

Our Daily Bread University
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Getting To Know Jesus

[Jesus said,] “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” (John 5:39)

Jesus Christ lived about 2,000 years ago. He was never on TV. He never wrote a book. He never traveled very far from where he was born. But Jesus had a greater impact on this world than anyone else who ever lived.

Four books of the Bible tell about the life and teachings of Jesus. These are called the Gospels. Gospel means “good news.” The good news is that God loves you and has made a way for you to respond to his love and live with him forever. That’s the good news Jesus came to bring.

The Gospels were written by four men - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; but the Holy Spirit helped these writers say what he wanted them to say. God guided each writer so that what you read in the Bible is God’s word. Each writer seemed to have written for a special group of people; Matthew primarily to a Jewish audience; Mark primarily to a Roman audience; Luke to the Gentiles; and John to appeal to every human heart. Each gospel tells the good news in a slightly different way.

Any history book will tell you what happened a long time ago. The writers of the Gospels had a greater mission. They wrote so people could have a personal relationship with God. John explained, “... these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

The Gospels are not just made-up stories. Matthew and John were disciples. They saw the events with their own eyes. Mark followed

Jesus and wrote what Peter had seen and heard. Luke interviewed people who knew Jesus and carefully checked their stories. Luke wrote, "... it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, ... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:3)

All four Gospels tell us that Jesus lived, died, and rose again. They also tell us that Jesus Christ is alive today and wants to be your Savior.

Life Questions:

Do you already know Jesus as your Savior? If you are not sure, you can pray this prayer: "Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner and that you died on the cross for me. I ask that you forgive me of my sins. I receive your free gift of eternal life." If you prayed this prayer, the first thing you should do is tell someone.

Getting to Know Matthew

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. (Matthew 9:9)

Matthew never expected Jesus to call his name! Matthew was a "bad guy." He was a Jew -- like Jesus -- but he was also a tax collector for the Romans. Jews thought a tax collector was one of the worst kinds of sinners.

Whenever the Romans conquered a country, they forced the people to pay a lot of their money in taxes. If anyone didn't pay his taxes he would be sold into slavery or sent to prison -- along with his whole family.

The Romans hired Jews to force other Jews to pay taxes. The Jewish tax collectors didn't just collect what the Romans demanded. They made people pay even more. They kept the extra money for themselves. Matthew worked for the enemy and cheated his fellow Jews. So the Jews hated him. That's why Matthew was surprised when Jesus said, "Come, follow me."

Many of Matthew's friends were viewed as very sinful. He wanted his friends to meet Jesus. So he had a party and invited Jesus. Some people got mad at Jesus for going to a party with these sinful people. But Jesus ignored them. He came to bring sinners back to God. When Jesus chose Matthew, he proved that God loves everyone -- even the worst sinner you know.

Matthew changed after he met Jesus. He stopped collecting taxes. As a tax collector, he spread fear and hate. When Matthew became a disciple, he spread good news. What a difference Jesus made in his life!

Matthew came to love the Jews. He knew the Jews wondered: Could Jesus be the promised Messiah? Could he be the promised King of the Jews? Matthew wrote his gospel to answer their questions.

For the Jews to believe in Jesus, he had to fulfill the prophecies written by Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament. Matthew wanted to prove that Jesus fulfilled prophecy exactly "as it was written." That's why Matthew quotes the Old Testament 65 times.

Life Questions:

Do you sometimes think that God only likes "good" people? Matthew could explain why he believed that Jesus is the Savior; can you?

Getting To Know Mark

She who is in Babylon, ... sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. (1 Peter 5:13)

Mark was a Jewish boy who grew up at an exciting time! He lived in Jerusalem, and Jesus came to Mark's house. Sometimes Mark tagged along with the disciples. After Jesus went back to heaven, Mark was part of the first church. Christians had secret prayer meetings at Mark's mother's house.

Mark's cousin, Barnabas, knew the apostle Paul. They planned to sail to far-away lands to spread the gospel. It sounded exciting! Mark wanted to go, so they let Mark join them as their helper. It was exciting!

Early in their mission, Mark decided not to continue on with them. He left Paul and Barnabas and sailed for home. Later, Mark wanted to join them again. Paul said no. He didn't want a helper who might leave them again.

Mark didn't give up doing God's work. He helped Barnabas. Later he helped the apostle Peter. Mark's gospel is based on what he heard Peter preach. Peter preached mostly to the Romans. So, Mark's gospel was written to the Romans.

The Romans didn't care about prophecy. All they cared about was who had the most power. So Mark focused on what Jesus did, not what he taught. Mark starts his gospel when Jesus began his ministry. It covers the last three years of his life. That's when Jesus did miracles, showed his power over nature, healed the sick, brought dead people back to life, died, and rose again. Mark focused on the action and the power.

There's a story in Mark's gospel not found anywhere else. It happened when Jesus was arrested. Mark wrote, "Then everyone deserted [Jesus] and fled. A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." That could have been Mark. Who else would have known? Mark might have been a person who ran away, like he did when he was helping Paul and Barnabas. But even though he may have run away, he never stopped loving and serving Jesus.

Life Question:

Have you ever tried to run away from something God wanted you to do?

Getting To Know Luke

Since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:3)

Luke was the only gospel writer who was not Jewish. He was a Gentile, probably from Greece. And he wrote his gospel primarily to a Greek audience. Luke was a doctor and was highly educated.

Luke was also the only gospel writer who didn't meet Jesus in person. He became a Christian after Jesus went back to heaven. Then Luke traveled with the apostle Paul to spread the good news about Jesus.

Luke addressed his gospel to his friend Theophilus, which means "lover of God." Theophilus was a well-respected Gentile and a new believer in Jesus. Theophilus had heard stories about Jesus, but Luke wanted him to be certain his faith was based on the truth. That's why Luke wrote his gospel.

Luke was like a news reporter. He talked to people who had known Jesus. He was careful to get the story exactly right. His training as a doctor helped him because he knew how important it was to do things without making mistakes. Luke's gospel includes stories found nowhere else, like the angel's visit to Mary, Jesus' mother, and details about Jesus' birth. He was able to include these stories because he may have talked to Mary personally.

Mark's gospel was already written. So Luke followed the pattern of Mark's gospel. But Luke was a Gentile, not a Jew, and he was writing to another Gentile. He wanted to make sure Theophilus knew that Jesus came for everyone. So Luke put in stories that showed how Jesus loved everyone: sick people, women, Samaritans, poor people, shepherds, and beggars.

Luke wrote two books in the New Testament. His gospel tells about what Jesus BEGAN to do and teach. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke wrote about what Jesus CONTINUED to do through the church after he went back to heaven. Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer.

Life Question:

Luke took great care to make sure he recorded true stories about Jesus. What can you do to make sure you know the truth about Jesus?

Getting To Know John

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

John had been a disciple of John the Baptist. He was one of the first to follow Jesus and became one of Jesus' best friends. In his gospel, John calls himself, "the disciple Jesus loved." John got to sit next to Jesus at the last supper and when Jesus was dying, he told John to take care of his mother.

John's gospel doesn't follow the same pattern as the other three gospels. Those writers told their stories in the order in which things happened. John doesn't tell his stories in the order they happened. John tells about several miracles or signs Jesus performed. Just like a sign points you in the right direction, the miracles Jesus performed point people to God.

John also tells about several times Jesus said "I Am" to describe himself. When God first introduced himself to Moses at the burning bush, Moses asked God his name. God said, "I Am." One time Jesus said to the Jews, "Before Abraham was born, I Am!" (John 8:58) Jesus used the same words God used as his name to describe himself. To the Jews, this was the same as saying he was equal with God. So they tried to kill him for saying "I Am."

John's gospel tells about some great conversations Jesus had with people that are not recorded in any of the other gospels. It may be that John was there to overhear what was said. In one of John's letters he said he wrote about what he heard with his ears and had seen with his own eyes.

In one of these conversations, Jesus said what has become the most famous Bible verse: John 3:16! If you know any Bible verse, you probably know that one. It says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

John lived to be very old. He preached about Jesus to the very end. Near the end of his life, he was arrested and sent to a deserted island. There he had a vision of Jesus, of how our world will end and how Jesus will come back to make all things new. John wrote down his vision as God told him to. It's the last book of the Bible called, The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Life Questions:

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Are you sure you have eternal life because you belong to Jesus?