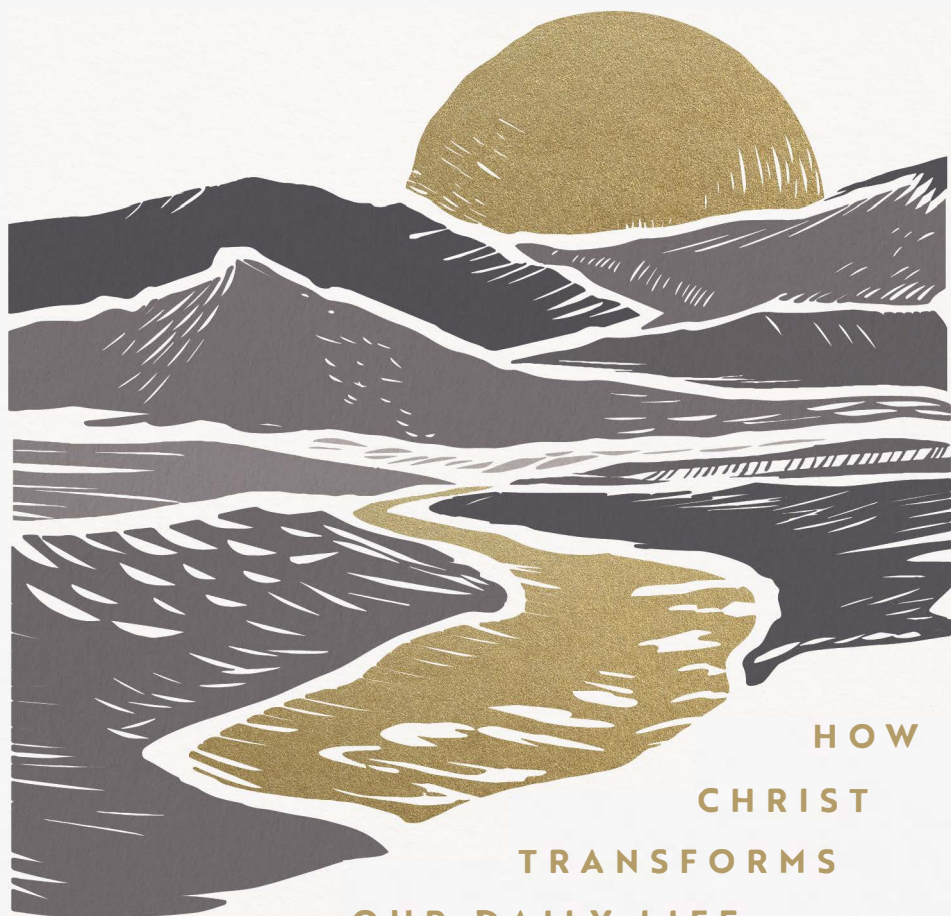


Elyse Fitzpatrick

Foreword by Kelly M. Kopic

Because He Loves Me



HOW
CHRIST
TRANSFORMS
OUR DAILY LIFE

“Thank you, Elyse. The gospel for yesterday but also for today and tomorrow. What you wrote is inspirational, and it overflows with practical application that pushes me to take the gospel into the otherwise private corners of my life. You said in the book, ‘This message will be the only message I’ll ever have from now on.’ That is the case, I am already in line for the next one.”

EDWARD T. WELCH, Counselor and faculty member,
Christian Counseling & Education Foundation

“*Because He Loves Me* will provide hope and a desperately needed supply of ‘spiritual oxygen’ to many Christians who have lost sight of what they have and who they are in Christ and are struggling to live a life they can never live apart from him. We can never afford to move ‘past’ the gospel message of the love of God through Christ.”

NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH, Author;
Radio Host, *Revive Our Hearts*

“God has once again gifted Elyse to explain and apply the gospel of Jesus Christ to one’s Christian walk and struggles. She helps the reader see that the gospel is not just for salvation but also vital for the believer’s everyday life. While many books emphasize the gospel message while neglecting its practical implications, Elyse welds the two together like the New Testament epistles do, continually pointing readers to Jesus Christ and their identity in him. Don’t miss out on this uplifting book!”

STUART W. SCOTT, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling,
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Elyse Fitzpatrick reminds us of why the gospel is such good news—even after a lifetime of familiarity with the message. This is a moving exposition of gospel truth, showing how the doctrinal content of our faith is not merely dry, academic stuff but wonderfully personal and practical truth. And the gospel message is not just the foundation of our new life in Christ but the bricks and mortar as well. That simple but crucial truth is all too often missed in the church today.”

PHILLIP R. JOHNSON, Executive Director, Grace to You

“I want to spend the rest of my life helping the church rediscover the greatness of the gospel. *Because He Loves Me* is a powerful tool for that mission. Elyse writes as someone utterly captivated by Jesus and the beauty of his good news. As you turn these pages, you won’t just learn about the gospel—you’ll feel its weight, its wonder, and its transforming love. Read this book. Let it draw you back to the one who loves you more than you dare imagine and let it help make the gospel great again in your life and in the life of the church.”

DR. DERWIN L. GRAY, Cofounder and Lead Pastor,
Transformation Church; Author, *It’s Time to Heal*

“*Because He Loves Me* is a contemporary Christian classic, reminding readers that the gospel is the indispensable power behind true Christian transformation. My friend Elyse Fitzpatrick skillfully handles the word of God, passionately proclaiming the person and work of Jesus, to help us grasp who we are in Christ so that we might joyfully become more like him. I’m so glad to see this jewel of gospel-centered encouragement refreshed to serve another generation!”

ERIC SCHUMACHER, Author; Pastoral Ministry Director,
Baptist Convention of Iowa

“Many Christian books focus our gaze on the difficult duties of the Christian life, leaving us either triumphant in self-righteous pride or burdened with a backpack full of guilt. Elyse Fitzpatrick shows us how to lay down that burden of guilt at the cross and put to death that self-righteousness, not merely once but daily, as we glory increasingly in the gospel. Here is profound and practical wisdom that will leave you equipped to face life and death with joyful confidence in God’s love for you in Jesus Christ.”

IAIN DUGUID, Professor of Old Testament, Grove City College

“Elyse Fitzpatrick has given us a helpful, encouraging, and stimulating book that explores the practical impact of God’s great love for his people in every aspect of Christian living. Her rich insights into God’s revealed truth, when understood and applied, will certainly equip and inspire Christians to better fulfill their chief end of glorifying and enjoying him forever!”

CAROL J. RUVOLO, Author, *Grace to Stand Firm;*
Grace to Grow; No Other Gospel

Elyse Fitzpatrick

Foreword by Kelly M. Kopic

Because He Loves Me



HOW
CHRIST
TRANSFORMS
OUR DAILY LIFE

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COMPANY

Because He Loves Me (Second Ed.)

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*To Gabriel James and Colin Charles.
May you know and love the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

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Foreword

KELLY M. KAPIC

Recently I watched a video of a young girl playing soccer with such joy and abandon that the crowd couldn't help but cheer and "ooh" and "aah." Her sheer delight propelled her forward even as opponents tried to block her path. Somehow, this ten-year-old wove her way through one defender after another. She knew where she was going and was determined to get there. One could describe Elyse Fitzpatrick in a similar way.

Elyse has caught a glimpse of the goodness of God and the beauty of the gospel, and she is determined to keep moving steadily in that direction without being stopped or distracted by threatening obstacles. She presses forward not merely for herself, however, but to bring the rest of us along. She leads us, not so that we might say ooh and aah about her, but so that we might be drawn to her Savior. He is the one she keeps pointing us to, the one she longs for us to know when we speak of "the gospel."

After teaching theology for many years, I know that simply using the word "gospel" doesn't mean we actually understand what it is or how to apply it. It can lose its force. Words we use often can become thin and vague. Our accounts of the gospel sometimes so emphasize us that they lose focus on Christ. In other cases, I have seen our idea of the gospel get reduced to a single facet (for instance, forgiveness) and so fail to display the whole, glorious picture. Forgiveness indeed, but not merely

the promise of forgiveness. More, not less. Elyse understands that the gospel is always, first and foremost, about the love of the Father, the life-giving power of the Spirit, and the grace of Christ at the center of it all. In these pages she calls us back to that biblical center:

The hope of the gospel is simply this then: that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, was born in a lowly manger, lived a perfect life, suffered from the moment of his first breath, was indescribably shamed and cruelly tortured, and then died ... After three days ... he rose again, still in human flesh, and then after 40 days he ascended to the Father. Because of this, we have an entirely new identity, not based on our accomplishments, our self-respect, the accolades of others, our own good works. We are completely and irrevocably justified; we have been entirely forgiven, reconciled, [and] redeemed. We will have eternal life with him, and everything we go through now is in some way tied to these truths.

She rightly connects the incarnation with our new life in Christ. She connects the indicative with the imperative. God's love and action always is first, and our response is only ever a response to his compassion, nearness, and grace. Christ's story becomes determinative for our story. We stand in awe and gratitude for his sinless life, sacrificial death, life-giving resurrection, and his ongoing, glorified human life. His life is now our life. This does not mean we downplay God's call to obey; instead, it reframes obedience entirely as our response to what God has already done in Christ. He first loved—us. You. Me. Praise God.

My hope is that Elyse's enthusiasm for the gospel and her love for our God will rub off on you as they have on me. I'm grateful for her faithful ministry over the many years since this book was

first written, because over time it has become clear that this was no passing fad for her—no brief emotional high that faded after a year or two—but something genuine, heartfelt, and deeply transformative. She loves Christ and wants us to love him too. And she continues to live what she wrote.

If you are anything like me, that makes you want to learn from her. To God be the glory, for he first loved us so that we might now be free to truly love God and others. May it be so.

Kelly M. Kapic
Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College

The “Must-Read” Introduction: Are You Forgetting Something?

Have you ever had that uncomfortable feeling that you’ve forgotten something important but just can’t remember what it is? I experienced that one Sunday morning as my husband and I were leaving church. I had a niggling sense that I was forgetting something but I just couldn’t pinpoint what it was. Purse? Nope. Bible? Got it. Then, as we proceeded down the main street toward the freeway, suddenly I started yelling, “The boys, the boys, we’ve forgotten the boys!” As you can imagine, my husband instantly whipped the car around and raced back to the church. I jumped out and ran to find them. I had forgotten that my daughter had asked me to take our grandsons home with us, and when she heard how we almost left them, I’m sure it made her think twice about asking us again. I suppose that’s something most of us can relate to, isn’t it? We all know what it’s like to unintentionally forget someone we love.

In Luke’s Gospel, we read a similar story. Having completed their annual pilgrimage to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem,

Mary and Joseph set out to return to Nazareth. After they had gone a day's journey, they began to search for their son among relatives and acquaintances. Although they had presumed that he was somewhere in the group, they soon discovered that he was nowhere to be found. They returned to Jerusalem immediately and, after searching frantically for him for three days, they found him in the temple, in dialog with the teachers (Luke 2:41-46).

It seems to me that in some ways we're like Jesus' parents. Let me explain what I mean. By definition, we Christians joyously celebrate our Passover Lamb, our salvation with Jesus, but then, like his parents, we eagerly head on back to Nazareth, back to living out our beliefs *without a conscious awareness or acknowledgment of his presence*. Of course, we assume that he is somewhere nearby. We haven't felt his absence because we're so preoccupied with living life for him.

Please don't misunderstand. I'm not saying that he has left us behind. No, he has promised never to do that. What I am saying is that once we've been saved, once we've understood and accepted the message of the gospel—the good news—the person and work of Jesus becomes secondary to what we're focused on: living the Christian life. We love to remember him at Christmas and Easter. We adore him as the baby in the manger; we rejoice over the empty tomb. But aside from these two seasons, our attention is primarily focused on us, on our performance, on our spiritual growth. We know that the incarnation (the second Person of the Trinity becoming human) and resurrection (Jesus' rising to life after death) are important truths to our initial salvation, but that's pretty much where their impact ends.

Let me illustrate what I mean. If I asked you, "Where did the ongoing incarnation of Jesus Christ connect with your life yesterday?" would you have an answer? We all know that the crucifixion is important for our initial salvation, but what did

it mean to you this morning? Does Calvary inform and warm your heart when you're waiting in line at the grocery store or hearing bad news from your doctor? Does his sinless life comfort you when you realize that you've just sinned in that same way *again*? In other words, *is he relevant to you in your daily walk with him?*

I don't assume any malice toward him on our part in our effective desertion of the Redeemer. Instead, I think the problem is that the answer to the question, *Is Jesus relevant?* is probably something like, "I guess he should be, but I don't see how." I think that we move past him because we don't really understand how God's love to us in the good news of the gospel message applies to our lives practically, here on this side of Calvary. Yes, of course we know that he died for our sins and rose again, but what does that have to do with living life here in the 21st century? Again, how relevant is the gospel, the work of Jesus Christ, to you?

Perhaps another side to our desertion of the Savior, and a more sinister one, is that, although we as believers should view salvation as his work, we believe that living the Christian life is solely our work. Yes, salvation is a wonderful gift, we think, but Christian living is where we've got to concentrate now.

I believe that many Christians think fondly of Jesus, are sincerely grateful for salvation, and remember his name as a tagline when they pray, but they don't see his work and life as something to contemplate every moment of every day. I have to admit that I, too, once pursued a godly life without much thought of him. Among those who would classify themselves as serious Christians, who study the Bible and want to please God, my guess is that the thought of revisiting the gospel seems like a step back into kindergarten. To put it another way, if I told you that this is a book about the gospel, would you automatically assume that it's for unbelievers?

What I'll be asking you to consider throughout this book can be summarized in one simple question: *In your pursuit of godliness, and in living the Christian life, have you left Jesus behind?* Since this might be a new question for you, let me ask you a few more that will help clarify the answer.

- If I said that we're going to spend page after page considering God's love, would you feel the need to stifle a yawn? What does his transforming love mean to you today?
- Are you more focused on your performance for him or his for you?
- At the end of each day, is there a rest in your soul because of him or is there guilt and a determination that tomorrow you're going to "do better"?
- Do you still feel the need to prove that you're not "all that bad"? Do you get angry when people criticize or ignore you?
- You know that Jesus is the door (John 10:7-9). Do you see how he is your life? Could you tell me exactly how he has transformed your daily life?

As we work through the answers to these questions together, I want you to be encouraged. This is a pursuit that your Savior is passionate about. His magnificent work, so personally costly to him, is not to be relegated to some introductory course that gets stored in the garage with old yearbooks. No, it is to be constantly mused on and relentlessly rejoiced in by all who know him.

So, let's ask him to enlighten us now as we embark upon our journey back to Jerusalem, searching for the beloved Son. Unlike his parents, we won't have to search frantically. No, he is joyfully and patiently waiting to reacquaint you with

his love and to make his presence the most relevant aspect of your life. Let's spend time thinking about our Savior and how what he has already done is meant to be the most significant characteristic of our faith and life for him.

Part One

How God's
Love Transforms
Our Identity

Chapter 1

Remembering His Love

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.

John 3:16

Before you begin this book, it's vital that you know where we're going, so in case you skipped the introduction, please take a moment to go back to it. Thanks!

In this chapter we're going to look at God's love as seen in the good news—the gospel—and then we'll consider why it is important for us to remember it. I know that you probably think you've heard all of this before. Let me assure you, it's my assumption that you have. I know this good news won't be *new* news for many of you. Even so, please let me beg your indulgence while we traverse this well-worn highway again, in search of our Savior.

What Is God's Love and Why Should I Care?

When Forrest Gump humbly proclaimed, "I'm not a smart man, but I know what love is," in a way he spoke for us all. We all think we know what love is. Each of us has our own definitions of love, no matter how naïve or sophisticated we are.

Although we might have some conflicting definitions, this book will remind you what *real* love looks like—love that has given sacrificially, transforms powerfully, and lasts eternally. Simply put, real love was profoundly and perfectly personified in Jesus Christ, the God-Man who assumed human flesh, lived a perfect life, was executed on a Roman cross, rose from the dead, and then ascended to heaven, still embodied in human flesh, to pave the way there for each of us. Real love is personified in the gospel, and living in its light is utterly essential for our transformation.

It's essential for us to think about God's love today because it is only his love that can grant us the *joy* that will strengthen our hearts, the *courage* that will embolden us in our fight against sin, and the *assurance* that will enable us to open up our lives to him so that he might work powerfully in us. If we're not completely convinced that his love is *ours right now*—fully and forever ours—we'll always hide in the shadows, focusing on our performance, fearing his wrath. Prayer will be hard because we won't want to approach him or be transparent before him. Witnessing will be a chore, for who would want to talk to others about a god who is demanding, angry, or cold? If we don't consciously live in the light of his love, the gospel will be secondary, virtually meaningless, and Jesus Christ will fade into insignificance. Our faith will become all about us, our performance, and how we think we're doing, and our transformation will be hindered.

What do we need to remember? Simply that God loves us so much that he crushed his Son so that we might be his, and that this love isn't based on our worthiness to receive it or our performance once we have. His love doesn't fluctuate from day to day. It was settled the moment he set it upon you before the foundation of the world. God has spoken to us about his love and the gospel in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever

believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Will that love transform the way you live today? It’s meant to, but exactly how?

The Gospel... Again?

I realize that you might be thinking, “Oh yes, God’s love, Jesus and the gospel—yes, yes, I know all about that. It’s true that I love that story, and it’s good to remember it so that I can tell it to my unsaved friends, but frankly, isn’t that just a little basic now that I’m saved? I mean, the gospel is great for those beginning the Christian life, but I think I’ve grasped it already. After all, I am a Christian! Are you saying that there’s something more here that I need to consider?” Yes, in fact I’m saying that if you neglect to focus on God’s love for you in Christ, your Christianity will soon be reduced to a program of self-improvement—just one of many methods to help you “get your act together.” And although that might seem like a worthy goal, it isn’t true Christianity at all. True Christianity is not a program of self-improvement; it’s an acknowledgment that something more than self-improvement is needed. What’s needed is *death* and *resurrection*: gospel words, gospel constructs, gospel motives, gospel power—a loving Redeemer.

To illustrate what I mean about our need to remember God’s love for us in the gospel, I’ve written out a very significant number of verses that encapsulate this message. Because I assume that you’re already pretty familiar with these passages, their context, and what they signify, I’m not going to explain them. Instead, I’ll let them speak directly to you. So please fight the temptation to skim over them because you already know about them. Instead, please ask the Spirit to make them alive to you again.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every

spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6)

By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners. (Romans 5:19)

For there is no distinction ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:22-23)

In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.
(Genesis 12:3)

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped ... [was] born in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:5-7)

Her offspring ... shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"
(Luke 1:28)

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." (Luke 1:30-32)

The time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:6-7)

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

So by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” (Matthew 21:37)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53:2)

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22)

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph ... the son of Adam, the son of God. (Luke 3:23, 38).

“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.” (Luke 4:18-19)

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3)

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. (John 1:11)

He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. (Acts 10:38)

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. (Isaiah 52:13)

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God ... Blessed are you ... For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father.” (Matthew 16:16-17)

“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me?” (John 14:9)

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Matthew 16:23)

Jesus ... emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant. (Philippians 2:5, 7)

He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:4-5)

“One of you will betray me.” (John 13:21)

“You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’” (Mark 14:27)

“If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And

they all said the same. (Mark 14:31)

“Let not your hearts be troubled.” (John 14:1)

“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” (Matthew 26:38)

And ... he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

(Matthew 26:39)

“So, could you not watch with me one hour?”

(Matthew 26:40)

“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” (Matthew 26:42)

He ... found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. (Matthew 26:43)

“See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” (Matthew 26:45)

“Would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”

(Luke 22:48)

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me ... Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” (Zechariah 13:7)

And they all left him and fled. (Mark 14:50)

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. (Mark 14:55)

“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” ...

“I am.” (Mark 14:61-62)

“You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?”

... “I am not.” (John 18:17)

“This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.” (Matthew 21:38)

“What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” And the guards received him with blows. (Mark 14:63-65)

His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. (Isaiah 52:14)

“You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world.”

(John 18:37)

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace ... and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. (Mark 15:16-19)

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” (John 19:4-6)

“Behold your King!” (John 19:14)

“Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” ...

“Shall I crucify your King?” ...

“We have no king but Caesar.”

So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

(John 19:15-16)

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him.

And they led him out to crucify him. (Mark 15:20)

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull ...

There they crucified him. (John 19:16-18)

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away ... who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ... Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief.

(Isaiah 53:7-8, 10)

“Woman, behold, your son!” (John 19:26)

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Matthew 27:46)

“I thirst.” (John 19:28)

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”
(Luke 23:46)

“It is finished.” (John 19:30)

Now ... we have died with Christ. (Romans 6:8)

“Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39)

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and
at once there came out blood and water. (John 19:34)

In him we have redemption through his blood, the
forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of
his grace, which he lavished upon us. (Ephesians 1:7-8)

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the
point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

It is God who justifies. (Romans 8:33)

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and
whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom
the Lord will not count his sin.” (Romans 4:7-8)

“Certainly this man was innocent!” (Luke 23:47)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in him we might become the righteousness of
God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ
died for the ungodly ... but God shows his love for
us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for

us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:6, 8-10)

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away.

(Matthew 27:59-60)

And they made his grave ... with a rich man in his death. (Isaiah 53:9)

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3)

“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.” (Mark 16:6)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

(Ephesians 2:1, 4-5)

We believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him ... The life he lives he lives to God. (Romans 6:8-10)

“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” (John 20:15)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

“Mary...” (John 20:16)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35, 38-39)

“Rabboni!” (John 20:16)

“I will never believe.” (John 20:25)

Christ died for our sins. (1 Corinthians 15:3)

“Peace be with you.” (John 20:26)

Was buried... (1 Corinthians 15:4)

“Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (John 20:27)

Was raised... (1 Corinthians 15:4)

“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

He appeared... (1 Corinthians 15:5)

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (Acts 1:9)

Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)

We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)

Christ is ... seated at the right hand of God.
(Colossians 3:1)

... and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that ... he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"
(Romans 8:15)

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:30)

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. (Revelation 19:11-13)

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:4)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ... No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1, 3-5)

If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? (Romans 8:31, 33)

When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:10-12)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who ... hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until

we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
(Ephesians 1:11-14)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father ...
that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may
have strength to comprehend with all the saints what
is the breadth and length and height and depth, and
to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,
that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
(Ephesians 3:14, 17-19)

In this the love of God was made manifest among us,
that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we
might live through him. In this is love, not that we
have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son
to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son
himself will also be subjected to him who put all
things in subjection under him, that God may be all
in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28)

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:21)

Time for a Heart Check

Please stop now for a moment of reflection. What did you think as you read the preceding verses? Allow me to suggest some possibilities:

- *Oops, you caught me.* I was hoping I could skip by these; maybe I'll go back and force myself to read them now...
- *Yada, yada, yada.* I've heard this a thousand times, maybe not in that exact way, but a thousand times anyway. I need something new—perhaps a few concrete steps to

help me change, not this same-old, same-old... I know it should transform me, but I don't see how.

- *Oh dear, not again!* I know that I should be responding with some sort of gratitude because of God's love for me, but I already feel too guilty. This story doesn't remind me of his love for me, only of the way I fail to love him. Frankly, this story terrifies me.
- *That reminds me...* I know that there was a time when that story moved my heart and made me thankful, but that hasn't happened in a long while. I'm really going to get my act together now. Really.
- *I'm different from other people.* There was a time when that story meant something to me but I've had a hard life. I guess I know that Jesus loves me, but I need someone with real arms to hug me and stop the pain. God's love is nice, but it just isn't tangible enough for me now.
- *I've tried to live the life I know God wants me to live, but I just can't.* I really don't see how that story about God's love in Christ intersects with my struggle with worry (or gambling, gluttony, pornography, pride, anger, or gossip). I'm looking for something that will make me better so that I can stop hurting people and live a productive, healthy life.
- *Sorry, too busy to read. Can you text me? Gotta run!*

Where did you find yourself in those responses? I'll admit that sometimes it's hard for me to connect the dots between God's love and my daily life. I continually strive and frequently fail to see how his love in Christ is all that I need and to understand how to live with the gospel motivating and informing every decision, every action, every word.

If you found yourself in any of the statements above, don't worry. Unless we're very intentional about meditating on

these truths, they slip from our thoughts like misty dreams that evaporate in the morning light. That's why Luther said we must "take heed, then, to embrace ... the love and kindness of God ... [and to] daily exercise [our] faith therein, entertaining no doubt of God's love and kindness."¹

I've written this book because grasping the reality of God's love will provide every ultimate answer to every question we have about him and ourselves. The gospel will not answer every practical question or quell occasional confusion or doubts. But it will give us a solid starting place, a foundation from which we will struggle and learn. It will tell us who we are, why we're here, and how we're supposed to do what we're supposed to be doing. Delighting in God's love will transform everything about us, including who we are, or our identity. This love is illustrated for us in Scripture, and particularly in the story we call "the gospel."

Oh, here's one more item you'll need to know. I'll be using the term *gospel* very frequently in this book, so I want to define what I mean here. The gospel was summarized in the verses above. It is the incarnation, sinless life, death in our place, burial, bodily resurrection, ascension, and eternal reign of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. I'm going to be using the term *gospel* as shorthand for all those truths, and I'll also be helping you see how they are meant to tangibly impact every facet of your life today.

So now that you've gotten a taste of where we're going, let me give you a personal word of encouragement. If you're in Christ today, God's promise of relationship and identity with him is rooted in his ageless love: *I have loved you so much that I sent my beloved Son to bring you to myself; that in believing this you might have eternal relationship with me. I will be your God; you will be my child. Rest and rejoice in all my love has done to transform you.* If, on the other hand, you're not sure you're a Christian, will you please turn to the appendix right away? That way you'll know what I mean when I talk about

God's love for us in Christ and what our response needs to be. Thank you!

In chapter 2, we'll start our discussion about God's astounding love with an initial look at who we are and how his love shapes our identity. For now, though, here's a reminder to us about the depth of his love for us: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation [the one who bears and takes away his wrath] for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Who are we? We are people who are being transformed by his love.

Realizing How God's Love Transforms Your Identity and Life

At the end of each chapter, you'll find a question or two to challenge you. Please plan to take the time to do this practical work, as the point of this book is not mere information but the transformation of your heart and life. These practical exercises will help you as you cooperate with the Spirit's purpose in this pursuit. You could also gather together with a friend or two to go through this study and the questions.

1. What are your hopes or expectations as you begin this study?
2. My premise for this book is that many of us are so focused on living the Christian life, we've left Jesus behind. What do you think of that statement and why?
3. To help yourself remember, summarize in a few sentences what you've learned from this chapter.