

Who is Jesus?



GROWTH GROUP BOOKLET

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INTRODUCTION TO WHO IS JESUS? SERIES

Who is Jesus? is a question that's been asked ever since Jesus' life began. In fact there may be no historical figure who has attracted so much attention around *who they are* than Jesus of Nazareth. This also means there may be no historical figure whose identity has been so questioned. In an article written for the Guardian in 2017, Simon Gathercole reminded us that '*The historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth is both long-established and widespread. Within a few decades of his supposed lifetime, he is mentioned by Jewish and Roman historians, as well as by dozens of Christian writings. Compare that with, for example, King Arthur, who supposedly lived around AD500. The major historical source for events of that time does not even mention Arthur, and he is first referred to 300 or 400 years after he is supposed to have lived. The evidence for Jesus is not limited to later folklore, as are accounts of Arthur.*'

The historical information leaves us with little reasonable doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical figure. The more interesting question is, *who is Jesus?* It remains a pertinent question today, just as it has been since Jesus' life began. It is the question at the heart of the Gospel of Matthew: '*What kind of man is this?*' (Mt 8:27) The Gospel of Matthew is a book based on the facts and eyewitness accounts concerning Jesus, for example the genealogy (1:1-17), historical facts (2:22; 27:32-37) and personal details (4:18-22; 10:1-4; 27:57-61). Although the Gospel of Matthew is historically reliable, the purpose isn't to merely recount historical events.

The first readers of this Gospel aren't simply reading for historical information about Jesus but for what Jesus shows us about God. In other words, although Matthew's Gospel contains historically reliable information about Jesus, it's not Matthew's primary concern or focus. The primary purpose of the gospel is a message of good news concerning Jesus. The purpose of Matthew's Gospel, this ancient biography, is to help the readers know God and how he came in Jesus to meet the deep concerns and needs of people. The concern and need to know who Jesus really is, how belonging to him impacts their identity and how they understand the world. Ancient biographies were expected to portray the hero's life in a way that shaped the reader's identity and lifestyle. We are intended to read the Gospel of Matthew no differently.

It's been said that 'the way forward is sometimes the way backwards.' This is key in beginning to understand who Jesus is. The Gospel of Matthew begins by introducing Jesus through his lineage, tying Jesus' identity to stories of King David and Abraham (1:1). As Matthew's Gospel unfolds Jesus will be shown to be the Messiah that God promised would come through the Old Testament, through stories like King David and Abraham. A man with such an identity is a clear sign that God is going to finally save his people from their sins (1:21-23).

As the Gospel of Matthew continues to unfold, there's more to this man Jesus.

Jesus speaks as though He is God (5:21-22).

Jesus heals as though He is God (8:1-4).

Jesus is addressed by spiritual powers as though He is God (8:29).

Jesus forgives sin as though He is God (9:1-8).

Jesus controls nature as though He is God (8:23-27).

Jesus shows compassion as though He is God (11:25-30).

Jesus' life and teaching show us that the kingdom of God is near -- that God himself is near. Everything that Jesus does is revealing something about who he is, revealing that *he* is God with us.

Matthew's Gospel reaches its climax at the cross. Jesus' death on the cross shows His love in his willingness to stay on the cross so that people like the rebels hanging next to him, the centurions who nailed him there and those looking at a distance could find life and be saved from their sins. Jesus reveals the heart of God towards us; it's gentle but fierce, it's humble but glorious, it's compassionate but strong. But Jesus' resurrection is the resolution that confirms Jesus is who He said He is. The cross threatened to call into question everything Jesus said and did as he faded into the distance like a setting sun. Instead like a rising sun overcoming the darkness, Jesus overcame Death, Sin, and Satan.

As we follow the unfolding story of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, we are left to answer the question for ourselves, *who is Jesus?*

To explore more of the Gospel of Matthew scan the link:



GROWTH GUIDE 1 | THE GOD-MAN

PERSONAL GROWTH MATTHEW 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.



GROWTH GROUP | THE GOD-MAN

In this short clip from Talladega Nights, what do Ricky-Bobby, the family and his friend get right and wrong about who Jesus is?

Scan link to watch video:



Read Matthew 1:18-24

What insight do we get from verses 1:18-19 into who Jesus is?

What insight do we get from verses 1:20-21 into who Jesus is?

What insight do we get from verses 1:22-24 into who Jesus is?

There are many opinions or points of view concerning Jesus, but God wants these insights into Jesus to be the beginning of a controlling point of view about who Jesus is. If you had to sum up all these observations about Jesus into one sentence, what would you say?

What difference would it make if God's view of Jesus were missing from your view of Jesus?

Because we encounter God in Jesus, how do you think this would have shaped the identity and lifestyle of Jesus' people?

How do you think God wants these insights about Jesus to shape your identity and lifestyle?

Pray about the ways God can use these insights to shape your identity and lifestyle. Ask Him to strengthen you to do this.

PRAYER

How has God been at work in your life this week?

How are you going with God?

How are you going with others God has placed in your life?

Something God's put on your heart from the passage?

Who are the people you are on mission to?

What can we pray for them this week?

'The task of saving from sin forms one part of Jesus' divinely commissioned work (1:21). In 1:23, Matthew presents Jesus with a further role: he is to manifest God's presence among human beings.' - Warren Carter

'Christ shall be the author of salvation because he is the Eternal God.' - John Calvin

'God's point of view is that Jesus will manifest God's presence, God's saving presence, in a sinful world under.' - Warren Carter

GROWTH GUIDE 2 | THE HEALER

PERSONAL GROWTH MATTHEW 4:12-25

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. 21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. 23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. 25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.



GROWTH GROUP | THE HEALER

In this short clip from *The West Wing*, what does Jed Bartlet's prayer reveal about how his heart feels and the world he lives in?

Scan link to watch video:



Read Matthew 4:12-25

As Jesus begins his ministry in 4:12-17, what insight do we get into who Jesus is?

How might verses 18-22 be an example of verse 17?

What do Jesus' actions in verses 23-25 reveal about Jesus' characteristics or traits?

There are many opinions or points of view concerning Jesus, but God wants these insights into Jesus to be the beginning of a controlling point of view about who Jesus is. If you had to sum up all these observations about Jesus into one sentence, what would you say?

What difference would it make if God's view of Jesus were missing from your view of Jesus?

How do you think verses 12-25 would have shaped the identity and lifestyle of Jesus' people?

How do you think God wants these insights about Jesus to shape *your* identity and lifestyle?

Pray about the ways God can use these insights to shape your identity and lifestyle. Ask Him to strengthen you to do this.

PRAYER

How has God been at work in your life this week?

How are you going with God?

How are you going with others God has placed in your life?

Something God's put on your heart from the passage?

Who are the people you are on mission to?

What can we pray for them this week?

'When Christ miraculously healed them, he proved his divinity.' - John Calvin

A characters' repeated actions underline their personal traits.' - Warren Carter

GROWTH GUIDE 3 | THE AUTHOR

PERSONAL GROWTH MATTHEW 8:23-9:8

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" 28 When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 29 "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" 30 Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31 The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." 32 He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. 33 Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. 34 Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.



GROWTH GROUP | THE AUTHOR

In this short clip from Jurassic World, what happens when the creator loses control of their creation?

Scan link to watch video:



Read Matthew 8:23-9:8

What insight do we get from verses 8:23-27 into who Jesus is?

What insight do we get from verses 8:28-24 into who Jesus is?

What insight do we get from verses 9:1-8 into who Jesus is?

There are many opinions or points of view concerning Jesus, but God wants these insights into Jesus to be the beginning of a controlling point of view about who Jesus is. If you had to sum up all these observations about Jesus into one sentence, what would you say?

What difference would it make if God's view of Jesus were missing from your view of Jesus?

Because Jesus has authority over the physical and spiritual realities, how do you think this would have shaped the identity and lifestyle of Jesus' people?

How do you think God wants this to shape your identity and lifestyle?

Pray about the ways God can use these insights to shape your identity and lifestyle. Ask Him to strengthen you to do this.

PRAYER

How has God been at work in your life this week?

How are you going with God?

How are you going with others God has placed in your life?

Something God's put on your heart from the passage?

Who are the people you are on mission to?

What can we pray for them this week?

GROWTH GUIDE 4 | GENTLE IN HEART

PERSONAL GROWTH MATTHEW 11:25-30

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. 27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

GROWTH GROUP | GENTLE IN HEART

In this clip from Avengers, what is surprising about the superhero Ironman?

Scan link to watch video:



Read Matthew 11:25-30

What insights do we get into who Jesus is from 11:25-27?

What does God reveal about himself in verse 28-30?

This is the only place in the Bible where Jesus himself tells us what his heart is like. What is significant about this?

What is God's heart like towards those who come to him?

What difference would it make if God's view of Jesus were missing from your view of Jesus?

Because this is God's heart towards those who come to him, how do you think this would have shaped the identity and lifestyle of Jesus' people?

How do you think God wants this to shape *your* identity and lifestyle?

Pray about the ways God can use these insights to shape your identity and lifestyle. Ask Him to strengthen you to do this.

PRAYER

How has God been at work in your life this week?

How are you going with God?

How are you going with others God has placed in your life?

Something God's put on your heart from the passage?

Who are the people you are on mission to?

What can we pray for them this week?

'This love is not a forced love, but it is his nature, his disposition, this disposition is free and natural to him; he should not be God's son else, nor take after his Heavenly Father, unto whom it is natural to shew mercy, but no so to punish, which is his strange work, but mercy pleaseth him: he is 'the Father of mercies,' he begets them naturally.' - Thomas Goodwin

'We are apt to think that he, being so holy, is therefore a severe and sour disposition against sinners, and not able to bear them. No, he says; 'I am meek,' gentleness is my nature and temper...it is my nature to forgive: 'I am meek... I am lowly,' willing to bestow my love and favour upon the poorest and meanest.' - Thomas Goodwin

'In heart;' it is his temper, his disposition, his nature to be gracious, which nature he can never lay aside.' - Thomas Goodwin

GROWTH GUIDE 5 | THE SAVIOUR

PERSONAL GROWTH MATTHEW 27:32-55

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). 47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” 48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.” 50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”



GROWTH GROUP | THE SAVIOUR

In this short clip from *The Lord of the Rings*, what does this unlikely hero begin to realise?

Scan link to watch video:



Read Matthew 27:32-55

What insight do we get from 27:32-37 into who Jesus is?

What insight do we get from 27:38-44 into who Jesus is?

What insight do we get from 27:45-54 into who Jesus is?

There are many opinions or points of view concerning Jesus, but God wants these insights into Jesus to be the beginning of a controlling point of view about who Jesus is. If you had to sum up all these observations about Jesus into one sentence, what would you say?

What difference would it make if God's view of Jesus were missing from your view of Jesus?

How do you think this would have shaped the identity and lifestyle of Jesus' people?

How do you think God wants this to shape *your* identity and lifestyle?

Pray about the ways God can use these insights to shape your identity and lifestyle. Ask Him to strengthen you to do this.

PRAYER

How has God been at work in your life this week?

How are you going with God?

How are you going with others God has placed in your life?

Something God's put on your heart from the passage?

Who are the people you are on mission to?

What can we pray for them this week?

GROWTH GROUP | THE CONQUEROR

What do we see happen in this short clip from *The Matrix*?

Scan link to watch video:



Read Matthew 28:1-20

What insight do we get from 28:1-10 into who Jesus is?

What different responses to Jesus' resurrection do we see in 28:11-15?

How does 28:16-20 add to God's point of view about who Jesus is?

What difference would it make if God's view of Jesus were missing from your view of Jesus?

How would 28:16-20 have shaped the identity and lifestyle of Jesus' people?

How do you think God wants 28:16-20 to shape *your* identity and lifestyle?

Pray about how you think God is wanting to use these insights into Jesus to shape your identity and life at the moment. Use this moment talking with God to ask Him to strengthen you to do this.

PRAYER

How has God been at work in your life this week?

How are you going with God?

How are you going with others God has placed in your life?

Something God's put on your heart from the passage?

Who are the people you are on mission to?

What can we pray for them this week?

APPENDIX



PERSONAL GROWTH PLAN

One way you can get the most out of this Growth Guide is to prayerfully consider what it looks like for you to prioritise Christlike growth in your life. You can do this by working through this personal growth plan.

Consider each of the following points when completing the table below:

1. Write down all of the goals that you want to achieve in a particular area of life God has brought to your attention. Use the table on the following page to list growth areas you'd like to focus on with God.
2. You may want to write down both long and short-term goals. Ask yourself what it is you want to achieve in your life, as well as what you want to do in the next 3 years, 6 months, or a few weeks.
3. Be sure to include goals relating to those things that give you the most enjoyment, fun and satisfaction. You will want to make time for these in your busy life.

AREA FOR GOAL-SETTING	NEXT STEP 1	NEXT STEP 2	REVIEW DATE
Eg. My Spouse to feel the love of Christ through me (Ephesians 5:1, 22-33)	Eg. Study my Spouse - Listen/notice/write down evidences of God's grace.	Eg. Adjust my behaviour, build into my week moments of noticing these evidences of God's grace and affirming them.	Eg. Last Growth Group night of Term 4.
In what way will these goals help you achieve your personal goal of becoming more like Christ?			

GROWTH GROUP LIFE CYCLE

1 FORMING: “WE’RE EXCITED!”

At this stage, members are trying to understand each other and how they can best relate together in the future. A team must go through the Forming Stage.

2 STORMING: “WE’RE NOT SURE WE LIKE THIS.”

At this stage, teams are trying to understand the teams expected outcomes and the roles that each member will play in achieving them. A team must go through the Storming Stage.

3 NORMING: “NOW WE’RE GETTING SOMEWHERE.”

Members work out the basic operational ground rules within the group (team values). A team must go through the Norming Stage.

4 PERFORMING: “WE’RE SMASHING IT.”

Relationships are stabilised and problem solving is effective. The team is cohesive and capable of achieving purpose.

5 MULTIPLYING: “WHAT’S NEXT?”

Teams see performance has waned or circumstances have shifted and seek to redirect energy. At this stage, a group can take a number of options: Plant a new group, reform the group by members moving on and new members coming onboard, or the group can simply cease.

GROWTH GROUP “WHAT IFS?”

What is the pathway for those who aren't yet Christians who attend Southside?

Putting someone who's not yet a Christian into a group where they are expected to engage as though they are Christians is unloving. Nor would it be loving for those Christians at Growth Group expecting to connect in a way that is going to deepen and grow their relationship with God and one another. Not letting someone who wants to find out more about Jesus into a Growth Group seems at best picky and at worst unloving and unchristian. But at Southside we want to love those who are not yet a Christian by walking with them along that journey.

The **first step** in joining this journey is to encourage them to regularly attend our Sunday services, get a Bible and start reading the Gospels.

The **second step** is coming along to the Newcomers Morning Tea after a Sunday Service, here we as a church will be able to introduce ourselves to them and for us to get to know them a little more.

The **third step** is them joining our 6 week Life Course & After Life. The Life Course is where we get to sit with them over 6 weeks and discover for the first time or re-discover what the message of Christianity is all about. The After Life Course is where we sit down and read the bible with anyone who is interested in taking a next step.

The **fourth step** is harder to know depending on how the first three steps go.

What if you or someone asks me to join my growth group?

At Southside we encourage every-member who claims to be a follower of Christ to belong to a Growth Group. However, we don't want to be unwise in how we move people into Growth Groups. It seems simple, "I know this person and they're not in a Growth Group, I'll invite them to mine." The thought can be as simple and as good as that. But there's more to it than that. Growth Groups flourish due to a number of factors: relationship, committed to growing in Christlikeness, trust, and size (to name only a few). Often these kinds of questions aren't running through our minds when we're thinking of inviting someone into our Group.

Plus, at Southside, we have what we call a 'process' or steps that we want everyone to take as they join us at Southside. For someone new to get to know us as a church and for us to get to know them we have four steps we like people to take before joining a Growth Group:

1. Regularly attend Church on Sunday
2. Complete Newcomers Course
3. Complete Life Course
4. If coming from another Church, they've left well and communicated that they want to make Southside their home church. We need to recognize the importance of this step. At this point, they are committing to Southside's Mission and Vision and we as a church are committing to care for them.

Joining a Growth Group is a formal or tangible recognition of this commitment.

The other factor we need to keep in mind is the impact a new member will have on a group. Simply inviting someone along without even discussing this with your Growth Group Leader or members (often we do ask, but it's after the fact), this is simply unloving.

Of course, we want to see as many people in Growth Groups. But we don't want to be in such a hurry that we sacrifice the health and growth of the current group members.

For these reasons, we 'centralise' Growth Group recruitment. What this means is that anyone joining a Growth Group needs to be discussed (before approaching the individual) with the Maturity Pastor (Ryan). This conversation is the first step that needs to be made when someone asks you to join your group or you want to invite someone into your group.

So, what if someone asks me to join my growth group? Have a conversation with the Maturity Pastor to figure out what the next step might be for this particular person.

What if I want to stop or change growth groups?

There might come a time when it's necessary for you to stop attending Growth Group or to change Groups. We recognize this is a reality in the life of church. Because we value belonging to a Growth Group, we believe that these transitions out of Growth Groups or into a new group, are significant events. Yet, few of us do this well. Often conversations don't happen, assumptions are made and feelings are hurt. Ultimately, church unity is lacking and Christ and His body are dishonored.

Here are five steps to take in order to help you walk through these transitions well, for your sake, for the sake of others and for the sake of Christ:

1. **Have a good reason for leaving.** Before you go, evaluate whether your reasons are good, legitimate and honouring to God. The reasons that people leave churches are many. Some are good, some are bad, and many are hard to discern. Check your pride in the decision. Ask yourself whether you are running from conflict or reacting to unrealistic expectations. If your reasons are good, go. If not, stay. If you are unsure, it would be wise to seek good counsel from godly friends or church leaders who can help you think through the process.
2. **Communicate your decision** to leave with the Growth Group Leader and Maturity Pastor. Personal communication is preferable to written communication, but make sure you communicate.
3. **Tell your leader the truth** about why you're leaving. If you have legitimate reasons to leave, then you have nothing to hide or worry about. If the reasons for leaving will sting your leader, deliver it in the spirit of Proverbs 27:6, "*Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.*" Scripture commands us to "*speak the truth in love*" (Eph. 4:15), which means you shouldn't couch the real, sometimes difficult reasons behind a bunch of spiritualised nonsense. God may use your reasons for leaving to help the group, church and leaders. You might want to ask for an "Exit Interview", this can be immensely helpful to leadership, who are accountable to receive truth with humility. Whatever you do, don't just leave without telling your leaders.
4. **Appropriately transition** or conclude your group commitment. You might want to consider giving your leader some notice, an appropriate time frame of your departure. Although this period shouldn't drag on, but you also should not just drop the ball on the people you've been committed to.
5. **Leave graciously.** What this means is, when leaving, you refuse to speak ill of those who remain in the group. Look forward, not backward. So, think carefully before you speak about your former group leader and members. Don't say anything that could be remotely construed as criticism. Be aware that casual comments could stir up needless controversy.

If you've read this material and realize that you didn't leave a Growth Group well in the past, it might be wise to circle back to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. If you have gossiped or stirred up division, you should make it right, apologising not only to the leaders of that church but also to the people to whom you gossiped.

In the end, remember that Jesus loves the group you're leaving and the one you're going to — his blood was shed for both. Honour that by leaving well.

What if I don't like something about my group?

There are a couple things worth mentioning in counselling you through this situation.

First, is the issue simply your personal preference, personal like or dislike, were you simply not getting your way? Or is the issue as a result of misunderstanding or a sinful attitude that has led to sinful words and actions? The point is, be clear on what the issue is.

Second, I'd like to point you to the above answer and point 3 in the previous section (What if I want to stop or change growth groups?)

However, to help us think through this, Ken Sande in his book 'Resolving Everyday Conflict' gives us a helpful 4 step process to think through as we seek healthy relationships in conflict.

STEP ONE | BRING GLORY TO GOD

Who are you really wanting to please and honour in this situation, Christ or yourself? How can you please and honour Christ in this situation? Can you let it go? Remember, conflict always provides an opportunity to glorify God, opportunities to trust, obey and imitate God.

STEP TWO | GET THE LOG OUT

How can you own your part in the conflict? If we have dealt with our contribution to a conflict, then we can legitimately approach others about theirs. If you're only 2% responsible, your 100% responsible for that 2%. Owning and confessing our part to the person is the way we fully own our part. A good confession: (1) Addresses everyone involved, (2) avoids words like; If, but, perhaps, possibly, I guess, and maybe, (3) Admits specifically, (4) Acknowledges the hurt, (5) Accepts the consequences, (6) Alters your behaviour, (7) Asks for forgiveness (give time).

STEP THREE | RESTORE GENTLY

If someone has something against you, God wants you to take the first step in seeking peace. We need to take initiative and move towards others when conflict damages relationships, hurts others, hurts the offender, or significantly dishonours God. Recognise that when trying to show someone their fault, there are limits to what you can accomplish.

STEP FOUR | GO AND BE RECONCILED

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world. Therefore, we should be the most forgiving people in the world. We need to recognise a few things about what forgiveness is: it's a radical decision not to hold an offence against the offender, it's absorbing the cost, releasing the offender of their deserved payment. Remember Christ has already absorbed ours for us and forgiveness is an unconditional commitment you make to God. We must also appreciate the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation – forgiveness rests on you but reconciliation is both your willingness and the offender's repentance.

ARTICLES

WANT TO BE LIKE JESUS? BE GENTLE.

GOSPEL COALITION | DANE ORTLUND

Jonathan Edwards wrote that “a lamblike, dovelike spirit and temper” is “the true, and distinguishing disposition of the hearts of Christians.” And he has something to teach us.

Not many have identified gentleness as a major theme in Edwards’ writing (more common are titles such as Jonathan Edwards: The Fiery Puritan), and not many identify gentleness as a major need in the church right now. And yet gentleness is perhaps the most neglected virtue among Christians today.



IN CHRIST I’M NOT A SINNER

GOSPEL COALITION | DANE ORTLUND

There is an entire psychological substructure that, due to the Fall, is a near-constant emission of relational leveraging, fear-stuffing, nervousness, score-keeping, neurotic controlling, anxiety-festering silliness that is not something I say or even think so much as something I breathe. You can smell this on people, though some of us are good at hiding it. And I’m seeing more and more, bit by bit, that if you trace this fountain of scurrying haste, in all its various manifestations, down to the root, you don’t find childhood difficulties or a Myers-Briggs diagnosis or Freudian impulses.

You find gospel deficit. All the worry and dysfunction and resentment is the natural fruit of living in a mental universe of Law. The gospel really is what brings rest, wholeness, flourishing, shalom—that existential calm that for brief, gospel-sane moments settles over you and lets you see for a moment that in Christ you truly are invincible. The verdict really is in; nothing can touch you.



THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE GOSPEL

GOSPEL COALITION | DANE ORTLUND

The gospel of grace frees us judicially: despite being guilty in ourselves, we are, at the same time, acquitted through the work of another. The gospel of grace frees us relationally: accepted in Christ, the craving for acceptance from others is emptied. The gospel frees us psychologically: at peace with God and self, the frenetic quest for a self-generated internal stability is emptied, so that we can say with Paul, “I do not even judge myself” (1 Cor. 4:3). The gospel frees us morally: no longer a slave to sin but now a slave to Christ, united to him and indwelt by his Spirit, we are vitally empowered for true virtue.

The gospel also frees us geographically: no longer needing to be in a certain place, known by certain people, on the social mountaintop, we are free to be anonymous, unknown, in the valley. Grace renders a verdict of acquittal not only over our identity but also over our location. A deep rest, a settled “okayness,” lands not only on who we are but also on where we are.



LEADERS NOTES

LEADERS NOTES 1 | GOD-MAN

Passage: Matthew 1:18-24

Big Question: Who is Jesus?

Big Idea: God has entered the world in Jesus as the Saviour and king.

Matthew is introducing us to Jesus who is very clearly not an ordinary man. This is God with us, the Saviour of the world, the promised Messiah who will save his people from their sins.

1:18-19 - The miraculous beginning

1:20-21 - The Saviour

1:22-24 - God with us

LEADERS NOTES 2 | THE HEALER

Passage: Matthew 4:12-25

Big Question: How do we know Jesus is legit?

Big Idea: Jesus has begun his ministry and is healing people and preaching the good news of the kingdom.

Jesus' ministry will be marked by teaching backed up by the miraculous. Jesus has come to bring a message of healing. His miracles are proof and point to the deeper healing Jesus speaks about.

4:12-17 - The beginning of Jesus' ministry

4:18-22 - The call of the disciples

4:23-25 - The healer and the healing message.

LEADERS NOTES 3 | THE AUTHOR

Passage: Matthew 8:23-9:8

Big Question: What difference can Jesus even make?

Big Idea: Jesus is the author of life with authority over all things, including the authority to forgive sins.

These are three stories that show Jesus' authority:

1) Authority over creation, 2) authority over the demonic and 3) authority on earth to forgive sins. Each of these stories build our picture of who Jesus is.

8:23-27 - The author over creation

8:28-29 - The author over the demonic

9:1-8 - The author of life who can forgive sins.

LEADERS NOTES 4 | GENTLE IN HEART

Passage: Matthew 11:25-30

Big Question: What is Jesus like?

Big Idea: Jesus is gentle, humble in heart, compassion and kind and He invites people to come to him (the revelation of God).

Jesus here reveals his heart toward those who come to him (those who are and are not yet His people). Those who see Jesus will be those who come to him, and those who come to him will experience gentleness, compassion, kindness, rest.

11:25-27 - The revelation of God

11:28 - The call to come to Jesus.

11:29 - Jesus' is gentle and humble in heart

11:30 - The life Jesus' gives compassionately

LEADERS NOTES 5 | THE SAVIOUR

Passage: Matthew 27:32-55

Big Question: What does Jesus' death mean?

Big Idea: Jesus died on the cross in the great exchange - He who could have taken himself down, stayed up there, so that those who should be up there can stay free.

This account invites us to ask the question ourselves, who do you say this is? There is a great exchange on offer but you have to believe Jesus is the person and location where this exchange is found.

27:32-37 - The death of the King

27:38-44 - the death of the rebel

27:45-54 - The great exchange: Jesus dies forsaken so the guilty could go free

27:55 - Who do you say he is?

LEADERS NOTES 6 | THE CONQUEROR

Passage: Matthew 28:1-20

Big Question: Who will you listen to?

Big Idea: Jesus is alive. His call is to follow him and tell the world.

God raised Jesus from the dead, yet human inclination is to try and hide what God has just done. But Jesus then calls his disciples to go and make disciples.

28:1-10 - Jesus is alive

28:11-15 - Trying to hide the account.

28:16-20 - The call of Jesus - go.

EXTRA NOTES



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