

FOR HIS GLORY:

JESUS

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INTRODUCTION

“Who is Jesus?”

We know what it’s like to give your life to Jesus and then not know what to do next. We suggest telling those you are closest to, those who also know Jesus, and anyone else who can join you in celebrating this significant moment in your life. But what about tomorrow? And the next day? While giving your life to Jesus and receiving salvation is a moment, the commitment to Jesus is ongoing. It’s about acknowledging Him daily and trying to know Him more. This book is a way to know Jesus better. Whether you grew up hearing about Jesus or you had no idea who He was before today, this study is for you.

Before reading about His life, death, and resurrection, we want to give you a better idea of who He is by defining some key aspects of His identity:

Savior/Messiah: Derived from the Hebrew word for “anointed one” or “chosen one,” this name carries a specific meaning. The Messiah was the anticipated savior for God’s people, the nation of Israel (also known as the Hebrews or Jewish people). The Hebrew scriptures (our Old Testament) allude to and prophesy about a savior that would be a light to all the nations. Jesus is this Messiah who brought salvation to the world. The salvation He was bringing wasn’t the political salvation that the nation of Israel expected, it was salvation from sin and death, and it is for everyone.

The Son: According to scripture, God has three distinct persons: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is where we get Trinitarian Theology: “three persons, one God.” It’s a divine mystery that can be hard to wrap our minds around. What’s important to remember is that He is God, and we are not. We may have a hard time understanding how it works, but we can hold onto the fact that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity: The Son. This is why we say that Jesus is “fully God” because He is actually God.

The Word: The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus is “the Word” and that

existed with God before the world was made. This is another way that we get our understanding of the Trinity. John says in John 1:1: “The Word was with God” and existed with God before the world was made. This is another way that we get our understanding of Trinity. John also says, “The Word was with God and the Word was God” in reference to Jesus. We understand from the creation account that God spoke the world into existence. So while Jesus was born into human existence, He already existed as a part of the Godhead and was a part of the creation of everything that now exists.

These are the parts of Jesus’s identity that we hold onto when we give our lives to Him. He is the reason we exist, the reason we worship, and the reason we live and look forward to an eternity with God. As we learn more about Jesus and His journey to the cross, we will see these roles intertwining and playing out in the story of God’s plan to bring salvation to the world. This is Jesus.

THE GOSPELS EXPLAINED

The Christian Bible is broken up into two sections: the Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament is the original Hebrew Bible, the sacred scriptures of Judaism with books inside containing history and law, poetry, and prophecies from the beginning of time leading up to the coming of Jesus. The New Testament is a collection of accounts and letters that occurred *after* Jesus arrived on earth and the Christian faith was born. The complete Bible connects the Israelites (God’s chosen people) to the Messiah—Jesus Christ—and it is this Jesus that brings salvation to the world. This message of salvation through Jesus is called “The Gospel.”

Whether you’ve been in a church before or not, you’ve likely heard the word, “gospel” without really knowing what it means or where it comes from. The word “gospel” is an Old English term derived from the Greek term “evangelion.” They both mean “good news” and generally pertain to the good news of Jesus Christ.

When we say “the Gospels,” we refer to the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four books show us who Jesus is and what He did to save us. Each book was written and named after a particular author. While we believe that humans wrote these accounts down, we also believe that God inspired their writing through His Holy Spirit.

Matthew, also referred to as “Levi,” was one of Jesus’s twelve disciples. He was a tax collector who dropped his well-paying job to follow Jesus. His book was written in Greek and his many references to the Old Testament suggest that he was writing to a largely Jewish audience. This book is a bridge between the Old and New Testament emphasizing Jesus’s role as the fulfillment of God’s promises and the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament.

Mark was also one of Jesus’s twelve disciples. His account is the shortest and is mainly concerned with action and what Jesus did. Mark’s book was likely

created to be memorized and retold for spreading the Gospel message. This is the best book to read in its entirety to get a general overview of what Jesus did while He was on earth.

Luke was a doctor and the most detailed and orderly in His writing. He was not one of the twelve disciples, but instead, a sort of biographer of Jesus. Luke took eyewitness accounts from those who had been with Jesus and compiled them together to make his book. He wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts as a two-part story of Jesus and His followers before and after Jesus's defeat of death. Luke's gospel displays Jesus's role as a savior to all.

John was another one of the twelve disciples, but his writing is unique from the others. John is highly focused on the divinity and preeminence (greatness) of Christ. For John, Jesus's story begins at the creation of the world. John displays many of Jesus's miracles and communicates the great love of God through His only Son, Jesus. For the purposes of this devotional, we haven't used any passages from the book of John, but we would highly suggest reading it from beginning to end as a next step after this study.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

You can treat this study like a crash course and do it in one day or in twelve. You can take each chapter a week at a time or just whenever you get around to it. This is a way to get started in knowing Jesus better. We want you to see who He was and is, and for you to see Him walk, eat, pray, celebrate, mourn, and live on earth. You will learn how Jesus helps us understand who God is.

Prayer: We suggest praying before you begin. It doesn't have to be complicated, just something as simple as, "Lord, open my heart to receive your Word." We can miss what God wants to tell us when we don't recognize where our heart is at and remove distractions. God wants your attention, so create space for Him in the moment. Set your distractions aside, take a breath, and acknowledge God's presence before you begin reading.

Study: There is a short write-up for every reading; we suggest reading the short passages of scripture first and then reading the write-up. Then, if you have time, go back and read the passages again. We are often able to see new things in scripture both before and after we have more context. The blank pages are included for you to write whatever you want: notes and prayers to God, questions to ask your pastor later, or words and phrases that stick out to you while you're reading.

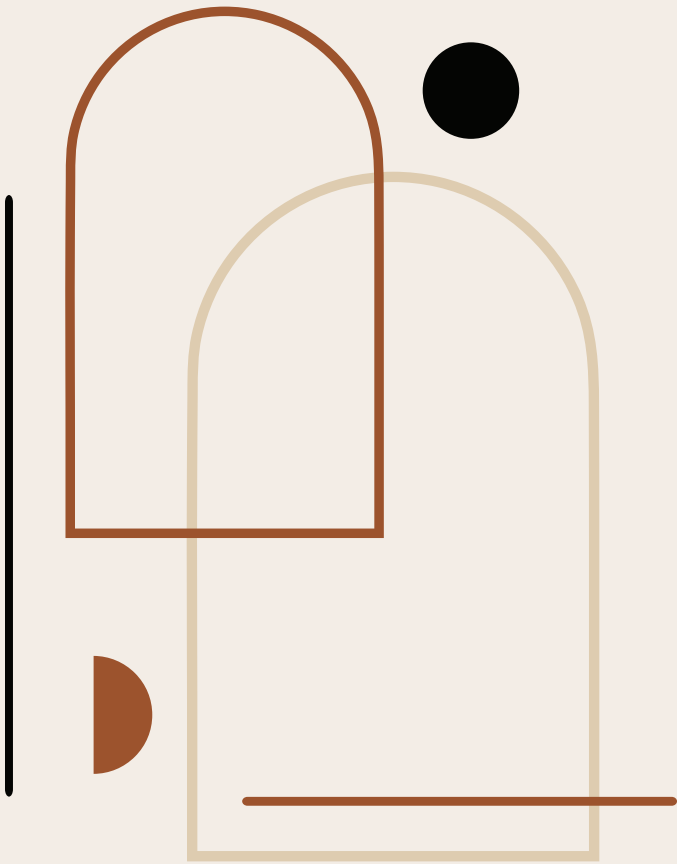
Response: We've provided some kind of practical application at the end of each reading. Some are more concrete than others like baptism or fasting, while others will call you into a time of reflection (these blank pages can be useful for those moments). You may have other things you are inspired to do based on what the passages speak to you. Let that inspiration come, and write down what God is asking you to do. We believe that your unique journey will lead you to unique responses.

A couple more things: It's impossible to have a true encounter with Jesus and not feel moved to action or change. There may even be times when your

reading produces feelings of sadness or anger. Don't be afraid to wrestle with the text and what you're feeling. Remember, Jesus came to set us free. He did not come to cause us guilt or shame. You may experience conviction which can feel like guilt, but there's a difference. Conviction will lead you to repentance, forgiveness, and the desire to right the wrongs, whereas guilt will cause you to run and hide in shame. Conviction is how God helps us grow and transform. Guilt is the voice of the enemy. If you experience any of these feelings and cannot wrestle alone, reach out to your pastor or church leader. That's why they are there.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that we all come with some preconceived ideas about who we think Jesus is. Many of us have at least heard of Jesus, and we may even have negative experiences associated with Him or His people. Past experiences can color our idea of who Jesus is, but as we will see, Jesus is not the same as His followers. Let the text tell you who Jesus is first. You may even see some of your past experiences in a new light because of it. Knowing Jesus has that effect on us.

The
INCAR-
NATION



01 / THE INCARNATION

Matthew 1:18-25, Colossians 1:15-19

It seems strange that a divine being would want to enter into humanity. God created time, but he is not restrained to it. He created the physical world, but he is not confined by it. God can and does operate within His creation, but He also exists outside of it. The Bible has plenty of instances wherein God moves, speaks, and reveals himself on earth, but there is no instance so meaningful as Jesus. Because God willingly chooses when he works within our world, Jesus's entrance into humanity is all the more amazing. Scripture says that Jesus was the very Word that God spoke in order to create the world. He was outside of time and space just like God, and then God sent Him into time and space—to a small town in Israel, to be born of a virgin, and to become human.

Why do this? If God can do anything he wants, however he wants, why confine His Word into a human body to live on earth? The short answer is because God created us to live in relationship with Him, but because of sin, we were separated from God, and only God could fix that. Jesus is the restorer of that separation. Jesus is how God met us when we couldn't reach Him. This is where we get the idea of "The Incarnation:" God in human form. In this way, Jesus was fully God and fully man. This is a big concept and can be hard to wrap our minds around. This is the challenge of understanding and receiving Jesus as your savior. He is not so divine that we cannot reach Him, and he is not merely human that he can't supernaturally restore our souls back to God.

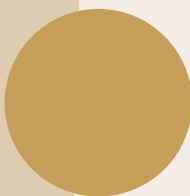
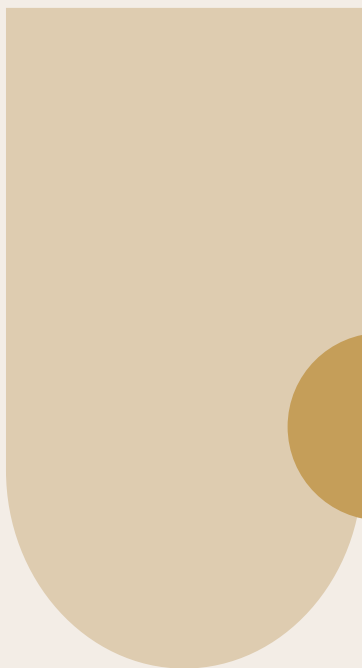
He is both, and so He did both.

Jesus brings God to us and brings us back to God. We will see this more as we explore His life. We chose this passage in Matthew because it gives us an idea of the practical and miraculous aspects of Jesus entering into human history. Practically speaking, he had a mother, he was physically born, and he even had an earthly father in Joseph whose perspective shows us that believing a virgin could conceive a child through the Holy Spirit takes a little bit of faith. We also see the miracles: how Mary was a virgin and yet conceived a son through the Holy Spirit, how an angel was sent to Joseph to help him understand what was going on, and how Jesus's birth had been prophesied hundreds of years ago.

The beauty of Jesus is that He is both/and. He is as practical and real as He is miraculous. He is fully God and fully man. He is the One who made us and the One for whom we were made. He is God with us.

Response: Meditate on the reality of who this Jesus really is. You've given your life to Him, now let Him reveal Himself more to you through the words of scripture. Read the passage in Colossians and then go back to the passage in Matthew and consider how important this moment was not just for Mary and Joseph, but for you.

BAPTISM



02 / BAPTISM

Matthew 3:13-17, Romans 6:3-5

After Jesus grew up and before He began to reveal who He actually was to the world, he gets baptized in water. John the Baptist, a prophet, had been baptizing others as a way of preparing them for the coming Messiah (read Matthew 3:1-12 for more of John's story). Participation in water baptism was the way that people acknowledged their repentance; it was how they were cleansed of their sins and made right with God.

So, why would Jesus, a man who lived a sinless life, ask to be baptized? He has nothing to repent of. He's the one who is saving those who have sinned. Even John is confused by Jesus's request. Jesus doesn't just avoid sin, He lived out the perfect life that we cannot. His walk is our example. He is showing us what it looks like to live out a life surrendered to God completely, and baptism is part of that walk.

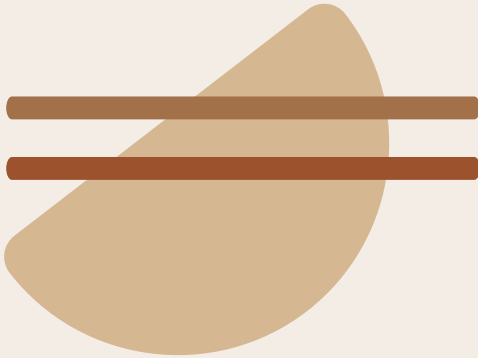
We see what repentance from sin looks like through baptism. We were dead in our sin, but because Jesus's sacrifice paid the penalty of our sin, we are resurrected through Him. In being baptized we identify ourselves with Jesus's death and resurrection (being "buried" underwater and rising again). When we get baptized, we are demonstrating externally what has happened in us

internally when we accepted Jesus. It's important to note that baptism is not what saves us from sin; Jesus did that on the cross. We are proclaiming Jesus's saving work in our lives.

Baptisms are often public because it's something worth celebrating, but it is just as powerful and meaningful in smaller settings. When you understand that Jesus is calling you to follow him, it is important that you listen *and* act. Later in the book of Matthew, Jesus tells His disciples to baptize others so that they may also walk out their repentance and their commitment to Jesus. It's something Jesus did first and then tells us to do for the purpose of living out our commitment to Him.

Response: If you find yourself doubting what water baptism is or if it's really important, bring that to God in prayer and read Matthew 3 again. Keep your focus on Jesus and who He is and how He lives. Scripture tells us all we need to know, and God desires that you would understand it. If you feel the need to be baptized, don't hesitate or wait until it's offered! Go to your pastor and ask how you can be baptized today!

The
TEMPTA-
TION



03 / THE TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:1-13, Hebrews 4:15, Philippians 2:6-8

Another key event before Jesus started His public ministry was His time in the wilderness where He was tempted. After Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended on Jesus from heaven, confirming who He was: The Son of God. That same Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where His humanity was challenged by temptation. Jesus was led to fast during that time. Fasting is a time of intensely focused prayer and quality time with God while abstaining from food. When hunger pangs tell us to eat, we are reminded to look to God for our every need.

It was at this time, when Jesus was focusing on God, that the devil tempted Jesus. The devil can also be called the “enemy,” as he is the enemy of God. The last thing the enemy would want is for anyone to be that focused on God, especially the Messiah—the One who would save humanity from their sin and bring them back to full relationship with God. Three different temptations are offered to Jesus in this account: 1. Food during His time of fasting 2. The chance to force God’s hand to save Himself 3. An instant earthly kingdom instead of the heavenly kingdom that God was and is bringing to earth.

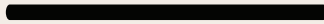
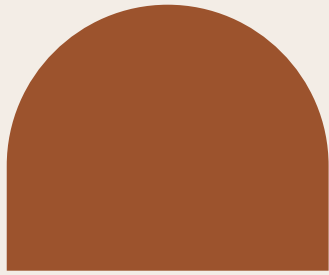
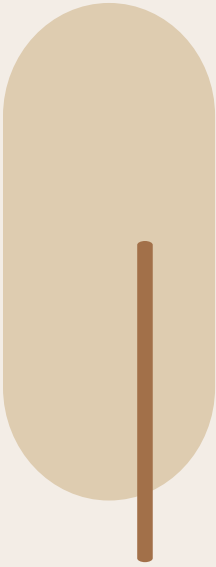
Any one of these things would have been difficult to say no to, especially under the circumstances. Being fully human, Jesus would have felt the intense pressure

to break and take what the enemy was offering Him. Still, He denied it each time while also responding to each temptation rooted in the truth of God's word. In His humanity, Jesus chose to rely on God's strength, not His own.

This moment is valuable because it shows us that while Christ was human, He lived a life of total obedience. Not once did He sin or "miss the mark." Jesus lived the perfect life which is what made Him the perfect sacrifice and worthy of our commitment. It also means that while we struggle in our own temptations, we can know that Jesus has felt the pressure to fulfill His own desires over God's. Jesus fully understands our personal battle to remain obedient to God's call on our lives. The life He led on earth is an example of how even the greatest temptations are no match for the power of those who rely fully on God.

Response: Attempt to fast and get alone with God. Try going without food for a meal or even a full day, and turn the meal-time into time spent with God. Don't be surprised when you are tempted to eat or to do something to distract yourself. Don't be too hard on yourself either. Fasting is a tough discipline; it's never fun to go without food. See how your hunger relates to your desire to be with God and remember Jesus's words in Matthew 4:5.

DISCIPLES



04 / DISCIPLES

Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11

Both passages in this section are from the same event. While you get to know Jesus, we want you to see how different accounts of the same story will emphasize different things about who He is and how others saw Him. The reality of Jesus's arrival on earth was that people didn't fully understand who He was until after His work on the cross. People in Jesus's time were expecting something totally different from who He actually was.

At the time of Jesus's arrival, the nation He was born into— Israel— was being ruled by the Roman empire. Their cities were occupied, they were paying taxes to a leader and government that had overpowered them, and they were waiting for someone to save them from their oppression. For the Israelites, their savior or “messiah” was expected to lead a revolution to free Israel from Rome's control. Remember, while we read the gospels, we know that Jesus was and is The Messiah; however, most people that encountered Jesus didn't know that upon seeing him. Some would realize it as they interacted with Him, but even then, most were expecting someone powerful (according to human standards) to fight the powers of Rome, not “passively” die on a cross.

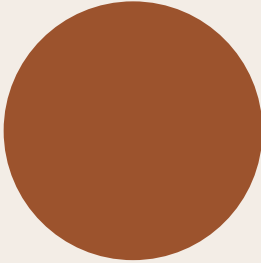
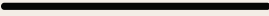
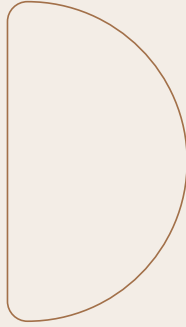
For the first 30 years of His life, Jesus lived in relative anonymity. He was the son of a carpenter and was training as a rabbi. Rabbis were trained scholars and teachers who were often followed by “disciples.” These people would

walk through life with a rabbi to learn, grow, and model their lives after this person who lived a life devoted to the scriptures. Disciples are “followers” in every sense of the word. This story in Mark and Luke is the beginning of Jesus calling certain men to follow Him and to learn from Him. We know them today as the “twelve disciples.” These men would eventually be the ones to tell Jesus’s message after He finished His work on the cross.

This role of disciple is not reserved solely for these twelve men. We are all called to be disciples—to follow Jesus closely. It’s one thing to know Jesus. Plenty of people did that in the Bible, but only a few took the extra step to follow Jesus and model their lives by Him. It’s no different today; we can receive salvation and the work of the cross, but it’s another thing to give our lives to Jesus in a way that affects how we live daily. This is the call of a disciple—this is how believers of Jesus begin to look and act like Jesus.

Response: By studying Jesus, you are already living as a disciple. What will make this study and your walk richer is if you do it with others. Identify other disciples of Jesus in your life and reach out to them, invite them to coffee, or call them on the phone. Surround yourself with disciples as you continue to learn how to follow Jesus together. You will learn more, grow faster, and enrich the lives of others trying to follow Jesus too.

HEALING
and
MIRACLES



05 / HEALING & MIRACLES

Mark 2:1-12

Jesus wasn't just a rabbi. He didn't just teach well and speak with authority—He also healed people: the blind, the lame, and the dying. Jesus's healings brought Him a lot of attention. People would follow Him for days and even chase after Him. In one story, a woman simply touches His coat and is healed of her disease. Something about Jesus was clearly different from other teachers and leaders.

Jesus's miracles were not just reserved to healing. He calmed storms and multiplied food, He even turned water into wine at a wedding. All of these events were ways in which Jesus was bringing glory to God the Father and showing people just what God's Kingdom was about—restoring humanity back to Himself. No wonder people wanted to know Jesus and be around Him! He was a walking example of the power of God on earth.

What made Jesus even more intriguing to his contemporaries was that He also was forgiving people of their sins. Teaching was well within the job description of a rabbi and no one was complaining about the healings, but only God could forgive sins. Having sin atoned for was a process completed by the sinner and facilitated by a Jewish priest. So when Jesus started telling people that their sins were forgiven without them having made an animal sacrifice or completing a ritual purification, it upset some people and set others free.

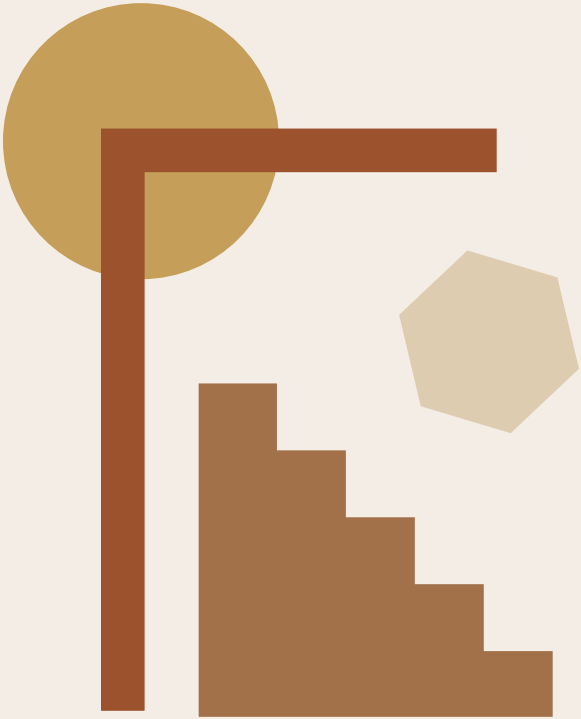
Jesus's miracles showed that His power was not just in healing physical ailments.

Jesus was healing souls by forgiving sins, and in doing so He was also claiming to be on par with God. While we know that Jesus is “God with us,” a crowd of devout, God-fearing Jews who were waiting for a savior were either amazed or deeply troubled. Either Jesus was the Son of God and could forgive sins, or He was a crazy man pretending to be God while supernaturally healing people and convincing them that their sins were forgiven. He dismantled religious Judaism as they knew it. Perhaps you can see why some people might have had a problem with Jesus.

Jesus was not just the ultimate teacher. In forgiving the sins of humanity, He demonstrates how He is the ultimate priest. He was healing the sick and bringing freedom to people who were held captive by their sins. Jesus was and is the miracle for our souls. His forgiveness is the ultimate healing, and as we continue forward, we will see just how that forgiveness was completed upon the cross.

Response: Gratitude to Jesus is inevitable when we talk about the forgiveness of our sins. Take some time to worship, sing, write, create, or do whatever helps you express your gratitude for Jesus. It’s also possible to read the Mark passage and remember your own need for healing. Ask away! Miraculous healing still happens today. Ask Jesus for healing in your body, mind, relationships, etc. And don’t hesitate to ask other believers to pray with and for you when you get the chance.

PARABLES



06 / PARABLES

Mark 4:21-34

Not everyone understood Jesus when He spoke. People are inclined to hear what they want and this was no different when Jesus was around. When Jesus talked to crowds about a topic, it was usually met with some who believed, some who didn't, and others who didn't fully understand. When Jesus did teach, He often spoke using "parables." These stories taught moral, philosophical, or spiritual subjects through analogy.

People were familiar with this way of teaching in Jesus's time, but there was one distinction between what Jesus was teaching and what other rabbis would have taught. Jesus, having been with the Father before He came to earth, had an understanding of the Kingdom of God that other teachers didn't. His intimate relationship with God allowed Him to know more than any person could, and He attempted to relay that to others. The thing was, not everyone was listening for the truth.

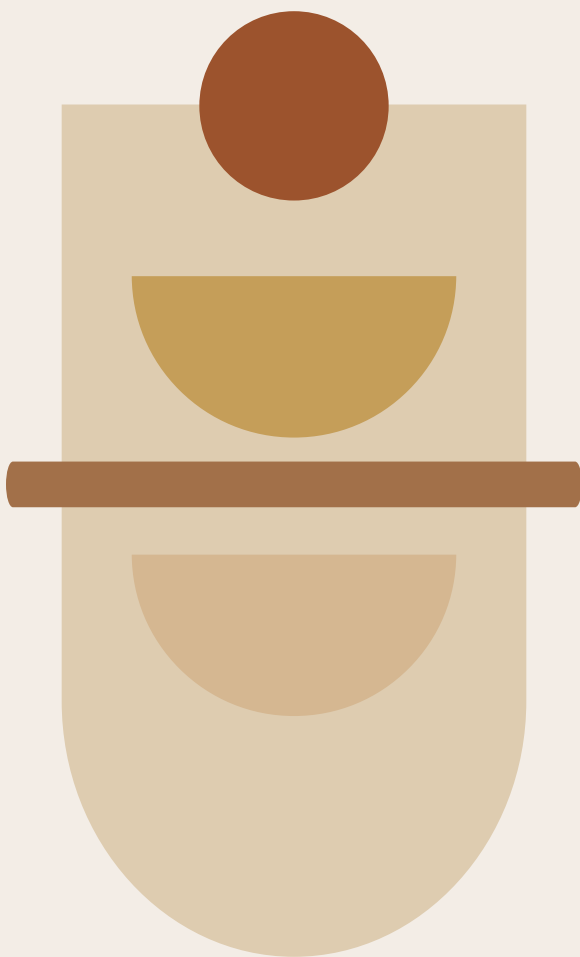
Some people like the Pharisees, who were religious and well-read, were looking to find fault in what Jesus was teaching. Other people just didn't understand the lofty concepts Jesus was teaching. In part, what Jesus taught is so mysterious that even we today can't fully understand all of His meaning. What's important about these parables is to listen to Jesus's words and go back to them from time to time.

Jesus's parables were about so much more than teaching people how to behave or about a concept they hadn't heard before. He was trying to teach them how to look for and anticipate the arrival of God's Kingdom on earth. The arrival of God's Kingdom was spoken about in the Old Testament from the moment sin entered the world through songs, poetry, and prophecy. The Messiah was meant to be a testament to the fulfillment of the promise that God was coming back to save His people and bring a new kingdom. God was going to take back His creation, and Jesus was the sign that this Kingdom had arrived.

In the church today, we speak of God's Kingdom as being "present and not yet." God's Kingdom is "present" because Jesus has already come to us, and won the ultimate victory over sin and death. However, it is also "not yet" because we are now experiencing the process of God bringing His *full* Kingdom to earth. What we know is that we are in the days of continuing to see the mystery of God's Kingdom play out.

Response: The truths of these three parables can be exciting, and they can even be confusing. We get to anticipate God revealing His Kingdom to us as we live our everyday lives. While you read these parables, identify the truth Jesus is teaching about God's Kingdom. Ask God how He is asking you to walk in that truth today.

The
LORD'S
PRAYER



07 / THE LORD'S PRAYER

Matthew 6:5-15

Faith with religion is a complex topic. Sometimes they work together as real faith results in true, worshipful religion. There are also times when faith and religion are not the same. Religion can easily become a source of cultural identity, and while there is nothing wrong with taking on the identity, if it isn't rooted in true faith and relationship with God, religion becomes hypocrisy. Relationship with God is the reason for religious practice. Being a Christian without *knowing* Christ doesn't make sense.

In the New Testament, the Pharisees are an example of people who practiced religion rather than pursuing real relationship with God. They were seen as devout and disciplined people because they faithfully performed the rules and rituals of the Torah—the Jewish scriptures and part of our Old Testament. They were also the people who scrutinized Jesus's every move, waiting for Him to do something wrong so they could point out His imperfect practice of the Jewish religion. Time after time Jesus proved that He knew the scriptures and the laws better than the Pharisees and that His religious practice was the result of His deep relationship with God. Jesus didn't live a perfect life because of the rules; He lived the perfect life because He loved God the Father.

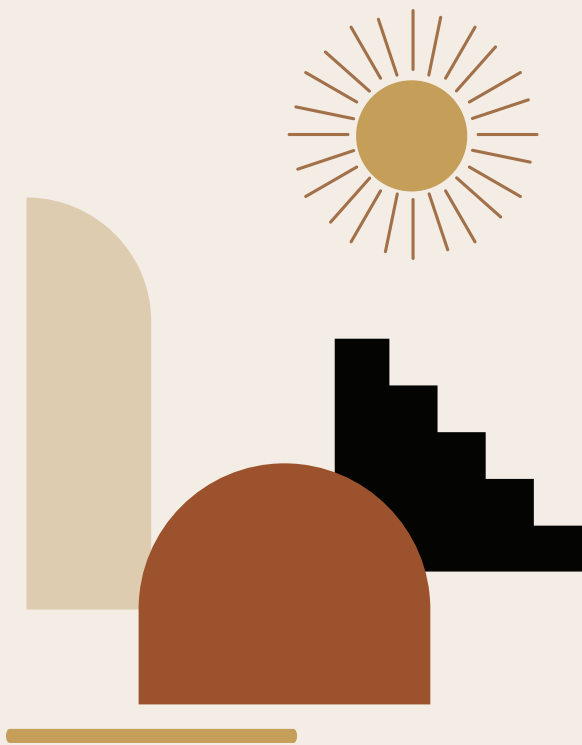
In this passage, Jesus specifically points out the hypocrisy of praying for others

to hear. The point of prayer is to communicate with God, align ourselves to His will, and express our hearts to Him. It's true that God already knows what's going on inside your heart and mind, but through prayer we willingly share those things with God. Prayer is an act of trust and intimacy with God.

The point of Jesus coming to earth was so that God could restore the relationship He had with humanity. Because of sin, we chose to separate ourselves from God. God rescued us and our relationship through Jesus. When Jesus taught about religion, He was teaching people how to bring devotion back to relationship with God. Prayer, when motivated by a desire to take care of our relationship with God, is the kind of prayer that God desires for us.

Response: Jesus's prayer in this passage is called "The Lord's Prayer," and you may already be familiar with it. If you know it, take some time to break down the prayer, line for line. Sometimes our cultural familiarity with Bible verses can keep us from fully understanding them. Focus in on how Jesus is guiding us to speak to God the Father. If you aren't familiar with this passage, attempt to memorize it. This prayer is a great outline for how we can speak to God, first by acknowledging His greatness, and then asking for His help and provision in our daily life.

LORD'S
SUPPER
and
COM-
MUNION



08 / THE LORD'S SUPPER & COMMUNION

Luke 22:14-23

| *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” -1 Corinthians 11:26*

In order to understand the significance of The Lord’s Supper, we first need to talk about The Passover. Passover is a Jewish holiday and observance of when God delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. When Pharaoh refused to let Israel go, God sent a series of plagues to show Pharaoh His power. There were storms, infestations, and even disease, but Pharaoh still refused to give up control of God’s people, that is until the final plague, when God “passed over” Egypt. You can read the account in the book of Exodus.

God’s presence passed over Egypt, killing every firstborn in the land. The only families spared were those that took God at His word and followed His instruction. The instruction was to kill a lamb and paint their doorposts with its blood. Then, in their homes, under the covering of this sacrifice, the people were to prepare the lamb over a fire and eat a meal, observing God’s provision and protection. Everything happened as God said it would and those who were obedient and listened to His instruction were spared the tragedy that occurred throughout the rest of Egypt. This was the act that convinced Pharaoh that God was more powerful than other gods, and Pharaoh finally let Israel go.

The Passover became a regular observance for the Jewish people. They remembered God’s salvation for the people of Israel with this meal. This was the meal that the disciples were participating in when Jesus instituted The Lord’s Supper. They shared a cup of wine that Jesus called His “blood” and

they ate the bread that Jesus called His “body.” Just like the blood and body of the lamb that was sacrificed, Jesus was foreshadowing His own role as the sacrifice that would set humanity free from the slavery of sin: His blood shed and His body broken.

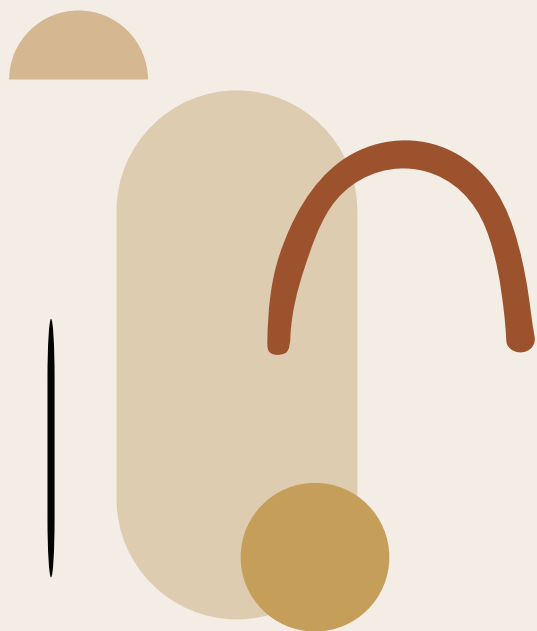
From this meal we have received the tradition of “Communion.” We partake of the cup and the bread that signifies what Jesus has done for us. It’s a time of remembrance for what Jesus has done for us. When we receive the cup and bread, we are observing Jesus’s role as the sacrificial lamb that saved us from death and separation from God.

Jesus says He will not eat this meal or drink this wine again until the Kingdom of God comes. This is to foreshadow the day Jesus returns and establishes God’s Kingdom forever. This is the “present and not yet” aspect to Communion; we commemorate the already won victory of Christ’s act on the cross and we anticipate the day when we will get to eat with Him in eternity.

Response: You don’t need to wait for Communion to reflect on the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Take some time today to meditate on what you’ve already received from Jesus and how powerful that is, and the next time your church participates in Communion, the reality of what Jesus has done will be even stronger for you having reflected on it.

CRUCI-
FIXION

Pt. I



09 / CRUCIFIXION PT. I

Mark 14:26-50, 53-72

Jesus is fully God and fully man. Divinity and humanity in one. This is a tension that He lived in every day of His life. It's easy when reading scripture to focus on one side of Jesus over another and see Him as more human or more divine, but He was both. The events leading up to the cross show us Jesus's humanity and divinity working together. He struggled with the reality of dying and asked for the Father to "take this cup of suffering away," but He never struggled with God's plan and obediently moving forward with it.

In contrast, we also see the experience of the disciples as they watched their leader and hopeful hero betrayed, arrested, accused by the religious elite, sent away to be tried, and eventually killed. It was a time of immense doubt and confusion in understanding God's plan. Peter was so sure of himself and who Jesus was calling him to be that he couldn't fathom abandoning Jesus. Jesus says it best in verse 38, that "The spirit is willing but the body is weak." Peter's determination, failure, and His future work within the church shows us more about who Jesus is than who Peter is. Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him. He knew that Peter desired to be loyal and obedient, but Jesus also knew that Peter was human and afraid. Jesus didn't hold Peter's humanity against him. He went to the cross anyway knowing that Peter wouldn't stick with Him.

Up until this point in the story, Jesus hadn't explicitly confessed that He was the Messiah. People had wondered, assumed, and even confessed it about Him but

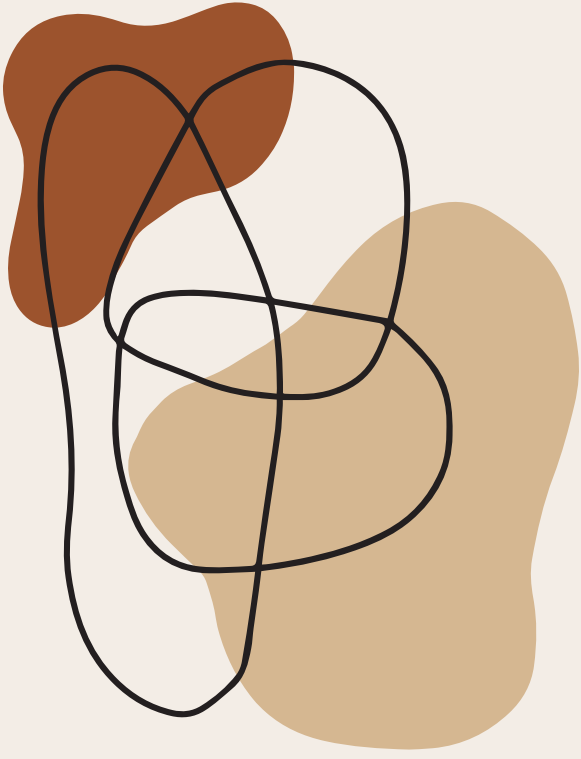
Jesus had yet to proclaim it. Jesus's presence caused discord within the Jewish community. People were following Jesus instead of the leaders and teachers of the law. So those leaders and teachers sought to have Jesus stopped. The only problem was that they couldn't find any offense. Jesus had done nothing wrong. It was Jesus's own testimony of Himself that gave the high priest grounds to have Him killed. Jesus confessed that He was The Messiah. Remember that the Jewish people were waiting for a savior, but people had a particular idea of what that savior would look like. Not everyone could see Jesus in that light, and so for the chief priests and the religious council, this man had just claimed to *be* God, and that was blasphemy.

Jesus waited until God's appointed time to confess who He was. By waiting, Jesus was able to do so many miraculous and God-glorifying things. By confessing, Jesus was putting the next part of the plan into motion: to shed His blood for our sins that we might have eternal life with the Father.

Response: This portion of scripture is intense. We are reading about five distinct events that occurred before Jesus went to the cross. Careful reading and purposeful meditation on these passages is powerful; it reminds us that Jesus did all the work in saving us, and we get to receive this free gift without obligation to do something. Receiving Jesus is enough. Read and remind yourself of why Jesus's act on the cross is so valuable and why He alone is worthy to be praised.

CRUCI-
FIXION

Pt. II



10 / CRUCIFIXION PT. II

Mark 15:1-47

Pilate was a Roman governor. While the chief priests were the religious leaders of Israel, the political power belonged to the Roman empire. Pilate was appointed to govern over the province of Judea and the capital Jerusalem where Jesus's trials took place. Turning Jesus over to Pilate was the council's way of having Jesus tried on a political level. For the priests, Jesus was a blasphemer and heretic. For Rome, Jesus was causing religious upheaval and could potentially cause trouble for the Roman Empire if not controlled.

Jesus's silence amidst the accusations was His act of surrender to God's plan, not an admission of guilt. The priests and the crowds wanted Jesus dead, and Pilate, who was in the business of keeping Rome in power and governing the people of Judea, had no choice but to have Jesus killed. He was beaten, mocked, and nailed to a cross.

For people who know this story, it can be easy to overlook the details of the events that took place. The crucifixion is full of irony—it is the fulfillment of prophecy and the sad reality of a sinful humanity. There is one major event documented in Mark that needs a closer look:

“Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” (v. 37-38)

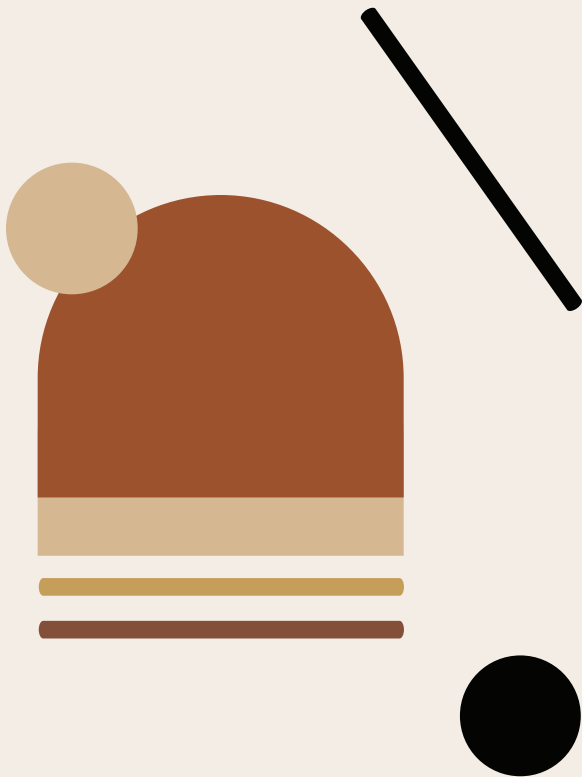
This doesn't mean much to those of us who aren't familiar with the layout of

the Jewish temple. The curtain is the temple veil that separated God's presence from the rest of the temple where priests and people could inhabit. God is holy, and because of sin, man was not able to dwell in God's presence. God's presence cannot be sullied by man's sinfulness, but rather, God's holiness consumes all that which is not holy. The temple veil was a protection that allowed people to worship God as closely as possible without being consumed by His holiness.

Jesus died and the veil tore. It was ripped from top to bottom, an impossible feat even if someone was crazy enough to try and unleash God's holy presence on purpose. This miracle removed the barrier that kept God's presence from the rest of sinful humanity. Jesus's death was the key. It was God's plan that Jesus be the sinless sacrifice, taking away sin and tearing down the barrier that kept us from God. This is what it means when we say that Jesus is the way to the Father. Not only is Jesus "God with us," He is the way by which we can now dwell in God's presence. Jesus has washed us clean and made us sinless in God's sight, and we are no longer separated from Him. The veil is torn.

Response: This is a long reading, and the content is heavy. Read the text thoughtfully, and put yourself in the story as best you can. Imagine Jesus's experience, his fears, his doubts, his determination, and his trust in the Father. Take some time to journal your thoughts and feelings and express gratitude for Jesus's act so that we might no longer be separated from God.

RESUR- RECTION



11 / RESURRECTION

Matthew 27:62 - 28:15

Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. When people accused Him of saying that He would “destroy the temple” and rebuild it in three days, Jesus was actually talking about Himself—that He would die and rise again on the third day. The chief priests needed to make sure that Jesus’s body stayed in its tomb. This would prove to everyone that He wasn’t actually who He said He was. They had a stone rolled in front of the tomb to prevent anyone from taking His body and making a claim that He had risen again.

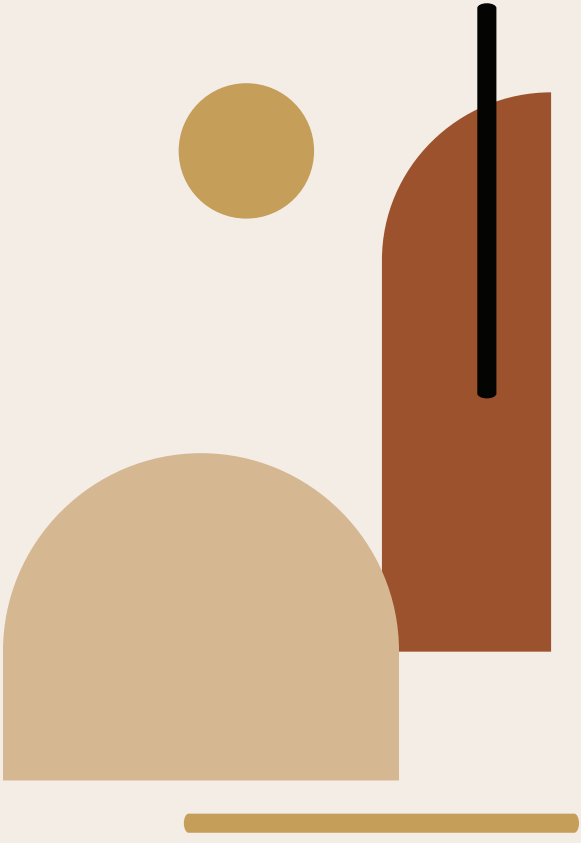
When Jesus died, no one knew what would happen, but they knew that they would find out three days later. Either He lied and His body would remain in the tomb, or He was exactly who He said He was and would rise again. The text speaks for itself. The giant stone that covered the tomb was rolled away and the first witnesses to Jesus’s miraculous resurrection were the women who had cared for Him while He walked the earth. Had the chief priests and Pharisees not secured the tomb, there could have been more reason to doubt the validity

of what happened. As it goes, God uses these acts of the Pharisees to confirm that Jesus's resurrection was real and not some scheme that occurred at an unguarded tomb without witnesses.

He is the sacrificial lamb who has the final victory over sin and death. This resurrected Jesus is The Messiah. This means that God's plan to bring salvation to the world had been accomplished and it is the reality that we get to live in every day. We are no longer separated from God as a result of our sin. Jesus has made the way for us to experience life in the fullness of God's presence.

Response: The message of the gospel is not complete without the resurrection. Jesus's death on the cross bridged the gap between us and God. The resurrection is the reminder that not only are we forgiven but that we have been given a new life. Respond how you see fit: pray, meditate, worship, or do all three. Embrace the presence of God as you reflect on His love for you.

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SION *and*
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12 / THE GREAT COMMISSION & ASCENSION

Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:6-9

Not many of us hear about what happened to Jesus after the resurrection. We've received forgiveness and new life through His death and resurrection, but from His last days on earth, we receive even more. Jesus walks on earth for forty days *after* His resurrection. He spends more time with His disciples and prepares them for His ascension into heaven.

Jesus was meant to go back and sit at the right hand of the Father. This was another fulfillment of the scriptures. Before He left, He gave the disciples their purpose: "The Great Commission." This was their responsibility from now on. Just as Jesus had been sharing the news of the arrival of the Kingdom of God, the disciples were now meant to share what they had seen and experienced. They were meant to carry on Jesus's message and share the good news of the forgiveness of sins.

Before the disciples could go out, Jesus had one more thing to give them. The book of Acts is technically not one of the four gospels, but it is written by one of the gospel-writers: Luke. Luke wrote an account of Jesus's life and the account of what life looked like after Jesus went up into heaven. It's often referred to as the "Acts of the Apostles," but it could also be called the "Acts of the Holy Spirit." An apostle is "one who is sent." In this way, the disciples became apostles as they were sent by Jesus.

The disciples needed the Holy Spirit to empower them to go out. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. You can read about what occurred when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in Acts 2. This was the final step to the disciples going out and spreading the message of Jesus to the world. They were given supernatural ability to speak in different

languages. The Holy Spirit's arrival spread the Gospel in a way that would not have been possible by human effort alone and still does today.

This was humanity's introduction to the third person of the Trinity. We've talked briefly about the Trinity, that God is three persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came onto the scene when Jesus had ascended back to the Father. So while Jesus is "God with us," the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God that moves *through* us to do the miraculous for the glory of God. All three were present at the creation of the world, and each has a role in bringing us understanding of who God is. It's a divine mystery, but what we know is that God's presence dwells among us and even empowers us to keep the message of Jesus moving throughout the world.

Finally, we note in Acts that Jesus's work is not finished. His disciples ask Him if He will restore the kingdom of Israel, and Jesus tells them that it is not the time and the time is not for them to know. Jesus is alluding to His second coming. He sits at the right hand of the Father now, but there will come a time when He will return and fully bring God's Kingdom to earth. This is a day that we look forward to while we continue the work that Jesus and His disciples started, spreading the gospel to others with the help of God's Holy Spirit.

Response: The completion of this study is worth reflecting on. Who did you think Jesus was before this study? Do you feel like you know Him better? What questions do you still have that you might need help understanding? We trust that God is speaking to you in how you personally can respond to your new understanding of Jesus. Remember the Holy Spirit. He is empowering you to continue to study, grow, and walk the path of following Jesus.

CONCLUSION

We do not pretend to have introduced you fully to who Jesus is through this study. We only touched on a portion of His life. Our hope with this book is that you would embrace your role as a believer and disciple of Jesus. We want to honor that you have given your life to Jesus and that you may need some guidance in getting to know Him better. Now, it's your turn to explore. We suggest that as you explore other books of the Bible, still take time to read about Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Maybe choose one of the gospels and read through the whole thing. Each book will offer value and also present challenges. What we hope is that those challenges are not so great that they keep you from growing in your intimate knowledge of Jesus. We've only scratched the surface. The Gospel of John says it best:

“Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.” -John 21:25

This is the end of the study but not the end of your story with Him. There is still so much to learn.

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