



Who exactly did Jesus love?
As we contemplate Jesus' heart and actions toward the lost and brokenhearted characters in the Bible, we begin to know more fully how God feels toward us—we experience how Jesus comes alongside and loves us in our own doubt, fears, and need for healing.

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one



JESUS, THE MOST COMPLETE HUMAN

*You know that he was revealed so that he might take away sins,
and there is no sin in him.*

1 JOHN 3:5

At the time of Jesus' coming the world was in a desperate situation. God had created the world with perfect *shalom* (completeness, wholeness, peace). Adam and Eve experienced this shalom with God—there was nothing that hindered their relationship with Him. They experienced shalom within themselves—no ego got in the way of honesty about who they were. They experienced shalom with each other—they didn't hide from each other or hurt each other; they enjoyed only love and

community. Adam and Eve experienced shalom with creation—they didn't seek to dominate creation and use it for their own gain. They only sought to rule over it and subdue it as God had commanded them. But you know the story. They disobeyed God, and with that act of disobedience came broken shalom with God, within the self, with each other, and with creation. When Jesus entered the story, the people of the world were desperate for a way to restore shalom and to live the way they were meant to live.

Right into this dark and desperate world, the plan of redemption is enacted. God does what He always does: He takes the darkness and speaks light into it, creating something out of nothing. Jesus comes, heaven come to earth. As He brings heaven to earth, it changes everything for us. Romans 5:6 describes it: "For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly."

The movie *Avengers: Endgame* has a scene near the end that gets me hyped every time I see it. If you haven't seen it, spoiler alert! I am about to tell what happens. In this scene, it appears that all hope is lost. Our heroes have battled valiantly, but the enemy, Thanos, has proved too strong for them. Thor, Captain America, and Iron Man together are no match for him. We look on helplessly as Captain America seems to accept his fate; he knows he won't

**When all seems
helpless and hopeless,
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win, but he will fight anyway. Just then, in the background, a portal opens up, and through that portal walks Black Panther, Shuri, and Okoye, and behind them an enormous army of Wakandan warriors. Right then—right in that moment—you know the tide has turned.

You know our heroes will save the day and defeat Thanos and his army. Reinforcements showed up at just the right time. I remember watching this movie on opening night in the movie theater. The teenagers in front of me were crying and

laughing. While I was a tad bit more reserved, my heart felt that same happiness.

But a movie high can't compare to the exponentially higher joy I feel when I think about Christ coming into our hopeless world to save us. So, when you hear "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly," you can almost see that portal open, with redemption breaking through the fall. When all seems helpless and hopeless, our Redeemer makes His appearance, and you know who is about to win.

JESUS RESTORES SHALOM WITH GOD

Jesus lived in complete peace with God. Romans 5:1 points to Jesus as the One who brings us peace with God: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Looking back to the original status of things in the garden, we see Adam and Eve at complete peace with God. They walked and talked in the garden with Him. They were naked and unashamed before Him. What a beautiful picture. In their relationship there was no striving, no fear, no hiding. This is also the way Jesus lived in relationship to the Father.

Doesn't your heart long for that relationship of trust and rest? If you feel a pull toward living at peace with God, it is because you were made for it! Your heart was made to find its satisfaction in Him. Jesus knew this and modeled that life of peace with God to the fullest.

Jesus said He always lived to do the things that pleased the Father, not to gain or earn anything by it but because that was His

If you feel a pull toward living at peace with God, it is because you were made for it! Your heart was made to find its satisfaction in Him.

HE LOVED THEM

greatest joy (John 8:29). Jesus always resisted temptation. Where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus succeeded. He lived at peace with God. Jesus lived out shalom. Christ's life of perfect peace with God was the key to undoing the effects of the fall. Jesus' life of complete shalom with God didn't just affect Him. The way Jesus lived affected all of creation from eternity past to eternity future.

Because of the way Jesus lived—because He lived as a perfect human was meant to live—we are now justified. His life of choosing to love and honor God, of being perfect, is now our record, given to us as a gift of grace. God sees us as perfect. We are hidden in Christ. His death to atone for all our sins makes us completely forgiven. Jesus' resurrection was the sign that God accepted His work on our behalf. We now have peace with God. Easter is the start of something; it is the launching of the new world. God will do for all of creation what He did for Jesus—providing rebirth, re-making, renewing. Redemption is for all of us, and we can take part in it. This peace that Jesus experienced with God was a peace for the world. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, didn't just sit back and relax; He actively worked to restore and give peace to others. His life brings the promise of peace on earth and good will to all people.

JESUS RESTORES SHALOM WITH SELF

Jesus knew who He was, and He lived fully in His identity of the Beloved. Jesus didn't try to be anything other than what He was. He never doubted who He was or what He was meant to do. We see this in the temple when Jesus was a young boy: "Didn't you know it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49), and it was clearly declared when He was baptized: "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17). Jesus embodied the perfect example of living at peace with self.

Peace with ourselves is also part of what God intended for us from the beginning. It's what we were created for: to know who we are without constant second-guessing or underlying feelings of inadequacy or feeling like unworthy impostors.

Jesus won for us a new identity. He redeemed us to make us accepted and loved.

This shalom with self doesn't mean that Jesus didn't face any hardship or ask God for a different way to accomplish salvation, but He ultimately submitted to God's will. As He prayed in Gethsemane, Jesus petitioned for some other way to accomplish the plan of redemption, praying openly, vulnerable with His thoughts, not trying to sugarcoat His feelings. Jesus cried out to His Father. Jesus, who had always experienced complete and uninterrupted peace with His Father, was going to experience a divide—a break in relationship—for our sake. That is the thought that made Jesus sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Where Adam and Eve failed in the garden of Eden, Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane that His Father's will be done. Jesus succeeded and won for us a new identity. He redeemed us to make us accepted and loved.

JESUS RESTORES SHALOM WITH OTHERS

Jesus lived to make peace with others. Matthew 9:36 says, "When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd." *The Message* puts it this way: "Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd."

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Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but made Himself a servant (Phil. 2:6–7). He loved others, provided for them, healed them, and restored them. He looked for the marginalized and brought them in. His whole life was filled with service. He empathized with others, felt compassion, hurt with people. He wanted people to be whole; this was His mission. Jesus didn't just make them whole physically, but worked toward their wholeness emotionally and spiritually. He loved people into new life.

JESUS RESTORES SHALOM WITH CREATION

Jesus introduces a new way of living, one of giving instead of consuming. Colossians 1:19–20 says, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

What does the Bible say about how Jesus interacts with creation? You may not have considered this question very often, but it is essential to learning who Jesus is and how He experienced the wholeness of shalom. Jesus is reconciling creation to Himself. He sees the flowers of the field. Not a bird falls from the sky without His noticing. Jesus walked on water. He wasn't afraid of the storms while out at sea; He actually slept in the boat while the storm raged around Him. Lisa Sharon Harper, in her book *The Very Good Gospel*, writes,

Jesus exercised dominion over creation to serve humanity. He multiplied bread and fish to feed thousands, and he smeared mud on the eyes of a blind man to give him sight (see John 9:1–12). Later Jesus was crucified on a tree. God—the Creator of the tree—was nailed to it. The original

sin of humanity was committed in relation to a tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Now the redemption of humanity and the reversal of the Fall happens in relation to a tree. Then Jesus conquered death, opening his own grave. And in the end there is only one tree, the Tree of Life. The tree's leaves are for the healing of the nations (see Revelation 22:1–2).¹

Jesus lived in a way that redeemed and restored every part of creation. Because of what He has done, now we can partake in redemption; we can do this through our work and our vocation. We now are living into the holy mystery—this mystery that God uses His created ones, who were broken by the fall, to bring about His redemption. Because of the way He lived, we now experience in part that same restored shalom.

It is important to understand how the wholeness of Christ's life is pushing to bring heaven down to earth, pushing to reverse the effects of the fall. Together, let's look over Jesus' shoulder and see how Jesus lived in shalom, observing the way He loved. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we will seek to become more like Him. We will understand what it means to bring shalom to others and to live in shalom ourselves.

two



JESUS WITH THE DOUBTERS

*The world of Christian faith is not a fairy-tale, make-believe world,
question-free and problem-proof, but a world where doubt is never far
from faith's shoulder.*

OS GUINNESS

*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out
your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said
to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

JOHN 20:27-28 NIV

When Jesus was putting together His team of disciples, the ones who would spend every day of His ministry life by His side, supporting and helping Him, He put together the most

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normal and average group of men and women you could imagine. Jesus included those with weak faith; He included the doubter. If I were to put together a support system, I would load it up with hype men and women. I'd want to look around and see a group of friends who believed in me more than I believed in myself.

Jesus didn't operate with a need for hype men; Jesus needed only the love of His Father. Jesus' sufficiency came from the perfect love shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That love within the triune Godhead was His operating system. That love enabled Him to deal so gently with those who doubted Him.

Three stories about Jesus encountering doubters provide a beautiful demonstration of Christ's love at work with those whose faith was weak. These people were believers. They came to Jesus. They wanted to be near Him. But they also doubted. Their hearts were conflicted.

A FAMILY OF DOUBTERS

Some of the doubters Jesus encountered were part of His own family. Matthew 12:46–50 tells the story:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (NIV)

This story appears just a few verses after Matthew recounts how the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of casting out demons by

the power of the devil (Matt. 12:22–37). His mother and brothers undoubtedly heard about this; they knew all the rumors about Jesus. They were familiar with the way the religious leaders talked about Him, and they were worried. Something needed to be done, and they were going to do it. They were staging an intervention of sorts. Rumors were swirling about the things Jesus was doing and what He was saying. He had a strange group of people following Him and listening to all His teachings. And it was just Jesus—her son, their brother, the one they’d lived with day after day, eating meals, sharing a home. It was Jesus, who’d been a carpenter only a year ago—and now look at Him! Who did He think He was? So Jesus’ family went to Him. They would remind Him of where He came from; they would bring Him home.

Even Mary—the one who was visited by an angel sent by God, conceived a baby without the help of any man, saw the shepherds come to praise her baby, received the gifts from the wise men, and heard Anna’s and Elizabeth’s prophetic words spoken over her son—knew better than anyone else about who this man Jesus was, and yet she doubted. She went to bring Him home; she went to rein Him in: “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21 NIV).

These family members send word to Jesus: “Your family is here. They want to talk with you.” How does Jesus deal with this request? By redefining what family means. Jesus invites everyone in. The doubts of His mother and brothers do not make Him question His mission. Jesus reminds them and us that the way to be a part of the family is to remember who the true Father is and to live in that relationship.

**Jesus uses the doubt
of His own family
members to call more
people to Himself.**

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Jesus uses the doubt of His own family members to call more people to Himself. His statement doesn't exclude His family, but rather continues to demonstrate to them the truth of who He is. Their doubt is the catalyst to bring more people into the family of God, to bring more people truly home. One commentator writes,

Jesus was not so much concerned with traditional family arrangements as he was with the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God . . . and how this anticipation required a new kind of household. *Blood relatives and language were no longer decisive criteria for the new Household that God and the ministry of Jesus make possible.*¹

YOU STILL DON'T KNOW ME?

Some of the closest friends of Jesus struggled to fully grasp who He was. The book of John gives us a glimpse of this in John 14:8–11, where Jesus responds to Philip's questions:

"Lord," said Philip, "show us the Father, and that's enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who lives in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Otherwise, believe because of the works themselves."

This little interchange takes place near the end of Christ's ministry. Jesus is sitting with His disciples and preemptively comforting and preparing their hearts for what is about to happen. He tells

those around Him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:6–7).

Jesus has just described Himself as the way to God, and Philip’s response is to ask Jesus if they can just see God instead. Philip doesn’t understand that Jesus has essentially explained to them that He and the Father are one. It’s not just that Philip doesn’t completely understand, but rather that He struggles to believe this claim. *How can Jesus and God be one? Is Jesus really claiming to be the Father? How is this even a possibility?*

Commentator Frederick Bruner explains what’s happening in this exchange between Philip and Jesus: “The human being wants to know God. Jesus says, in effect, ‘Welcome home.’”²

Jesus leans into Philip’s doubts and one more time—for the millionth time—tells him, “I am the One you are looking for.” Then Jesus tells Philip and the other disciples, who I am sure have the same questions and doubts as Philip, that He never does anything without His Father. Jesus explains that He only speaks the Father’s words and only does what the Father wants. Jesus doesn’t get angry at Philip for his question. He doesn’t roll His eyes and walk away angry because, after months and months, these guys still don’t get it. He just tells him again, “I’m the One.”

Jesus makes a concession for Philip and essentially says, “If you can’t believe I and the Father are locked together, then please just look at the things you have seen Me do and ask yourself, ‘Who could do these things except for God Himself?’” Jesus basically says, “If you can’t believe your ears, if you can’t let your heart believe, then just go ahead and believe your eyes. You have seen the evidence. Believe what you have seen.” Jesus appeals to the natural to prove the supernatural. He doesn’t demand that Philip

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rise above and just believe. Jesus takes him back to all the things Philip had experienced and asks him to look, to remember, and to believe. He doesn't say, "I shouldn't have to prove Myself to you. You should just trust Me." Jesus builds Philip's faith. He does not shame Philip for his doubt.

MY LORD AND MY GOD!

Thomas may be the most well-known doubter from Scripture, and most of us are familiar with his story from John 20:24–29:

Now Thomas [called "Twin"], one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (NIV)

This interchange between Thomas and Jesus takes place after Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus has appeared to Mary at the tomb and then to most of His disciples. The other ten disciples tell Thomas that Jesus is alive, but Thomas remains skeptical: "I'll believe it when I see it." Then eight days later Jesus comes to him. Think of how Thomas felt during those eight days. Perhaps Thomas sat

uncomfortably with his doubts and skepticism. Maybe he felt vindicated, having laid down an impossible ask, thrown the ultimate gauntlet.

But then Jesus comes. I love the scene being set in these verses. The disciples are indoors; the doors are locked. The disciples are probably still scared about what had happened, scared they would be uncovered as followers of Christ. They were uncertain about their future and perhaps even about their faith. And then Jesus appears! He greets His disciples with “Peace be with you.” Then He turns His attention to Thomas, singling him out. He doesn’t define Thomas by the doubts Thomas had, like we do. Jesus defines Thomas by His own great love for him. Jesus proves to be the Good Shepherd here, and He goes after Thomas, the struggling one. Jesus turns His gaze to him. Can you even imagine what must have been going through Thomas’s mind? I mean, he’d been wrong—really wrong. I know when I am wrong about something or someone, I fully expect to be called out over it. I don’t expect grace or kindness. I expect justice. But that’s not the way of our Savior. Jesus says, “Look. Touch. See. Don’t be faithless but believe.” And Thomas responds with, “My Lord and my God!” My Lord and my God. Jesus claims Thomas as His, and Thomas responds by claiming Jesus as his.

Because Jesus cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (NIV), Thomas was able to cry out “My Lord and my God!” and be completely accepted. The *Africa Bible Commentary* describes the way Jesus responds to our doubts:

Jesus doesn’t define Thomas by his doubts. Jesus defines Thomas by His own great love for him.

On such occasions Jesus stands like a mother beside us to protect us. In our fears, our confusion, our anxiety and our

sinfulness, the risen Lord stands with his own and among his own. Like a mother Jesus takes us into his arms to protect us. When Jesus is with us, we know that we are blessed with the peace of his presence. Today our world is cruel and often frightening. We are fearful and prefer to stay behind closed doors. At such moments Jesus Christ comes to us, without being invited, and takes the central place by calming the storms and declaring, *Peace be with you.*³

In the midst of our doubts, we can be completely honest with God about them. Beloved, Jesus didn't define His own family or Philip or Thomas by their doubts. Jesus doesn't define you by yours either; He defines you as His dearly loved child. He comes in patience. He comes in kindness. He comes to us right where we are so we can then fall back in amazement at His love and say, "My Lord

**If you are doubting
today, He is patient
with your doubt.**

and my God!" If you are doubting today, He is patient with your doubt. Remember these stories. Remember the kindness and love of Jesus. Pray for the faith to cry out "My Lord and my God!" Jesus has a word for you as well: "Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe."

Doubting one, you are blessed—truly blessed. Jesus understands how difficult it would be to believe and not see. Because of that He proclaims a blessing over you if you do believe, even if your faith is weak—maybe especially if your faith is weak.

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