

# Love Walked Among Us

*Learning To Love Like Jesus*

Paul Miller

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**Main version of Scripture used: NIV**

**No other versions used**

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## *Introduction*

### Who Is Jesus?

In 1991 my wife, Jill, asked me, “Do you love me?” We had been going through a hard time, but hard times weren’t unknown to us. We have six children who at the time were 2, 5, 8, 12, 14, and 16. Our eight year old, Kim, is disabled—unable to speak, unable to do many things other children do. Sometimes Jill got so tired that she’d fall asleep during dinner.

It had been a long day, and I thought she just wanted me to reassure her that I loved her. “Of course I love you,” I said. But then she asked me again, “Paul, do you love me?” The third time she asked, I got irritated with her. *Of course* I loved her. Didn’t I help out with the kids? In the morning I dressed the little guys and got them breakfast. In the evening I read to them and put them all to bed. I helped constantly. Case closed. That night I went to sleep fuming at Jill, still making a list of all the ways I loved her.

I didn’t tell Jill, but her question gnawed at me. What does it mean to love someone? What does love look like?

As I thought about love, I began to think about Jesus. After all, Jesus is supposed to be the most merciful and self-giving person who ever lived. I decided to study his life to see how he related to others. What was he like? How did he treat people?

And slowly by slowly, as they say in Africa, I began to understand what it really means to love.

### **Who Is Jesus?**

Regardless of your background, Jesus is hard to ignore. Almost 2 billion Christians claim to follow him; over 1 billion Muslims honor him as a prophet. Leading Jewish theologians esteem him as a great rabbi. His image can be found in Hindu temples. Many cult leaders claim to be a reincarnation of the spirit of Jesus.

Jaroslav Pelikan, professor emeritus of history at Yale University writes,

Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for

almost twenty centuries.... It is from his birth that most of the human race dates its calendars; it is by his name that millions curse and in his name that millions pray.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all the attention that Jesus gets, most people have little idea of who he is as a person, even those who worship him. I have often asked Christians, “When you get to heaven, what person in the Bible would you like to meet?” Only one out of several hundred has mentioned Jesus. I think the word *person* throws them off because they aren’t used to thinking of Jesus as a *person*.

When we see Jesus portrayed, he often comes across strangely. Hollywood frequently pictures Jesus in slow motion. In most films Jesus talks slowly, walks slowly and moves slowly. He also stares. My ten-year-old daughter, Emily, and I were watching one of the better Jesus films, and we noticed that he never blinked! The other actors did, but Jesus never did. Our eyes began to hurt every time the camera focused on Jesus’ face.

I decided to study Jesus with fresh eyes, forgetting what I already knew—or thought I knew—about him. I wanted to experience what Albert Einstein did when he read the gospels. He reflected:

I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.... Jesus is too colossal for the pen of phrase-mongers, however artful.... No man can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word.<sup>2</sup>

Einstein was not a follower of Christ but he felt the wonder of the real man in a way many miss. As I read and studied the gospels, I began to experience Einstein’s sense of wonder. I hope you do too.

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1 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.1.

2 George Viereck, “What Life Means to Einstein,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Oct. 26, 1929, p.117.

## **What Are the Gospels?**

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Bible's four accounts of Jesus' life, are called *gospels*, a word that means *good news*. They carry the name of their author and were written over 1900 years ago in Greek, the language of the Roman Empire. Like modern biographers, each author provides his own unique perspective and includes scenes or details that other authors don't. When we put their accounts together, we get a rich, three-dimensional picture of Jesus. Like documentary videos, scenes are often described in such vivid detail that we can visualize exactly what's happening: the setting, the circumstances, the people, and how Jesus treated them.

Matthew, a former tax collector and one of the original twelve followers of Jesus, wrote an eyewitness account. Tax collectors in the Roman Empire were usually well educated and fluent in both their native language and Greek. The government auctioned off the job of tax collector to the highest bidder. The winner of the auction recouped his expenses by charging more than was required, thereby alienating the general population. Think of Matthew as a very smart, former used car salesman. Though he's been changed by Jesus, he could still read people like a book. There are hints of this in the details Matthew provides about Judas (the disciple who betrayed Jesus).

Written about thirty-five years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Mark's account was most likely derived from Peter, a former fisherman and the leader of the twelve disciples. Like Peter himself, Mark's story is fast-paced and passionate, and it captures the shocking impact Jesus had on people.

Luke, a doctor and a traveling companion of Paul (one of the leaders in the early church), based his chronicle on the testimony of eyewitnesses. His book breathes compassion for the "little" people and the powerless: outcasts, women, children, the poor, and the disabled.

John, another former fisherman and one of Jesus' most intimate friends, wrote his gospel last. As someone particularly close to Jesus, John gives us unique, close-up glimpses of him.

Are the gospels reliable history? I'll let you judge for yourself. My only request is that you read them with an open mind, the way Einstein did. Einstein reflected about the gospels,

No myth is filled with such life. How different, for instance, is the impression which we receive from an account of the legendary heroes of antiquity like

Theseus! Theseus and other heroes of his type lack the authentic vitality of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

C. S. Lewis, Oxford professor and a leading expert on myth, wrote:

I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are, they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing. They are not artistic enough to be legends.<sup>4</sup>

When we read a myth or legend, we instinctively understand that we are in the world of fable. We switch gears when we read it; in the words of the poet Coleridge, we “suspend disbelief.” But the gospels are set in a real world of needs: wine running out at a wedding; hungry crowds with not enough food; fruitless fishing trips; and no money for the tax bill. Into this world quietly breaks the miraculous, which seems as ordinary as the hassles. In myth, extraordinary people in an extraordinary world do extraordinary things. In the gospels, the extraordinary love and compassion of a remarkable man radiates and illuminates an ordinary world.

### **A Study of Love**

This book examines how Jesus treated the people he encountered, because it's in “little moments” with friends and family that most of us reveal our true selves. Jesus is no exception.

Gandhi, a Hindu and national leader of India, enjoyed chiding Christians that they did not take seriously Jesus' call to love. Yet, what is more difficult to learn than love? How do you love someone when you get no love in return—only withdrawal or ingratitude? How do you love without being trapped or used by the other person? How do you love when you have your own problems? When do you take care of yourself? How do you love with both compassion and honesty? When you are compassionate, people use you; but when you are honest, people get angry. What is love?

Most of us have lacked good models for love. We don't even know what's normal

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<sup>3</sup> George Viereck, p.117.

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p.158.

anymore. Let me suggest this: the person of Jesus is a plumb line to which we may align our lives. He satisfies our hunger for a hero—someone who is both good and strong—to change this world.

Jesus arrived at the home of his good friends, Mary and Martha, several days after their brother Lazarus died. Mary, in the passionate way of the ancient Near East, threw herself weeping at Jesus' feet. Overcome with grief, Jesus weeps with her. Several bystanders comment, "*See how he loved him*" (*John 11:36*). In this book we'll join the bystanders of Jesus, look at Jesus and *see how he loved*.