52 Weeks with Jesus

Devotional

James Merritt

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Experience Jesus in a Fresh Way

A few years ago I decided to try an experiment of sorts. I committed myself to 52 weeks of getting to know Jesus Christ more deeply. I had been a Christian since I was a boy, but I wanted something more from my relationship with Christ. So I plunged in. For the next year I studied the four Gospel accounts of Jesus's life, took seriously Jesus's words to his disciples, read books about Jesus, and on Sundays my sermons were all about Jesus.

As I had hoped, it was a transformative year for me. My passion for Jesus deepened, I became more aware of his wonder and majesty, and I grew in my compassion for others. What's more, these changes weren't experienced by me alone. Those in my congregation and within my circle of influence who had joined me in this journey were also changed. As a result, I couldn't help but wonder what would happen if thousands—or even tens of thousands—of others could make this same exciting discovery. So I set pen to paper and wrote *52 Weeks with Jesus: Fall in Love with the One Who Changed Everything.* In that book, I presented some Scriptures about Jesus, offered observations I

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had discovered during my year with him, and closed with a short prayer and a question to contemplate.

On the pages that follow, you'll find 52 devotions that complement the year-long journey found in *52 Weeks with Jesus.* If you've read that book, my hope is this present book will enhance your year-long walk with Jesus even more. If you picked up this book without having read *52 Weeks with Jesus*, that's okay. I'm sure you'll find these devotions a rewarding experience. Each reading is comprised of a portion from Scripture, a short selection from *52 Weeks with Jesus*, and brief insights to help you incorporate what you've read into your life.

My prayer is that you'll find the next 52 weeks a time of transformation, just as it was for me and the many others who have experienced Jesus in a fresh way by getting to know him better.

May God bless your 52 weeks with Jesus!

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Section 1

Jesus, the Transformer

Birthdays are not unusual—unless the baby happens to be God. We begin our journey with Jesus at a logical place: his lineage and birth. More than a sweet, syrupy Christmas story, Christ's beginning reveals why he should be important to us and why we are important to him.

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1

Just Like Us

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli (Luke 3:23).

Jesus was just like us—born with a past and a history—and we have been made to become like him. God wants you to be a masterpiece of his grace by living for his glory and expressing his goodness to others.

52 Weeks with Jesus

Both Matthew's and Luke's gospels give us the family tree of Jesus. The former traces Jesus's earthly lineage through Joseph (legally, though not biologically, his father). Luke gives us Jesus's lineage through Mary.

Like Jesus, each of us has a family tree. We all have a

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host of ancestors—some of whom were likely scoundrels, others who were godly believers used by God in their day. If we had the chance, which of us would not enjoy a look back through time to witness the odd assortment of men and women whose DNA we share? No matter what surprises we might find there, God has had his hand in the network of branches and offshoots that is our family tree every step of the way. He's even overseen every disastrous wrong turn our ancestors made and then worked it for his ultimate purposes, including the bringing about of *you* for this day and this age.

You have a divine purpose rooted in God's plan. You were born in such a way as to fit uniquely and by design into a great purpose shared by no other human being—past, present, or future.

God's plans always involve people. Ordinary people through whom he can showcase his grace and mercy. Though God has used some of your ancestors in the past—just as he used Abraham, Isaac, David, and others in Jesus's past—he is no longer able to work through them. For now, at this time in history, God can use only *you*.

It is no small thing to be used as a masterpiece of God's grace. Never forget that.

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2

A Misfit Among Misfits

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers (Matthew 1:1-2).

Through Jesus's family tree, God puts his grace on display. God is reminding us that he can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves: pick up broken pieces and put them together, take broken lives and make them whole, gather broken hopes and make them reality. That is the message of Jesus's family tree.

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Among Jesus's earthly ancestors we find rogues, liars, cheats, prostitutes—every kind of disreputable character imaginable. Then there are the names we usually skip over in the genealogy: Asaph, Abiud, Zadok, Matthan, and many other unnotables. Who were these men? Why are they worthy to be listed in the lineage of the Son of God? And why the Hall of Shame? Where are the royal names in the King of king's lineage? And the ones who lived mostly righteous lives?

There was the great Bible hero David. Oh, but wait—David was an adulterer and murderer. What about Jacob? Ah, yes, he was the deceiver. Rahab? Wasn't she the harlot? And Tamar, the Canaanite; what about her? How ironic that the sinless One—the Redeemer of mankind's sins—should have in his earthly lineage such a roster of sinners themselves. But then what better way to demonstrate that no one is beyond God's grace…beyond God's usefulness?

Rahab no doubt faced a bleak future as the "madam of Jericho." What good thing could she do for the living God of the Israelites? And yet she would choose to betray her warmongering countrymen to become one of God's people. Even more astonishing? She is right there in the puzzling lineup of Jesus's earthly ancestors.

The man who would become King David began as a mere shepherd boy, and son of Jesse. There's not much raw

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material for a future king in simply herding sheep. Or is there?

The great lesson is, of course, that our past cannot present a stumbling block to God's desire to use us. No matter what we've done, or where we've been, or who we've known, God can still use us…and *will* use us. Using repentant sinners is what God does best.

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3

A Messy Messiah

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:41-42).

The New Testament is the story of a family: the family of Jesus. God became a part of our family so that we could become a part of his. And just as God used two ordinary women named Ruth and Mary to make a lasting impact on the world, God can use you to make a lasting impression on others by your living for him and loving him and doing his will.

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Experts say that virtually 100 percent of us are descended from one royal person or another. That each person can be part of a royal family on earth sounds impressive…until we realize that death is the great equalizer. Royal blood counts for nothing when it comes to being part of *God's* royal family. Riches, wealth, and worldly honor will not gain us one square inch of heaven.

The good news is that the blood that gains us acceptance in God's family is the blood of an innocent, slain Lamb of God. Through the death of Christ—and his resurrection—God has opened the doors to the greatest palace of them all…a heavenly home for all who come to him in faith. There we dwell not in the presence of just *a* king, but *the* King of kings.

Many in the Jewish community in Jesus's day didn't recognize their messiah. He wasn't what they expected a messiah to look and act like. Not only were there unsavory characters in his lineage, but there were also Gentiles. *Women* Gentiles at that. Tamar was a Canaanite; Rahab was an Amorite; and Ruth was a Moabitess. But in God's design, none of that mattered.

We all get into the human family—the "Adam" family—the same way Jesus did: by physical, biological birth. However, when it comes to God's family—the Jesus family—we have to be reborn spiritually. By being "born again," we enter into a new family altogether. In this new family, we

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are invited to make a lasting impact on others as we live for Christ daily.

May we always remember we are, like Adam, only dust. But also, like Christ, we are sons of God and co-heirs of a grand kingdom.

Christ the Son of God
Became a son of Adam
That we, sons of Adam,
Might become sons of God.

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