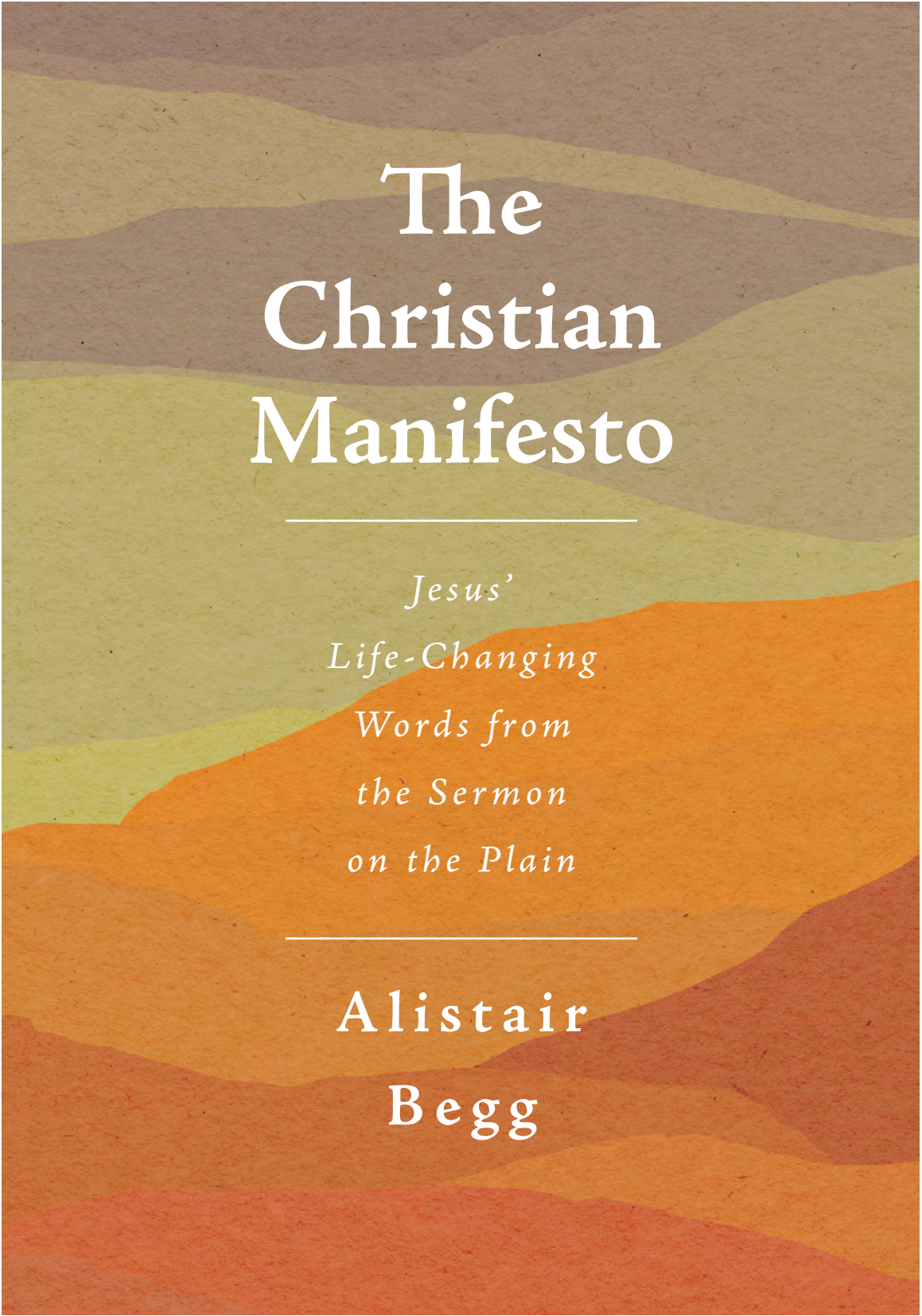




The Christian Manifesto

*Jesus'
Life-Changing
Words from
the Sermon
on the Plain*

Alistair
Begg

STUDY GUIDE

“The best thing we have to offer those around us is the kingdom of Jesus, and the way to earn the right to speak to them about that kingdom is to show them that kingdom. The biggest reason for the ineffectiveness of contemporary Christianity is a failure to take seriously the radical difference that Jesus calls for as we follow him as King.”

ALISTAIR BEGG

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THIS STUDY GUIDE

contains eight sessions to correspond with each of the eight chapters in *The Christian Manifesto*, which will help you consider what Jesus offers to everyone: the “good news of the kingdom of God.” In his Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17–49), Jesus describes what kingdom-minded living looks like—what the good life is as God sees it. In *The Christian Manifesto*, Alistair unpacks this sermon, encouraging Christians to live a radically different life that upends the world’s values and philosophies. The genuine Christian lifestyle is counterintuitive and countercultural, yet God blesses it with true meaning and impact.

This study will challenge you to a new (or perhaps *renewed*) way of living and offer encouragement in the person, work, and words of Christ. Including Scripture passages, hymn lyrics, and questions for contemplation and deeper engagement, this guide can be used for personal reflection or small-group discussion.

Each session includes four parts:

- 1) Getting Started:** a quote from the chapter, followed by an introductory question
- 2) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the chapter and are flagged for further meditation and memorization
- 3) Going Deeper:** questions to help you process each chapter’s main ideas
- 4) Giving Praise:** a poem or hymn that can be committed to memory and incorporated in worship

The following words from *The Christian Manifesto* provide a great summary of the overall themes and purpose for this book and study guide:

“What we shall hear Jesus saying to us is radical—how faith in him compels and equips us to live out a new lifestyle that is often countercultural and counterintuitive. This makes the Sermon on the Plain not only an invitation but also a challenge. The hallmarks and priorities of Jesus’ kingdom are different from this world’s—and so its citizens will be different too. Jesus’ call is deep, and it is wide, and it calls us to turn everything we naturally think upside down. Here we shall discover what the marks of a genuine Christian are.”

ALISTAIR BEGG

CHAPTER ONE

An Invitation to Happiness

Getting Started

The Sermon on the Plain ... is Jesus' invitation to you to experience life at its very best. It is his description of what life in his kingdom—a kingdom where all that is wrong is being put right—looks like as we live in this world. (12)

When Jesus used the phrase “Blessed are you when...” he was saying, “How happy, how fortunate, how privileged you are!” What he goes on to describe is the best kind of life as God sees it. But the best life according to God is not what we might normally call the good life.

What comes to your mind first when you hear the phrase *the good life*? How do you think that picture measures up against the Bible’s standard for Christian living? In your gut, do you feel that a biblical lifestyle is a happy and privileged one?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”

LUKE 6:20-21

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

1 PETER 2:9-10

Going Deeper

1. The kingdom of God is “an eternal kingdom, which will one day arrive in all its fullness but which for now exists in this world wherever its subjects are to be found” (11). How was the kingdom of God relevant to Jesus’ ministry? What does it mean to be a member of God’s kingdom?

2. The Sermon on the Plain doesn’t detail the way someone becomes a Christian, but it does describe the lifestyle of someone who already is a believer. How does someone become a Christian? Why would they then go on to live in the way that Jesus teaches in Luke 6?

3. The lifestyle Jesus calls us to is a radical one. What makes it so difficult? What might motivate us to live such a life?

4. Many years after Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Plain, the apostle Peter wrote, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy,” and describes the Christians to whom he’s writing as “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:10-11). How does this inform the way we should live in the world?

5. Alistair writes, “The biggest reason for the ineffectiveness of contemporary Christianity is a failure to take seriously the radical difference that Jesus calls for as we follow him as King.” In what ways have you heard professing Christians excuse themselves from this radical call? Why does that affect the church’s witness?

6. Alistair writes, “The best thing we have to offer those around us is the kingdom of Jesus.” What makes the kingdom such a good gift? How can you show that you truly believe this in your daily life?

GIVING PRAISE

How happy they who know the Lord,
With whom he deigns to dwell!
He feeds and cheers them by his Word;
His arm supports them well.

“O HAPPY THEY WHO KNOW THE LORD”

BY JOHN NEWTON

A Reversal of Values

We live in a contemporary setting that cries out for us to stand up for ourselves, be proud of ourselves, and elevate ourselves, and to be self-assertive in our pursuit of happiness. ... It's called being true to yourself, finding your truth, and living your best life, though in truth it's simply selfishness. (18)

Think of a major life decision that you have made. What factors were most important to you as you considered what to do? Did money and reputation play into your decision? Did Jesus and his kingdom play into it?

[illegible]

HEBREWS 12:1-2

Going Deeper

1. Jesus pronounces woes upon those who are “rich, full, flippant, and popular” (28). How do worldly riches, satisfactions, and flippancy hinder people from embracing the kingdom of God? How can poverty and hardship be a help?

2. Wealth can be a source of misery in two senses: how people think it relates to life in heaven and how people think it relates to life on earth. Where might you go wrong when you think about wealth? What is the right way to think of it?

3. Alistair says that the barrier of wealth is a big problem in the West, where most people have more than enough. How have your possessions and comforts kept you from fully acknowledging your dependence on God? What might you sometimes feel that you need more than God’s provision?

4. The Christian way is to profess the truth of the Gospel no matter the social consequences. How can we find joy in Christ even when we experience social stigma? What consequences might we face if we compromise the truth of the Gospel?

5. It was “for the joy that was set before him” that Jesus “endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2). How does Christ’s work on the cross serve as a model for our life in the kingdom?

GIVING PRAISE

Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always.
Thou and thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

“BE THOU MY VISION”

TRANS. MARY E. BYRNE

CHAPTER THREE

An Exceptional Kind of Love

Getting Started

It is incongruous, if not impossible, for those of us who declare ourselves to be the children of our heavenly Father not to manifest the mercy of our merciful God and not to display a love for our enemies. (31–32)

God loves the undeserving. The only reason we have any hope in God is because he loved us while we were still his enemies and gave his Son to reconcile us to him on the cross (Rom. 5:10). As members of his kingdom, we are to show God's own mercy to our own enemies.

Write down a few of the ways you were at enmity with God before you came to know him. What did you do to deserve his forgiveness?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

LUKE 6:27–28

“One will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

ROMANS 5:7–8

Going Deeper

1. God's agape love is unmerited, and God loves us even though he knows our wrongdoing. How would it change your perspective on other people if you began with the assumption that they don't need to earn your love, and they can do nothing to lose it?

2. We are to understand Jesus' words as he intended them to be heard (i.e., literally), not in a wooden and exacting manner (i.e., literalistically). What passages of Scripture can help us to understand what Jesus is *not* saying in Luke 6:29–30? What should we understand Jesus' message to be?

3. Jesus describes this command to love our enemies as a way to imitate God. What is the danger in seeing this as simply a moral prescription? How can we avoid that danger?

4. Alistair suggests that “people have been left with the impression that conservative Christianity takes the approach that only if you agree with our doctrines, and often with our politics, do you get to experience our kindness and love” (39). Practically speaking, what groups of people do you find

it difficult to love? Why? Has your own behavior contributed to the public perception of Christians Alistair mentions?

5. Our witness to non-Christians is tied up with our ability to show them the same love that we have received. What are some ways we can show love to people who reject God while remaining firmly committed to God's truth?

GIVING PRAISE

May the mind of Christ my Savior
Dwell in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do and say.
May the love of Jesus fill me
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.

“MAY THE MIND OF CHRIST MY SAVIOR”
BY KATE BARCLAY WILKINSON

CHAPTER FOUR

What the Golden Rule Really Means

Getting Started

Prior to the time of Jesus, this rule had been pronounced only in a negative form. ... Jesus, on the other hand, states it positively. He is making it clear that it is not simply enough for his followers to be passive, to refrain from recrimination or revenge; no, the children of God are to be initiative-takers in this matter of love. (43-44)

God's love for us is not just a matter of refraining from revenge. God goes out of his way to do good to his enemies, providing sinners with their daily bread (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17) and sending his Son as a sacrifice for sin (Rom. 5:6).

How has God taken the initiative in his love for you?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”

LUKE 6:31

“For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

ROMANS 13:9-10

Going Deeper

1. The Golden Rule is often subject to misinterpretation. Alistair suggests three constraints on how we understand it. What are they? What misinterpretations do they prevent?

2. In Luke 6:32-34, Jesus asks the same rhetorical question in three different ways. What does this question suggest about the nature of Christian love?

3. Alistair says that this kind of radical love “is an action that is the proof of our salvation” (50). Why is loving others as ourselves a sign that we have been united to Christ through faith? What does it reveal about us?

4. Alistair imagines the people he thinks of as his enemies and undeserving of love (51). In your own context, who do think of as your enemies? Or what kinds of people are you prone to overlook while loving others?

5. Christian love isn't just universal and harmless, but it is proactive and personal. Keeping in mind that the Golden Rule should be understood in light of God's law, as an expression of love for God, and in dependence on God's power, how can you personally and proactively bless those who can't or won't give back? Is there a first step you need to take?

GIVING PRAISE

I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how he could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.
O how marvelous! O how wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
O how marvelous! O how wonderful!
Is my Savior's love for me!

"MY SAVIOR'S LOVE"

BY CHARLES H. GABRIEL

CHAPTER FIVE

Generous Forgiveness

Getting Started

Each of us, if we're honest, is by nature inclined to discover and condemn the faults of others while passing much more lightly over our own sins. (57)

So often, we detect very quickly what we think others have done wrong and resist the need to admit our own wrongs. We judge the motives of others as malicious while seeing our own failings as well-intended. We move on from our own sins but begrudge those of others.

Recall Jesus' command in Luke 6:31: "As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them." What would it mean to apply this to how we judge and forgive others?

KEY SCRIPTURES

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you."

LUKE 6:37-38

"David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

"Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'"

2 SAMUEL 12:5-7

Going Deeper

1. Throughout the chapter, Alistair identifies and corrects the common misunderstandings of the commands to judge not, to forgive, and to give generously. What are these misunderstandings?

2. Alistair calls forgiveness “a subset of generosity” (68). How can reframing judgment and forgiveness as matters of generosity help us to understand the Lord’s commands here? What can we learn from God’s own generosity?

3. The judgment and condemnation Jesus is referring to is censoriousness. It is self-righteous, harsh, and hypocritical. Why are we so quick to judge people in this way? Practically speaking, how can we guard against this tendency?

4. Alistair says, “The attitude of unforgiveness is one of the consequences of our culture turning away from the idea of sin and the reality of guilt” (65). How does disbelieving in sin and guilt make true forgiveness impossible? What might the long-term impacts of such a perspective be on our relationships?

5. “Your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). How can meditating on this truth help us as we strive to show God’s mercy and generosity to others? Is there judgment, unforgiveness, or stinginess in your own heart for which you should ask God’s mercy?

GIVING PRAISE

E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme
And shall be till I die:

“THERE IS A FOUNTAIN”

BY WILLIAM COWPER

CHAPTER SIX

A Life of Integrity

Getting Started

Kingdom life involves having integrity—what we are like on the inside matching what we project on the outside and being quicker to admit our own struggles than to point out how others struggle. (81)

Integrity is the opposite of hypocrisy. Hypocrites put on a righteous exterior and hide their sins from others. They are quick to censoriousness, pointing out sins in others and refusing to acknowledge sin in themselves. People of integrity humbly acknowledge their own sin and depend on God's mercy to repent and do right.

Given the definitions above, who in your life is an example of integrity? What are some traits about that person that might be worth imitating?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

LUKE 6:43-45

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

GALATIANS 5:22-23

Going Deeper

1. In Luke 6:39–45, Jesus offers four pictures calling us to be diligent in examining ourselves. What are these four pictures? In a word, what warning does each one offer?

2. Alistair writes, “People who speak falsehood about religious or existential matters are not benign; they are dangerous. They are at their most dangerous when they stand at a pulpit” (74). How should we assess whether a teacher is teaching the truth and therefore worth following?

3. Think back over the last week. Have you been more aware of your own failings or more aware of the failings of others? Of the sins you have criticized others for, can you see any in your own heart?

4. Consider the things you have said over the past week. Have your words been consistent with the fruit of the Spirit? Remembering that no one is perfect in their speech (James 3:8) and “your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36), what do you need to say to God about this?

5. Alistair writes, “Just as a man straddling a boat and a riverbank will never feel stable, ... so the person who seeks to live with one foot in and one foot out of the kingdom, or who seeks to look better to others than they really are, will find that a tense and exhausting experience” (81-82). What is it about hypocrisy that makes it exhausting? What about integrity is freeing?

GIVING PRAISE

Perish policy and cunning,
Perish all that fears the light!
Whether losing, whether winning,
Trust in God, and do the right.
Some will hate you, some will love you,
Some will flatter, some will slight;
Heed them not, and look above you:
Trust in God, trust in God,
Trust in God, and do the right.

“COURAGE, BROTHER, DO NOT STUMBLE”

BY NORMAN MACLEOD

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Genuine Desire to Obey

Getting Started

Christians are those who confess Jesus to be Lord. But, as Jesus is about to tell us, not everyone who confesses Jesus to be Lord is a Christian. The crucial question, therefore, and the one that Jesus poses as he reaches the conclusion of this most challenging of sermons, is this: does your life match your lips? (83)

When it comes to examining ourselves to see whether we are of the faith (2 Cor. 13:5), verbal profession, orthodox theology, and spiritual giftedness are not sufficient on their own. Holiness and obedience will always be evident in the life of one who has been united with Christ by faith.

Before reading this book, how would you have answered this question: *How do you know that you are a Christian?* How would you answer it now?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.”

LUKE 6:47-48

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

1 PETER 1:6-7

Going Deeper

1. Jesus' words and their implication here are particularly challenging, and perhaps distressing. How can we reconcile the reality that no one can obey perfectly with the reality that obedience is a necessary mark of true discipleship?

2. Our salvation is by grace through faith and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). How, then, should we understand the relationship between faith and works?

3. Alistair writes, "The best person to tell you whether this should be a matter of assurance or challenge for you is probably not actually you but someone else who loves Jesus and knows you well" (89). Who is a wise and mature Christian in your life who can help you discern where you stand in the matter of obedience to Christ's Word? Prayerfully consider how you can let that person know that you welcome their input into your life.

4. Jesus' parable in Luke 6:47-49 pictures two different houses being battered by a storm, with only one remaining at the end. How do trials help reveal the soundness of faith? What is a current or recent trial that has tested your faith?

5. These final words of the Sermon on the Plain are a challenge and a warning, but they are also an invitation. How does trust and obedience to Christ secure us against the storms of life?

GIVING PRAISE

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand:
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

"THE SOLID ROCK"
BY EDWARD MOTE

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Heart of Our King

Getting Started

I do not wish, in this final chapter, to undermine or diminish any ways that the Spirit has been at work in you as you have read, to point out ways in which you need to change in order to live all out as a disciple of Jesus, or perhaps even to show you that you need truly to put your faith in him as Lord and Savior and become a disciple of Jesus. But at the same time, the Scriptures are first and foremost about the glory and goodness of Jesus rather than about us. (95)

What conviction of sin have you experienced up to this point in your study of the Sermon on the Plain? Write it down here. Then set it aside. Be ready to return to it after you have taken time to consider who Jesus is and the work he has done and is doing for you.

KEY SCRIPTURES

“He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

LUKE 4:17-21

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

JOHN 5:25

Going Deeper

1. Read Luke 4:17–20 again—the mission statement of Jesus’ ministry. What does this prophecy say about him? What is the significance of what he left out? (See Isa. 61:2.)

2. In Luke 7:9, Jesus praises the faith of the centurion. What qualities characterized the centurion’s faith? What did he believe about Jesus?

3. In the scene outside Nain, Jesus demonstrates both compassion and power in raising the widow’s son to life (Luke 7:11–17). John Calvin called the widow’s son “an emblem of the spiritual life which [Christ] restores to us.”¹ How is Jesus’ life and work pictured in this scene? How is the hope offered to the widow and her son offered to us?

4. Alistair writes, “When Jesus challenges us not just to say, ‘Lord, Lord’ but to mean it and to live it, it is this Jesus, full of compassion and power, who is issuing that challenge.” How is it that our

compassionate Lord can also speak such hard words to us? How do these seemingly contrasting attributes fit together in the person of Jesus?

5. Look again now at what you wrote down under “Getting Started.” In light of the fact that Jesus is both compassionate and powerful, what encouragement can you take as you face the challenges his Word has presented? In light of the fact that he is willing to help, what action can you take?

GIVING PRAISE

When the blest who sleep in Jesus
At his bidding shall arise
From the silence of the grave and from the sea,
And with bodies all celestial
They shall meet him in the skies,
What a gath'ring and rejoicing there will be!

What a gath'ring, what a gath'ring,
What a gath'ring of the ransomed
In the summer land of love!
What a gath'ring, what a gath'ring,
Of the ransomed in that happy home above!

"WHAT A GATHERING!"

BY FANNY CROSBY

ALISTAIR BEGG is the Bible teacher on the daily program Truth For Life and serves as the senior pastor of Parkside Church near Cleveland, Ohio.

Originally from Scotland, Alistair began pastoral ministry in 1975. He teaches directly from the text of the Bible and relies on the Spirit of God to do the work of God through the Word of God in the lives of those who listen.

Alistair's teaching reaches a global audience through radio, social media, truthforlife.org, and the Truth For Life mobile app. He has written several books and routinely speaks at conferences around the world.

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