

**Whatever you think
about Jesus, He's more.
*Incomparably more.***

Get to know Jesus on this fifty-day journey. In these meditations, you'll spend time reflecting on the person of Christ—His humanity, divinity, childhood, adulthood, and more. An ideal devotional companion for the season leading up to and immediately following Easter.

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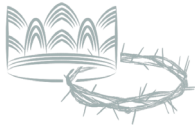
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Day 1

Somebody's Perfect

The Moral Perfection of Christ

“He has done everything well.”

—MARK 7:37

Where to begin? In starting a book on Jesus, the options are truly unlimited. We could start before time, where He has existed for eternity—the uncreated Creator. We could start at a manger in Bethlehem, where He who made the universe condescended to inhabit planet Earth. We could start with the events leading up to what we now know as Easter, where His purpose in coming here came to full fruition and where we humans were given the inexpressible hope of living forever. With Him.

I believe we do well, however, right here at the beginning, to simply stand back and try to take in the overall reality of Jesus. His utter beauty. His true perfection.

He is altogether ideal.

This statement stands out most vividly to us when we consider how far short we fall of being ideal ourselves. We don't have it together *physically*. We don't have it together *spiritually*. We don't have it together *morally*. Hardworking and well-meaning as we may be, we are still sinners—repeat offenders desperately in need of a Savior.

We *wish* it weren't so. We *try* not to be. We feel the inner urge to do more and be more. To be different. To be better. Yet we consistently come up short, as does everyone else. People can be strong in certain areas, perhaps in several areas. We're even strong in a few ourselves. But none of us is strong in *everything*. We each possess our weak areas.

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Stop and wonder, then, that Jesus has *no* weak areas. He is perfect in every way.

The writers who prophesied about Him in the Old Testament saw Him as “fairer than the sons of men” (Ps. 45:2 NKJV). Israel’s Messiah, as envisioned in their minds under the inspiration of God’s Spirit, was to be a man of perfection, surpassing all other humans.

**He is not merely good;
He is perfect.
He is not
merely enough;
*He is everything.***

But then to actually *meet* Him when He came, to spend time with Him, and to realize He truly was perfection at every turn, that you could find nothing at which He didn’t excel . . . what an *incomparable* experience.

This is not to say that Jesus struck everyone He met as being physically perfect. We have no New Testament evidence that He was the

equivalent of a male model in His day, though as a carpenter He was surely fit. The prophet Isaiah had even stated that the coming Messiah

didn’t have an impressive form
or majesty that we should look at him,
no appearance that we should desire him. (Isa. 53:2)

Yet people did desire Jesus. They followed Him without question because no matter what His appearance, His beauty was unmistakable. He possessed every grace, every virtue, in perfect tension and balance. Not one of them was missing. Think of that. We’ve never seen what sheer perfection looks like in a person. Perfect symmetry between the inner and the outer. Perfect alignment of heart and character. It’s almost impossible to envision such perfection. But there it is in Jesus.

He is not merely good; *He is perfect.*

He is not merely enough; *He is everything.*

DAY 1: Somebody's Perfect

He also kept the law of God perfectly. And let's be sure we're clear on what this means. Not only did He avoid committing even a single sin—an accomplishment that to our minds, knowing our struggles, is remarkable enough—but the perfection of Jesus went beyond mere sin avoidance. He actively lived the whole standard of God's law. None of it was for show. Everything He said and did was said and done with complete purity of motive. He fulfilled the law's mandate every moment of every day and went beyond that to fulfill the *spirit* behind the law.

I think of that memorable verse in Micah 6:

He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (v. 8 ESV)

That's a solid summary of what God's law requires of us: perfect fairness and perfect love, delivered in perfect humility. That's precisely what Jesus did every second of His earthly life—and He did it perfectly. People could be overheard saying, "He has done all things well" (Mark 7:37). They couldn't help but notice.

So let us, too, pause to wonder at the perfection of Jesus.

He is not merely good; *He is perfect.*

He is not merely enough; *He is everything.*

He is not merely our Savior and Lord; *He is our one priceless treasure.*

We have in Him the most beautiful thing in all the world, the most desirable of all possessions—the most wonderful relationship a human being could ever possibly hope to have with anyone.

When we have Jesus, we have all we really need for time and eternity.

John Flavel, a Puritan pastor from the 1600s, in a sermon titled "Christ Altogether Lovely," asked his listeners to "cast your eyes among all created things, survey the universe."

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You will observe strength in one, beauty in a second, faithfulness in a third, wisdom in a fourth; but you shall find none excelling in them all as Christ does. Bread has one quality, water another, clothing another, medicine another; but none has them all in itself as Christ does. He is bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, a garment to the naked, healing to the wounded; and whatever a soul can desire is found in him.⁶

Look anywhere else to find perfection, and you will never find it. Look to any other person as a model of flawless loveliness, and you will inevitably be disappointed. Look to anything or anybody—your spouse, your home, your job, yourself—to provide unmitigated satisfaction, and while you may see a number of impressive, desirable qualities there, you'll also see deficiencies that remind you they can never be everything you'll ever need.

But look to Jesus, and He will exceed your highest hopes.

Look to Jesus, and He will surpass your expectations.

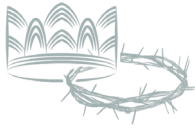
Look to Jesus, and you will find yourself in the presence of utter perfection.

Is Christ your most precious treasure? What are some of the qualities you value most in Him?

How could a greater focus on the perfection of Jesus temper your disappointment with others? With yourself?

Oh Father, words fail to express the wonder of who Jesus is. He is lovely, He is good. He is perfect in every way. I don't have to look anywhere else, pursuing other things and other people, in hopes of being satisfied. In Him I have all that I need. May my life reflect His beauty to a world that desperately needs to see Your glory and grace.

AMEN.



Day 2

Ahead of Time

The Preexistence of Christ

He is before all things
and by him all things hold together.

—COLOSSIANS 1:17

My reading pile almost always includes at least one biography. I've loved these life stories since I was a girl and have quite the collection in my library. Most of the biographies I pick up feature a person I already know a little something about, whether it's a Christian missionary, a historical figure, a public servant, or just an individual who's accomplished something noteworthy.

But the part of most people's story that's usually less familiar to me is their backstory: where they came from, their family of origin, the circumstances surrounding their birth, and the bearing all of that had on the direction their life would take.

Jesus, though, breaks the mold on the biography model. For all the fuss we make about His birthday every year (and we should!), the Christmas event is not where His backstory begins.

Jesus lived *before* He was born.

Pause and ponder how that statement makes Jesus incomparable. His existence didn't begin with His miraculous conception and His birth in a stable. In fact, the Christmas story itself hints at His prior existence. Long before anyone ever sang "O Little Town of Bethlehem" on Christmas Eve, the prophet Micah foretold that from this inconsequential city would come a "ruler over Israel." But though this Ruler would be *born* there, He wouldn't *come* from there, because

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his origin is from antiquity,
from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)

For another hint, page even further back through the Old Testament to Genesis 17, which describes the covenant God made with Abraham. Then fast-forward to the gospel of John, where Jesus outraged His first-century Jewish opponents by saying, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

That’s right. Not “I was”—*I am*. Jesus not only defies the restraints of chronology but also the constraints of grammar. That’s why John the Baptist, who was born to Elizabeth six months before Jesus was born to Mary (see Luke 1:36), could declare that “the one coming *after* me ranks *ahead* of me, because he existed *before me*” (John 1:15). Wow.

Jesus existed before *everything*, actually. There was never a time when He did not exist in all His fullness.

So what do we know about His life before He came to this earth? While much of this is mystery, we know that He was “with God” and that He “*was* God” (John 1:1). He had a close, personal relationship with God, living “at the Father’s side” (v. 18). He was eternally one and equal with the Father, and He possessed all the glory of the Father (17:5).

And what was He doing in eternity past? One thing we know is that He was actively at work. For inside the mystery that’s revealed to us as the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—Jesus was the uncreated Creator of everything that exists.

“All things were created through him,” states John 1:3, “and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.” In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul further quantifies what is meant by “all things”:

Everything was created by him,
in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions

DAY 2: Ahead of Time

or rulers or authorities—
all things have been created through him and for him.
(Col. 1:16)

But Jesus is more than the Creator. He didn't just fling the universe into existence and hope it survived the trip. He was, is, and remains the Sustainer of our world. He's had it all under control from the beginning, and He holds it all together today—"sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3).

Proverbs 8 gives us another glimpse of the preexistent life of Jesus. This passage is a personified description of *wisdom*. And Jesus, we're told in Scripture, is Himself "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). These verses take on new wonder when we read them in that light:

"I was there when he established the heavens,
when he laid out the horizon on the surface of the ocean,
when he placed the skies above,
when the fountains of the ocean gushed out . . .
when he laid out the foundations of the earth.
I was a skilled craftsman beside him." (Prov. 8:27–30)

Don't you love that picture? When God created the world, Jesus was there—not as a passive spectator, but actively working with His Father—just as He was when God devised and set in motion the plan of salvation. And as they worked together, they did it with joy:

"I was his delight every day,
always rejoicing before him.
I was rejoicing in his inhabited world,
delighting in the children of Adam." (vv. 30–31)

**Through all of
eternity, Jesus was
a joyful God. The
Father and the Son
took great delight
in each other.**

INCOMPARABLE

Through all of eternity, Jesus was a joyful God. The Father and the Son took great delight in each other. And Jesus was “always rejoicing” not only in the created world but in its beloved inhabitants, “the children of Adam” (Prov. 8:31)—the people He’d made to inhabit His created world.

You.

Me.

Us.

We are His delight.

This is our Jesus—the One who told His disciples that He loved them the way the Father loved Him (John 15:9). Why did He want them to know that? “So that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (v. 11)—the joy He has known with His Father from before time began.

And when the eternally existent Son broke into time, sent by the Father on a divine mission, He came to make it possible for us to experience what He had enjoyed for all of eternity.

How can knowing about Jesus’ delight in the earth and the people He created help you deal with the sadness we experience in our broken world?

What foretaste does the existence of Christ before time began give us of what eternity with Him will be like for those who believe in Him?

Lord Jesus, I worship You, the eternally preexistent God. Thank You for breaking the time-and-eternity barrier in coming to us, so we can experience with You the love and joy You experience with Your Father. You are forever incomparable.

AMEN.

Day 3



Full Body of Work

The Incarnation of Christ

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

—JOHN 1:14

We're amazed today if we get home from the grocery store and realize we didn't forget anything on our list. We're amazed by the last-minute comeback we saw in a championship game we were watching on television. We're amazed that a package we ordered online arrived two days ahead of its projected delivery date.

Yet we're barely amazed anymore that the Son of God was conceived in a human womb and born into this world as a human being. The story is so familiar that it's easy to forget how stunning it really is. So maybe we need to take a fresh look at what theologian Wayne Grudem calls "by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible"—more amazing than creation, more amazing even than the resurrection. In fact, Grudem writes, it "will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe."⁷

It's another reason why Jesus is *incomparable*.

So let's be amazed by it again.

We will never fully understand, of course, the divine thinking behind this event called the *incarnation*. (The word comes from a Latin term that means "to make into flesh; to become flesh.") Why would Jesus choose to take on our human weaknesses, frailties, and limitations? Imagine being omnipotent, all-powerful, yet requiring the parental care of a mother and father. Imagine being omniscient, all-knowing, yet needing to learn how to walk; being the eternal Word

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of God, yet needing to learn how to read. Imagine having created the oceans, yet being thirsty for water. Imagine having spoken the stars into place, yet lying down at night underneath them.

Why would Jesus do this? He'd dwelt in heavenly places, in celestial palaces. Why would He submit to being born in a borrowed cattle shed? He was the beloved Son of God. Why would He agree to becoming the rejected Son of Man?

These are just a few of the many imponderables connected to the incarnation. The apostle John described it this way: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Greek word translated "dwelt" in that verse literally means "tabernacled." In other words, Jesus "pitched His tent" with us.

- The infinite became finite.
- The immortal became mortal.
- The Creator became a creature.

Think of the humility involved in this exchange. Jesus, the Son of God,

emptied himself . . .
taking on the likeness of humanity. (Phil. 2:7)

Why? Because whether we understand it fully or not (which we can't!), only by His humbling Himself to this degree could we be saved from our sins. There was no other way. "He had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way" or else there'd be no "atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

We would like to think our need is not this drastic. We've become so accustomed to our sins—fighting them, excusing them, confessing them, trying not to think about them—that even though we may hate them, we've found a way to go on living around them. But this familiarity in our relationship with sin disguises the depths to which it has toxified our hearts. We have incurred God's holy wrath because

of our sin. We can't clear away the guilt from our sin. The inevitable outcome is that every sinner must die and be forever separated from God, from anything good, from anything else but the punishment we rightly deserve.

Except for the incarnation. That's the one and only game changer.

Jesus took on "flesh and blood," sharing in our human experience, "so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who were held in slavery all their lives to the fear of death" (Heb. 2:14–15). That is, all of us.

And that's the *why* of the incarnation, plain and simple. Amazing and sacrificial: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). To put it into language that rolls easily from memory, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 ESV). We needed what only this gift could give us, and so God gave us the best that He had:

- Jesus, living our life without sinning
- Jesus, perfectly obeying the Father
- Jesus, dying our death in our place
- Jesus, paying our penalty for sin

And if that's not amazing, I don't know what is.

It's amazing enough that, as you hear it described again, I'm led to ask you: Do you sense His Spirit stirring you today in a way that perhaps you've never known before? Is He giving you desperation over your sinful condition? An understanding that Jesus has come to your

The incarnation of Jesus is not just an ancient event that happened more than two thousand years ago. This wonder of wonders is very much a present-tense reality.

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rescue? A drawing of your heart to His own loving, gracious heart? Then run with me by faith into His forgiveness. Believe what He has said is true. And receive what He has said is yours.

There's no one else coming for us. We have Jesus, or we have nothing. We have this world with its constant disappointments and its occasional bursts of temporary peace and happiness, or we have eternal hope, God's saving grace, and the promise of life everlasting.

All because Jesus came and became one of us.

And oh, let's not forget that the incarnation of Jesus is not just an ancient event that happened more than two thousand years ago and that we celebrate each year on the twenty-fifth of December. This wonder of wonders is very much a present-tense reality. The God who became flesh, who came to dwell among us, who was crucified, buried, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, is seated today in His glorified human body at the right hand of the Father. He is still the God-man, our Advocate, who lives to intercede for us before the throne of God.

Stand amazed.

What would be different in your life if there had been no incarnation, if Jesus had not come to earth in human form?

How can you guard against becoming complacent about Christ's saving work for you?

*Thank You, Father, for the mystery and the miracle of what Jesus did when He put on human flesh and came to this earth to save us from our sins. His humility and sacrifice confront my pride. Where would we be—where would I be—without Him?
I'm amazed—and I praise you!*

AMEN.

Day 4



Growing Up Jesus

The Childhood of Christ

The boy grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom,
and God's grace was on him.

—LUKE 2:40

Within a century or two of Jesus' time on earth, speculation about what took place during His childhood years found its way into apocryphal accounts such as *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. You may have heard or read some of these fantastical stories about the young Jesus making clay birds that really flew, parting the waters of a brook in His boyhood village, or criticizing His schoolteachers for not knowing what they were talking about.⁸

Fascinating, right? Except none of these stories is true. Our only reliable source on the childhood activity of Jesus is what's told to us in Scripture. And perhaps what's most telling in this regard, as we scour the Bible for information, is that we're told almost nothing.

Jesus' childhood, like anyone's, was simply a childhood. Routine. Unspectacular.

Yet perhaps this tells us everything.

Because if anyone else had devised a story as inconceivable as the incarnation—a god coming to earth—it would never have included just an ordinary childhood, so unremarkable that it came with barely a mention in the historical recounting of His deeds. A god in the Greek sense of the word wouldn't have been given a childhood at all. Members of their mythological pantheon were assumed to arrive fully formed as adults. No childhood necessary, none desired. Having their

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legends diluted with images of childhood weakness, neediness, helplessness, dependence just wouldn't do.

Yet Jesus was so not that kind of god. His incarnation *for* us required identification *with* us, even down to His becoming a child. Part of what made this whole plan so ingeniously effective is that He restricted for a time the full use and expression of His divine capabilities so that He, like us, could experience all the normal developmental stages of childhood: the physical part, the intellectual part, the social part, the psychological part. All the parts. He didn't leapfrog from age three to age ten, for example, skipping the stages He didn't like, for the simple reason that we can't skip the stages we don't like. Instead He grew slowly, gradually, daily, incrementally, from one season to the next. The same way we do.

Jesus grew like us.

There's powerful importance in that—and purpose.

For though the Bible indeed says very little about His childhood,

the clues it does give us about His family and growing-up years indicate a plan that perfectly prepared Him as a child for His incomparable mission and ministry as an adult.

He was born, for instance, to parents who were devout and godly, who lived “according to the law of the Lord” (Luke 2:39) and were faithful in worship (vv. 41–42). What better way for Jesus to learn the Scriptures and to develop reverence for God and His Word than to grow up in a home where God's ways were both lived and taught?

And yes, the things He learned as a boy were things He'd known for all eternity as the Son of God. But the *incarnated* Jesus learned about His heavenly Father the same way other kids learn about Him—a little bit at a time, building the foundation for a lifetime. And He did that in

**Jesus grew slowly,
gradually, daily,
incrementally,
from one season
to the next. The
same way we do.**

DAY 4: Growing Up Jesus

the home of earthly parents whose lives centered around the living God.

Jesus' childhood was not trouble free. His family was not spared the challenges of life in a fallen world. Jesus' mother, of course, had gotten pregnant with Him under circumstances not easily explained, so no doubt He grew up acquainted with looks and whispers, gossip and suspicion. Due to a government mandate, His mother had been forced to give birth seventy-five miles away from home in an inhospitable environment. Before he turned two, His life was threatened by a jealous king, and His parents had to flee hundreds of miles away to Egypt. And once the danger was past, the family returned to the small town of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. No one expected much from anybody who came from there (John 1:46).

But even these adverse circumstances gave Jesus skills He'd need for later—how to handle being misunderstood, for instance, how to weather people's disapproval. All of this was part of God's early training ground for His Son on earth.

Jesus also grew up poor. We deduce this fact from the offering His parents brought to the temple for His dedication as a baby and for Mary's rite of purification following childbirth. The couple's choice of two common birds (Luke 2:24) reveals they didn't have "sufficient means" for a costlier, more presentable gift (Lev. 12:8).

If we didn't know the story, we might naturally expect that such a special child would be brought up in a family of wealth and name and position. How much more appropriate, however, that He wasn't. How fitting that "though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

What humility! Jesus was human like any other child. A son. A big brother. He *grew*, as we all must, from infancy, through childhood, to adulthood. But the Bible mentions another important detail about His story.

"The boy grew up," we're told in Luke's gospel, "and God's grace was on him" (2:40). Jesus grew up dependent on the favor of God. Contrary to *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus did not use His supernatural

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power as God to make birds or destroy His enemies. He laid aside that power. He grew as we have to grow. And He did so in reliance on the grace of God.

In ways we'll never fully understand, Jesus needed those years of childhood discovery—the obscurity of those slow-moving, simple, growing-up years—to learn that the one thing He needed more than anything else in life was the blessing only His Father could give Him.

Whether we realize it or not, we are all dependent—as are our children—on the care and keeping of God's grace. No matter our circumstances (whether good or bad), no matter our parenting style (whether hovering or permissive), no matter our family background (whether strong or dysfunctional), we ultimately are protected and guided by God's hand. We may think we are self-reliant, but the truth is, as we grow through every season of our lives, we are totally dependent on Him—His plans, His help, His behind-the-scenes work, and His favor on our behalf.

What difference does it make to us that Jesus went through every stage of normal childhood development?

What does it mean to you to depend on God's grace and favor on your life? How have you experienced that grace?

Father, thank You for sending Jesus as a baby who grew up in this world as a child. Thank You for His willingness to humble Himself, experience our lives, and share in our struggles. I acknowledge my need for Your favor and grace. Thank You that I can rely on it, as Jesus did, in every stage and season of life.

AMEN.

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