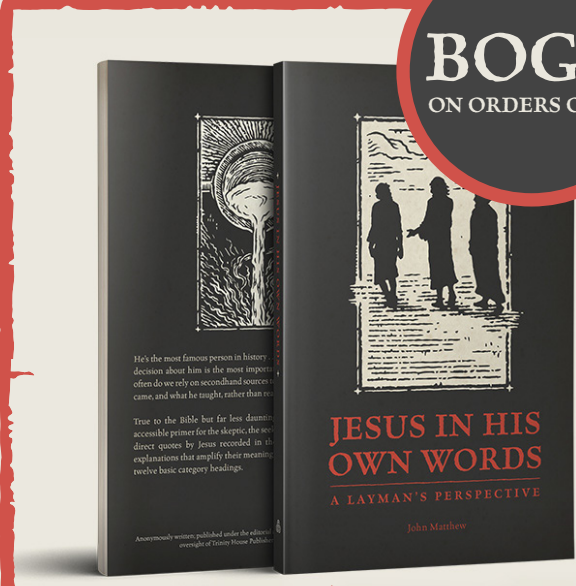


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WHO IS JESUS?

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 ♦

LIFE'S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS

READ JOHN 9:1-3

A busy intersection handles thousands of vehicles without incident until two cars collide in a fearsome crash. If we're in one of the cars, we want to know why. "Why not the cars before me or after me?" A category-four tornado hopscotches through town and takes only three houses out of a neighborhood of fifty. If ours is one of the three, we ask, "Why? Why my house?" Leukemia strikes down a high school scholar-athlete-leader and we ask, "Why? Why someone so young, with such great potential?"

Indeed, "Why?" This is life's toughest question, and humans have asked it from time immemorial. Not only children ask this question (sometimes with unnerving frequency), but spiritually mature adults ask it frequently too. Moreover, adults probably ponder this question even more often than they are brave enough to express it verbally.

Jesus' disciples once asked Him about a man who had been born blind. The rabbinic theology of the day required that the cause be found in either the man's sin or that of his parents. But Jesus told them that such simplistic reasoning was not behind the why of the man's blindness. Rather, Jesus explained, the answer is deeper: This happened "so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). And then Jesus proceeded to do God's work by restoring the man's sight.

If we drew the conclusion from this miracle that God's work is always to heal the infirm, we might miss other works that he does in difficult circumstances. These miraculous works include giving supernatural grace to

people with serious injuries to fight for life, moving neighbors to reach out with love and generosity to disaster victims who've just lost everything, and taking fear away from the person with cancer who is walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

God's works are many. For every "Why?" that is asked, if no specific answer is known, a work of God will probably be revealed. Our challenge is to remember that there are no accidents with God—only divinely orchestrated opportunities by which His works of grace and power are revealed.

God's Promise:

He allows the whys in life to reveal His ways and His works.

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JESUS IN HIS OWN WORDS

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.



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ALWAYS FOLLOW JESUS

Jesus called to Levi and said, “Follow me.” (Mark 2:14)

Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector (an outcast to the Jews), to become one of the disciples. Levi does just that; we know him as Matthew, writer of the first Gospel. Jesus similarly invited his other disciples to follow him. He continues to call out today.

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13–14)

It is easier and more tempting to follow the examples of society—with its lusts, greed, vanity, and selfishness—than to follow Jesus. The path of this world leads to hell and eternal separation from God, while following the path laid out by Jesus leads to heaven and eternal life with God.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24–25)

Jesus and his words are the only sure foundation of the soul. As we build on that foundation, our souls will know stability and will not be overwhelmed by people or spiritual forces of evil.

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21)

DISCOVERING THE WAY OF GOD

Following Jesus is not a one-time decision; it is an ongoing choice, and we should always pursue our spiritual growth with the help of his grace. As we become more Christlike in our daily walk, we should be mindful that it is easy to revert to the “ways of the world.” As Peter states: “Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity” (2 Peter 3:17–18).

To be a follower of Jesus is to walk with him, speak with him, imitate him, and pursue him in every aspect of our daily activities.

LIVE A LIFE OF TRUST AND OBEDIENCE

Jesus calls us to live a life of trust and obedience to him. James 2:26 says it succinctly: “Faith apart from works is dead.” In other words, our faith is demonstrated by what we do. This passage in John also demonstrates that the love of the Father and the love of the Son cannot be separated.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37–38)

As Jesus walked through the villages, he saw the dispirited people. They were like sheep without a shepherd. He saw them and lamented that many needed to be delivered. However, apart from him and his few disciples, there were not enough people to carry the good news of Jesus to all who needed it. This would change after his resurrection, as the gospel about Jesus would spread throughout the world.

MAKE JESUS THE TOP PRIORITY

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:37–39)

Jesus requires us to make him our greatest priority. Missionary Jim Elliot brilliantly captured the essence of this text: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”¹ After penning these words, Elliot was murdered by the people in Ecuador he was trying to evangelize. He gave his life to be a disciple of Jesus.

CHOOSE YOUR MASTER

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

We cannot play by two sets of rules, or we will become double-minded. Either the principles of God or the principles of the world will guide us. If we are playing by the world’s standards, it will be natural to accumulate and hoard earthly wealth for ourselves. Instead, Jesus commands us to hold the resources of this world with a loose grip and to treasure the unseen eternal over the seen temporal. He is not telling us that it is wrong to excel in the temporal arena, but this must never be the primary purpose for our endeavors.

PURSUE GOD FIRST

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

Jesus is telling us to seek God above all else and that, when we do, God will provide all that we need. Thus, we need not be anxious about anything.

REST IN CHRIST...AND THEN FOLLOW HIM

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28–30)

These verses call us to trust in Jesus—to enter the rest he offers in a personal relationship with him. Secondly, this passage is a call to follow, and keep following, Jesus as a committed disciple, relying on him for daily strength. Following Jesus is more than a religion or keeping a set of rules. It’s a new life marked by peace and rest in him.



¹ Elisabeth Elliot, ed., *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (Grand Rapids MI: Fleming H. Revell, Baker Book House, 1978), 174.