take a walk—a seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, just like two of Jesus' earliest disciples. Our metaphorical walk from Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified, to Emmaus, where he met his disciples on the road after his resurrection, is really a walk through the “meta-narrative” of Scripture. Authors Frank Viola and Leonard Sweet say: “The Bible is the greatest storybook, not just because it is full of wonderful stories, but because it tells of the great story, the story of Jesus.”

As these two disciples walk the road to Emmaus, their “hearts burn” because they're discovering that Jesus is the focus of all Scripture (Luke 24:13-35). Like them, we won't be able to understand the Bible as a whole unless we recognize that Jesus is the key to unlocking its interpretation. If we are going to understand the New Testament, we must read it Christocentrically. Luke affirms this truth when he writes: “Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

In the Gospels we find the manifestation of Jesus the Messiah. In Acts we find the propagation of Jesus the Messiah. In the Epistles we find the interpretation of Jesus the Messiah. And in Revelation we find the consummation of Jesus the Messiah.

In our contemporary age, most readers search the New Testament for principles of truth, not Truth itself. **That Truth is named Jesus, and he wants to live his life through his people, transforming us through his presence, embedding his principles from the inside-out.** In the treasure box whose name is Jesus, all of humanity's purpose and hope are locked away (Romans 5:12-21). He lived a perfect life on our behalf, because we could not do it on our own....

He died our death on the cross to forgive our sins and justify us, because we could not do it on our own—And he rose from the dead to give us his eternal life, because we could not do it on our own. The Father and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us, and Jesus now functions as our “great High Priest,” advocating on our behalf.

*If we don't understand that the core theme of the New Testament, and all of the Bible, is the pursuit of Jesus, we'll miss his epic work of grace on our behalf.*

As you read the New Testament my hope is that your journey morphs from a search for principles into a passionate pursuit of a Person—may your heart burn just as it did for those two Emmaus disciples. As strange as it sounds, it's very possible to read the Bible, yet miss Jesus. This is what happened to the Pharisees: “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life” (John 5:39-40).

Read the New Testament prayerfully and slowly, asking the Spirit of Jesus to reveal himself to you. Ask for a “total immersion” in the heart, soul, and mind of Christ. The New Testament is not about you or me—it's the story of God's redemptive activity channeled through Jesus. When you lose yourself in Jesus' story, you will find the life you were created to live. In every verse of the New Testament, there is a road that leads to Jesus. Enjoy your seven-mile walk, and keep your heart open to be transformed.

*—Derwin Gray*

## JESUS *in* MATTHEW

The Bible tells a big, sprawling story of sin and redemption, of death and resurrection. It takes us from Creation to New Creation—from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem. Along the way, the plot sometimes feels lost and the story seems . . . stalled. But when we turn the page from Malachi to Matthew, the twisting plot of the Story God is telling is about to come into sharp focus. We're about to meet the central character of the Story—his name is Jesus!

A few years ago I read the Bible straight through like you would any other book. I was trying to read it as if I'd never heard the Story. There were moments of elation, but also times when I felt the pain of the Hebrew prophets as they nearly despaired. Would the promises God had made to Abraham and his seed ever come true? Would the longed-for reign of the Messiah ever arrive? The wintery day I ended my reading of Malachi and turned the page to begin Matthew was during the season of Advent. I was sitting by a woodstove with a warm fire. Music played quietly in the background. As I read the first words of Matthew 1:18, "This is how Jesus the Messiah was born," the radio began to play the familiar carol "What Child Is This?" Tears filled my eyes. The Story was back on track, and God was keeping his promise!

Matthew opens his Gospel (his telling of God's redemptive Story) not with the birth of Jesus, but with a long genealogy tracing Jesus' lineage all the way back to Abraham. Matthew wants us to understand that even though God is doing a new thing with Jesus, that new thing is in continuity with what we have read in the Hebrew Scriptures. When we go from the Old to the New Testament, it's not that God has abandoned what he was doing with Israel from Genesis to Malachi—rather, God is bringing into fulfillment the promises he made to David and Abraham. So Matthew opens the New Testament with these words: "This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). God had promised David that a son of his would sit upon an eternal throne. God had promised Abraham that his seed would bless the nations. These promises are fulfilled in Jesus.

In writing his Gospel, Matthew is careful to remind us that this Jesus we call Lord is the Jewish Messiah spoken of by the prophets. The New Testament is not God's "Plan B"—it's the revelation of his "Plan A." From the wise men who seek the king of the Jews, to Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount, to the post-resurrection appearance when Jesus says, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18), Matthew is joyfully announcing the good news—King Jesus has come, and he has brought with him the reign of God!

—*Brian Zahnd*

# MATTHEW

## *The Ancestors of Jesus the Messiah*

**1** This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham\*:

- <sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac.  
Isaac was the father of Jacob.  
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
- <sup>3</sup> Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).  
Perez was the father of Hezron.  
Hezron was the father of Ram.\*
- <sup>4</sup> Ram was the father of Amminadab.  
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.  
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.
- <sup>5</sup> Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).  
Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).  
Obed was the father of Jesse.
- <sup>6</sup> Jesse was the father of King David.  
David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).
- <sup>7</sup> Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.  
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.  
Abijah was the father of Asa.\*
- <sup>8</sup> Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.  
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.\*  
Jehoram was the father\* of Uzziah.
- <sup>9</sup> Uzziah was the father of Jotham.  
Jotham was the father of Ahaz.  
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.
- <sup>10</sup> Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.  
Manasseh was the father of Amon.\*  
Amon was the father of Josiah.

HOW WOULD JESUS  
INTERACT WITH SOCIAL  
MEDIA IF HE HAD BEEN BORN  
INTO OUR TIME?

<sup>11</sup> Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin\* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).

<sup>12</sup> After the Babylonian exile:  
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.  
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.  
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.  
Eliakim was the father of Azor.

<sup>14</sup> Azor was the father of Zadok.  
Zadok was the father of Akim.  
Akim was the father of Eliud.

<sup>15</sup> Eliud was the father of Eleazar.  
Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.  
Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup> All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

## *The Birth of Jesus the Messiah*

<sup>18</sup>This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement\* quietly.

<sup>20</sup>As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was

**1:1** Greek *Jesus the Messiah, Son of David and son of Abraham*. **1:3** Greek *Aram*, a variant spelling of Ram; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10.

**1:7** Greek *Asaph*, a variant spelling of Asa; also in 1:8. See 1 Chr 3:10. **1:8a** Greek *Joram*, a variant spelling of Jehoram; also in 1:8b. See 1 Kgs 22:50 and note at 1 Chr 3:11. **1:8b** Or *ancestor*; also in 1:11. **1:10** Greek *Amos*, a variant spelling of Amon; also in 1:10b. See 1 Chr 3:14.

**1:11** Greek *Jeconiah*, a variant spelling of Jehoiachin; also in 1:12. See 2 Kgs 24:6 and note at 1 Chr 3:16. **1:19** Greek to *divorce her*.

## MATTHEW 2 //

conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,\* for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup>All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,\* which means ‘God is with us.’”

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. <sup>25</sup>But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

### Visitors from the East

**2** Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men\* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>2</sup>“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,\* and we have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup>King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup>He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

<sup>5</sup>“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

<sup>6</sup> ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities\* of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’\*”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

<sup>9</sup>After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! <sup>11</sup>They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup>When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

### The Escape to Egypt

<sup>13</sup>After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

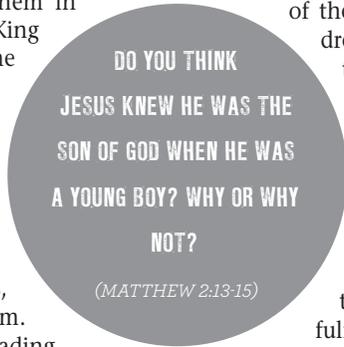
<sup>14</sup>That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, <sup>15</sup>and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”\*

<sup>16</sup>Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. <sup>17</sup>Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> “A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.”\*

### The Return to Nazareth

<sup>19</sup>When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. <sup>20</sup>“Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his



1:21 *Jesus* means “The LORD saves.” 1:23 *Isa* 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version). 2:1 *Or royal astrologers*; Greek reads *magi*; also in 2:7, 16. 2:2 *Or star in the east.* 2:6a *Greek the rulers.* 2:6b *Mic* 5:2; 2 *Sam* 5:2. 2:15 *Hos* 11:1. 2:18 *Jer* 31:15.

mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

<sup>21</sup>So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. <sup>22</sup>But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

### *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

**3** In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, <sup>2</sup>“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” <sup>3</sup>The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!  
Clear the road for him!’”\*

<sup>4</sup>John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. <sup>6</sup>And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize,\* he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup>Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. <sup>9</sup>Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. <sup>10</sup>Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup>“I baptize with\* water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with

the Holy Spirit and with fire.\* <sup>12</sup>He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

### *The Baptism of Jesus*

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup>But John tried to talk him out of it. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?”

<sup>15</sup>But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.\*” So John agreed to baptize him.

<sup>16</sup>After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened\* and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”

### *The Temptation of Jesus*

**4** Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. <sup>2</sup>For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

<sup>3</sup>During that time the devil\* came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”

<sup>4</sup>But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say,  
‘People do not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the  
mouth of God.’”\*

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, <sup>6</sup>and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect you.  
And they will hold you up with their hands  
so you won’t even hurt your foot on a  
stone.’”\*

<sup>7</sup>Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say,  
‘You must not test the LORD your God.’”\*

<sup>8</sup>Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup>“I will give

**3:2** Or has come, or is coming soon. **3:3** Isa 40:3 (Greek version). **3:7** Or coming to be baptized. **3:11a** Or in. **3:11b** Or in the Holy Spirit and in fire. **3:15** Or for we must fulfill all righteousness. **3:16** Some manuscripts read opened to him. **4:3** Greek the tempter.

**4:4** Deut 8:3. **4:6** Ps 91:11-12. **4:7** Deut 6:16.

## MATTHEW 5 //

it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,

*'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'*<sup>\*"</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

### *The Ministry of Jesus Begins*

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. <sup>14</sup> This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>15</sup> "In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,  
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,  
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,  
<sup>16</sup> the people who sat in darkness  
have seen a great light.  
And for those who lived in the land where  
death casts its shadow,  
a light has shined."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>17</sup> From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."<sup>\*</sup>

### *The First Disciples*

<sup>18</sup> One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. <sup>19</sup> Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" <sup>20</sup> And they left their nets at once and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. <sup>22</sup> They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

### *Crowds Follow Jesus*

<sup>23</sup> Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And

he healed every kind of disease and illness. <sup>24</sup> News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. <sup>25</sup> Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,<sup>\*</sup> Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

### *The Sermon on the Mount*

**5** One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them.

### *The Beatitudes*

- <sup>3</sup> "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,<sup>\*</sup>  
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.  
<sup>4</sup> God blesses those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
<sup>5</sup> God blesses those who are humble,  
for they will inherit the whole earth.  
<sup>6</sup> God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,<sup>\*</sup>  
for they will be satisfied.  
<sup>7</sup> God blesses those who are merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
<sup>8</sup> God blesses those whose hearts are pure,  
for they will see God.  
<sup>9</sup> God blesses those who work for peace,  
for they will be called the children of God.  
<sup>10</sup> God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,  
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.  
<sup>11</sup> "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. <sup>12</sup> Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

### *Teaching about Salt and Light*

<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

**4:10** Deut 6:13. **4:15-16** Isa 9:1-2 (Greek version). **4:17** Or *has come, or is coming soon*. **4:25** Greek *Decapolis*. **5:3** Greek *poor in spirit*. **5:6** Or *for righteousness*.

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

### Teaching about the Law

<sup>17</sup>“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. <sup>19</sup>So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

<sup>20</sup>“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

**5:21** Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17. **5:22a** Some manuscripts add *without cause*. **5:22b** Greek uses an Aramaic term of contempt: *If you say to your brother, ‘Raca.’* **5:22c** Greek *if you say, ‘You fool.’* **5:22d** Greek *Gehenna*; also in 5:29, 30. **5:23** Greek *gift*; also in 5:24. **5:26** Greek *the last kodrantes* [i.e., quadrans]. **5:27** Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18. **5:29** Greek *your right eye*.

### Teaching about Anger

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’\* <sup>22</sup>But I say, if you are even angry with someone,\* you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot,\* you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone,\* you are in danger of the fires of hell.\*

<sup>23</sup>“So if you are presenting a sacrifice\* at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

<sup>25</sup>“When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>And if that happens, you surely won’t be free again until you have paid the last penny.\*

### Teaching about Adultery

<sup>27</sup>“You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’\* <sup>28</sup>But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup>So if your eye—even your good eye\*—

## J. JESUS ANSWERS LIFE’S ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

### MATTHEW 5:17-20—ESSENTIAL QUESTION: WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG?

The Pharisees have super-charged the quest for “what is right and wrong” and made it into a kind of extreme competition. They have taken the basics of the “law” that God delivered to them—ways of relating to him and to each other—and exploded that simple outline into hundreds and hundreds of tiny rules and regulations designed to guarantee “righteousness.” And here Jesus says that “unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!” And then, through the rest of Matthew 5, he drives home his point by comparing common standards for what’s right and wrong to the standard he’s set. He’s saying it’s essentially impossible to live a “righteous” life by working harder at it—our solitary hope for living righteously is to allow the only Righteous Presence in the universe to live in us, to live through us. We will know right and wrong not when we try harder to meet God’s standards of righteousness, but when we yield ourselves to Jesus, who will help us to live righteously from the inside-out.

## MATTHEW 6 //

causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your hand—even your stronger hand\*—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

### Teaching about Divorce

<sup>31</sup>“You have heard the law that says, ‘A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.’\* <sup>32</sup>But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.

### Teaching about Vows

<sup>33</sup>“You have also heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the LORD.’\* <sup>34</sup>But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, ‘By heaven!’ because heaven is God’s throne. <sup>35</sup>And do not say, ‘By the earth!’ because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, ‘By Jerusalem!’ for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup>Do not even say, ‘By my head!’ for you can’t turn one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup>Just say a simple, ‘Yes, I will,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ Anything beyond this is from the evil one.

**5:30** Greek *your right hand*. **5:31** Deut 24:1. **5:33** Num 30:2. **5:38** Greek *the law that says: ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’* Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21. **5:41** Greek *million* [4,854 feet or 1,478 meters]. **5:43** Lev 19:18. **5:44** Some manuscripts add *Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you*. Compare Luke 6:27-28. **5:47** Greek *your brothers*.

### Teaching about Revenge

<sup>38</sup>“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’\* <sup>39</sup>But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup>If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. <sup>41</sup>If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile,\* carry it two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.

### Teaching about Love for Enemies

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’\* and hate your enemy. <sup>44</sup>But I say, love your enemies!\* Pray for those who persecute you! <sup>45</sup>In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. <sup>46</sup>If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. <sup>47</sup>If you are kind only to your friends,\* how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. <sup>48</sup>But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

### Teaching about Giving to the Needy

**6** “Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup>When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the

## J. JESUS ANSWERS LIFE’S ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

### MATTHEW 6:1-6—ESSENTIAL QUESTION: IS GOD REAL?

Here Jesus urges his listeners to do “good deeds” in secret, without drawing attention to ourselves. He’s urging us to not grab attention or reward or recognition for the intrinsically good things we do, because we don’t need to—God is real and can see all the secret things we do, and God is eager to “reward” us for those things. When we do good things in order to be rewarded by those around us, we’re essentially saying that the only real reward we’ll get is from the people we can see—it’s an act of disbelief in God’s real-ness. And Jesus is here simply reminding us: *Hey, God is real—you don’t have to scrape and horde and guarantee your reward for doing good, because God can see what you do in secret. So do things in secret so the only source of your reward can come from God. When you do that, you proclaim the truth—that God is real.*

synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. <sup>4</sup>Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

### Teaching about Prayer and Fasting

<sup>5</sup>“When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

<sup>7</sup>“When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. <sup>8</sup>Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! <sup>9</sup>Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
 may your name be kept holy.  
<sup>10</sup> May your Kingdom come soon.  
 May your will be done on earth,  
 as it is in heaven.  
<sup>11</sup> Give us today the food we need,\*  
<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our sins,  
 as we have forgiven those who sin  
 against us.  
<sup>13</sup> And don't let us yield to temptation,\*  
 but rescue us from the evil one.\*

<sup>14</sup>“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

<sup>16</sup>“And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, comb your hair\* and wash your face. <sup>18</sup>Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

### Teaching about Money and Possessions

<sup>19</sup>“Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

<sup>22</sup>“Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. <sup>23</sup>But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

<sup>24</sup>“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

<sup>25</sup>“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? <sup>27</sup>Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

<sup>28</sup>“And why worry about your clothing? Look

## J. REFRAMING JESUS

### MATTHEW 6:5-16

#### JESUS TEACHES LIFE-CHANGING TRUTHS

Who's been your favorite teacher? Was it your third-grade teacher who always told great jokes? Or was it a history teacher who brought boring dates and facts to life? Here in Matthew's Gospel, we encounter many moments when Jesus powerfully teaches the people around him. Crowds mob around him to hear him speak; his words and stories are unusual, amazing, and challenging. They're the kind of things you'd never forget. As you read through this specific passage—and others throughout this Gospel—imagine you're there, in the crowd, listening to Jesus' life-changing words. What is he teaching you? How will you respond?

6:11 Or Give us today our food for the day; or Give us today our food for tomorrow. 6:13a Or And keep us from being tested. 6:13b Or from evil. Some manuscripts add For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. 6:17 Greek anoint your head.

## MATTHEW 7 //

at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, <sup>29</sup>yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. <sup>30</sup>And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

<sup>31</sup>"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' <sup>32</sup>These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. <sup>33</sup>Seek the Kingdom of God\* above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

<sup>34</sup>"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

### Do Not Judge Others

**7** "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For you will be treated as you treat others.\* The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.\*

<sup>3</sup>"And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye\* when you have a log in your own? <sup>4</sup>How can you think of saying to your friend,\* 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

<sup>6</sup>"Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy.\* Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

### Effective Prayer

<sup>7</sup>"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone

who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>9</sup>"You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? <sup>10</sup>Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! <sup>11</sup>So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

### The Golden Rule

<sup>12</sup>"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

### The Narrow Gate

<sup>13</sup>"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell\* is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. <sup>14</sup>But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

### The Tree and Its Fruit

<sup>15</sup>"Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. <sup>16</sup>You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup>So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

### True Disciples

<sup>21</sup>"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup>On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' <sup>23</sup>But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

**6:33** Some manuscripts do not include *of God*. **7:2a** Or *For God will judge you as you judge others*. **7:2b** Or *The measure you give will be the measure you get back*. **7:3** Greek *your brother's eye*; also in 7:5. **7:4** Greek *your brother*. **7:6** Greek *Don't give the sacred to dogs*. **7:13** Greek *The road that leads to destruction*.

## JESUS *in* PHILIPPIANS

Met any cranky Christians lately? You know, people who look like they earn their living eating lemons?

Paul had every excuse to join the fellowship of the irritable. He was in Rome, and it was hot, dusty, and muggy. The food was nothing to write home about. (When I traveled there, a restaurant tried to sell me “meat of cow’s tail” and “lamb’s intestines with special spices.”)

Now, hot weather and bad food are tolerable if you have your freedom. But Paul did not. He’d been maligned, beaten, and imprisoned. Yet this short letter to followers of Jesus in the Greek city of Philippi contains not a hint of bitterness. In fact, it is the happiest book in the Bible. Like light, the joy Paul had found was seeping through cracks in his prison walls.

What was Paul’s secret?

Recently, a guy named Blaine sent me an email: “When I was in my early teens,” he wrote, “laughter was easy. I’m 17 now and the joy is gone from my life. How do you live a life of joy?”

How would you answer Blaine? I told him about my brother-in-law Jim, a true master of joy. For 40 years Jim has loved and cared for his wife, Miriam. Once gorgeous, witty, and intelligent, Miriam has Huntington’s disease. She now weighs 45 pounds. As I write this, doctors have given her just weeks to live. For Jim, the tears come quickly.

But like Paul, joy is present because Jim has met Jesus—not on the road to Damascus, but on the road to despair and bitterness. Circumstances haven’t determined his happiness, but the joy that Christ offers has. Jim’s life is marked by thanksgiving, contentment, and a transformed attitude. I told Blaine that Jim’s secret is found in a small book that will take 17 minutes to read. “Pour a cup of coffee and crack open Philippians,” I wrote. “Follow Paul’s advice and example, and see what happens.”

Once a persecutor of these Jesus-followers, Paul now writes to them as a proud father would write his dearly loved children. Ten years earlier, during his second missionary journey (recorded in Acts 16), Paul plants the church in Philippi. Now he’s thanking those who’ve stuck it out, commending them for their love, warning them about joy-draining legalists, and giving practical instructions on how to be unified and content in Christ. Central to this encouraging book is the person of Jesus. He is the reason Paul is imprisoned. But he is also the source of Paul’s contentment, his strength, his reward, and his mentor in humility and servanthood.

Blaine took my advice. He later wrote to tell me he prefers tea to coffee, but Philippians is now his favorite book in the Bible. “It has transformed my life,” he said. “The laughter has returned, too.” So if coffee isn’t your cup of tea, that’s fine. Pour yourself something else, crack open this phenomenal book, and encounter Jesus.

—Phil Callaway

# PHILIPPIANS

## Greetings from Paul

**1** This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of **Christ Jesus**.

I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to **Christ Jesus**, including the church leaders\* and deacons.

<sup>2</sup>May God our Father and the **Lord Jesus Christ** give you grace and peace.

## Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer

<sup>3</sup>Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. <sup>4</sup>Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, <sup>5</sup>for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about **Christ** from the time you first heard it until now. <sup>6</sup>And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when **Christ Jesus** returns.

<sup>7</sup>So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. <sup>8</sup>God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of **Christ Jesus**.

<sup>9</sup>I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. <sup>10</sup>For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of **Christ's** return. <sup>11</sup>May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by **Jesus Christ**\*—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

## Paul's Joy That Christ Is Preached

<sup>12</sup>And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters,\* that everything that has happened to

me here has helped to spread the Good News. <sup>13</sup>For everyone here, including the whole palace guard,\* knows that I am in chains because of **Christ**. <sup>14</sup>And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers\* here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message\* without fear.

<sup>15</sup>It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about **Christ** with pure motives. <sup>16</sup>They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News.

<sup>17</sup>Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about **Christ**. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. <sup>18</sup>But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about **Christ** is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

<sup>19</sup>For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of **Jesus Christ** helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

## Paul's Life for Christ

<sup>20</sup>For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for **Christ**, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to **Christ**, whether I live or die. <sup>21</sup>For to me, living means living for **Christ**, and dying is even better. <sup>22</sup>But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for **Christ**. So I really don't know which is better. <sup>23</sup>I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with **Christ**, which would be far better for me. <sup>24</sup>But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

<sup>25</sup>Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. <sup>26</sup>And

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN BEING A BOLD  
FOLLOWER OF JESUS AND AN  
OBNOXIOUS ONE?

1:1 Or overseers, or bishops. 1:11 Greek with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ. 1:12 Greek brothers. 1:13 Greek including all the Praetorium. 1:14a Greek brothers in the Lord. 1:14b Some manuscripts read speak the message.

## PHILIPPIANS 2 //

when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in **Christ Jesus** because of what he is doing through me.

### *Live as Citizens of Heaven*

<sup>27</sup>Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about **Christ**. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. <sup>28</sup>Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. <sup>29</sup>For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in **Christ** but also the privilege of suffering for him. <sup>30</sup>We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

### *Have the Attitude of Christ*

**2** Is there any encouragement from belonging to **Christ**? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? <sup>2</sup>Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

<sup>3</sup>Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

<sup>5</sup>You must have the same attitude that **Christ Jesus** had.

<sup>6</sup> Though he was God,\*

he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

<sup>7</sup> Instead, he gave up his divine privileges\*; he took the humble position of a slave\* and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,\*

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,

<sup>10</sup> that at the name of **Jesus** every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue declare that **Jesus Christ** is **Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.

### *Shine Brightly for Christ*

<sup>12</sup>Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. <sup>13</sup>For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

<sup>14</sup>Do everything without complaining and arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. <sup>16</sup>Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of **Christ's** return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. <sup>17</sup>But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God,\* just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. <sup>18</sup>Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

### *Paul Commends Timothy*

<sup>19</sup>If the **Lord Jesus** is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along.

**2:6** Or *Being in the form of God.* **2:7a** Greek *he emptied himself.* **2:7b** Or *the form of a slave.* **2:7c** Some English translations put this phrase in verse 8. **2:17** Greek *I will rejoice even if I am to be poured out as a liquid offering.*

*the end.*

**P.S. If this reading plan has inspired you to put Jesus at the center of EVERY day, we recommend continuing your journey with the entire Jesus-Centered Bible.**



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