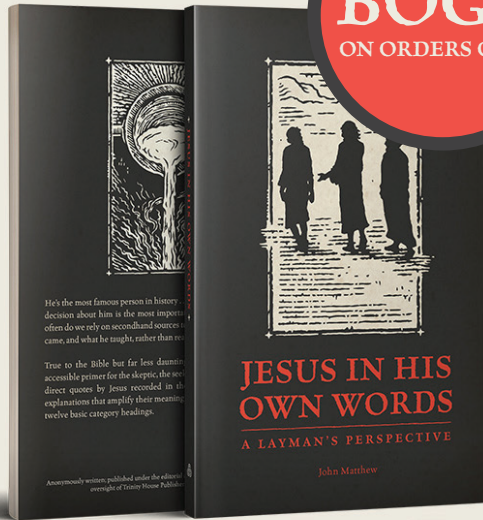


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## WHO IS JESUS?

He's the most famous person in history . . . and the most controversial. Our decision about him is the most important one we'll ever make. Yet, how often do we rely on secondhand sources to understand who Jesus is, why he came, and what he taught, rather than reading his words for ourselves?

True to the Bible but far less daunting, *Jesus in His Own Words* is an accessible primer for the skeptic, the seeker, and the believer alike. It pairs direct quotes by Jesus recorded in the Bible with short, lay-friendly explanations that amplify their meaning and context, all organized under twelve basic category headings.

◆ PROMISES OF GOD ◆

# THE PROMISE

READ GENESIS 16:6–14

If you are walking down a crowded sidewalk in midtown Manhattan on your way to a lunch appointment, “being seen” has relatively little value. Why? Because you don't feel lost. If New York City is your home, you have friends there, and you are (or at least feel) secure in that environment.

But if your situation in life changes—perhaps you are adrift on a disabled boat a few miles offshore in the Pacific Ocean—“being seen” may become your highest value in life. You wave frantically at every blip on the horizon or in the heavens, hoping to catch someone's eye. Once you have caught the attention of a search plane or a passing vessel and you see it turning back in your direction, you know you are safe because you have been seen. Being seen by someone with the power to save you is the same as being saved—you know it's only a matter of time.

On one occasion, a lowly and forsaken woman in the Old Testament was feeling like a shipwreck survivor. Adrift on an ocean of sand, this servant woman had fled from the security of her mistress's home. But it was not only she who was lost—she undoubtedly worried for her unborn child as well.

This servant woman, Hagar, had become pregnant by Abram, her mistress's husband. (This was culturally acceptable as part of an ancient marriage tradition when a wife was infertile; see Gen. 16:2.) Resentment flared between the two women (16:4–5), and Hagar was driven away. But Hagar's plight caught God's eye, who sent the angel of the Lord to save her and to restore her to Abram's family. Hagar called God “El Roi”—“a God who sees.”

Even though she may have been lost in her own eyes, she was not lost in God's. He saw her in the middle of the desert and cared for her.

Perhaps you have felt emotionally shipwrecked, or lost and abandoned in a wilderness of circumstances, feelings, or conflicts. Don't despair in those situations. The same God who saw Hagar sees you. Nothing—and no one—escapes His attention. To be seen is to be found, and to be found is to be safe.

### God's Promise:

No matter how alone you feel, you are never out of His sight.

◆ JULY 2023 ◆

# JESUS IN HIS OWN WORDS

## THE WAY THAT LEADS TO LIFE

Lord, what You inaugurated through Your beloved Son is utterly unique in human history. Christianity is not a set of regulations and rituals that are intended to earn favor and merit with God, with the gods or with some other version of the Ultimate. That is the nature of humanly devised religions, and it only leads to bondage and uncertainty. But the Lord Jesus Christ opened up an entirely new way, through which we can have direct access to You, not by our merits, but by His grace. The heart of Christianity is not a set of rules and observances, but a living relationship with You. But Your Word clearly reveals the human inclination to add to grace, because we think we need to accomplish something to earn acceptance with You. Deliver us from the folly of putting ourselves on a treadmill by denying the all-sufficient work of Your Son.



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## WISDOM FOR A LIFE OF HARMONY

Jesus gives us wisdom on what it means to live a pleasing life to God. The apostle Paul summarizes some of these principles in his letter to the Colossians: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (3:12–14).

## HOW TO PUT ON LOVE

Jesus taught the Beatitudes during His famous Sermon on the Mount. These eight declarations of blessing embody the essence of spiritual life and describe the benefits of the attitudes and actions they prescribe. Some behaviors encouraged in the Beatitudes are ones that we may already strive for, like mercy, a hunger for righteousness, purity of heart, and peacemaking.

Others are difficult to accept, being poor in spirit, mournful, and meek. But perhaps the most striking of these blessings is the eighth, which says that if we are persecuted because we believe in Jesus, we will be truly blessed.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

We are to acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy before God.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

A proper response to our spiritual bankruptcy is mourning our sinful condition. But this mourning will be replaced by comfort.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)

In God’s economy, the humble will be lifted up.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6)

Those who have an appetite for the things of God will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

Because God treats us with mercy (not giving us what we deserve), we should treat others better than they deserve.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

The pure in heart desire one thing above all else—the ultimate good of knowing God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

When we have peace with God, we can pursue peace with others.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)

As Paul puts it, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). From an earthly point of view, this appears counterintuitive. Still, Jesus is speaking of the eternal glory that our temporary sufferings will produce.

## GOD’S POWER TO OVERCOME SIN & TEMPTATION

Sin refers to anything that goes against the character of God, and it can manifest in various ways through our thoughts, words, and actions. Conversely, temptation is not sin, but it can lead to sin. Repentance is the act of turning away from sin that is necessary because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). What does God tell us about sin and temptation in Scripture?

In John 8:7, when the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, He challenged them with the statement, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” This made them realize that no one is without sin, and they all walked away. Jesus then told the woman to go and sin no more.

In Mark 14:38, Jesus tells Peter to watch and pray to avoid falling into temptation because although the spirit may be willing, the flesh is weak. Trusting in Jesus and relying on His Spirit can help overcome the downward pull of selfish thoughts and desires.

Mark 7:21-23 reveals that sin comes from within man’s heart and can manifest in various forms like evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. The problem of sin is internal, not external.

In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus raises the standard of sin by pointing out that anyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery in their heart. Therefore, God’s commandments become unattainable when our thought life is considered.

## PRACTICING FORGIVENESS IS VITAL

Forgiving others is based on realizing the depth of God’s forgiveness toward us. Because of Jesus’ sacrificial death, God treats us with grace instead of justice, giving us better than we deserve. Similarly, we should treat others better than they deserve. In Luke 23:34, Jesus forgave those who tortured and crucified him, setting an extraordinary example of forgiveness.

In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus emphasizes that forgiveness is crucial for a follower of Jesus. Choosing not to forgive others reveals a failure to understand the depth of our forgiveness by God.

In Matthew 18:22, when asked how many times one should forgive those who transgress against us, Jesus responds by saying we should forgive indefinitely. Forgiving someone does not mean forgetting the past and trusting that person in the future. Instead, it means dealing graciously with that person, just as Jesus does with us.

In Matthew 5:22, 24, we are commanded to seek reconciliation with those who have provoked us, a clear call to forgive, and a warning against holding grudges or harboring unreconciled anger and bitterness towards others.

## WHY WE JUDGE GRACIOUSLY

In Matthew 7:1-2, Jesus warns against judging others, reminding us that we will also be judged with the measure we use. True judgment depends on self-awareness and understanding our position before God before we consider judging another. While we should be discerning about others and hold them accountable for the laws of society, final judgment is reserved for Jesus, who will judge perfectly.

## LOVING GOD AND OTHERS

We are called to love God completely with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and by doing so, we can love ourselves correctly and see ourselves as God sees us instead of how the world sees us. When God defines us as part of His family, we can rest in that security to freely love and serve others.

When we incorporate the wisdom of God revealed in Scripture, we can begin to make choices to put on the love of Christ daily. These behaviors, when consistently practiced, help us live a life of harmony in which we submit ourselves to God, allowing Him to guide us into all humility and all truth.

