

# THE JESUS-CENTERED LIFE

*40 DEVOTIONS  
FOR TEENAGERS*



RICK LAWRENCE AND KURT JOHNSTON AND STORM



The Jesus-Centered Life  
40 Devotions for Teenagers

© 2016 Rick Lawrence, Kurt Johnston, and Jeff A. Storm

group.com

simplyyouthministry.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without prior written permission from the publisher, except where noted in the text and in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, visit [group.com/customer-support/permissions](http://group.com/customer-support/permissions).

## CREDITS

Authors: Rick Lawrence and Kurt Johnston and Jeff A. Storm

Chief Creative Officer: Joani Schultz

Editor: Stephanie Martin

Cover Art: Jeff A. Storm and Veronica Preston

Project Manager: Justin Boling

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com) The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked THE MESSAGE from *THE MESSAGE*.

Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

ISBN: 978-1-4707-4010-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1      20 19 18 17 16 15 14

Printed in the U.S.A.

01 AN ACRONYM GONE BAD.....	6	21 THE THICKER LIFE.....	46
02 WHY ALL THE 'SHOULD'S'?.....	8	22 IF YOU DON'T NEED HIM, YOU WON'T KNOW HIM.....	48
03 WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT JESUS?.....	10	23 SCARING YOURSELF FOR GOOD.....	50
04 THE DISAPPEARING JESUS.....	12	24 WHERE WOULD JESUS BE?.....	52
05 BE THE PIG.....	14	25 ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN.....	54
06 THE REAL THING.....	16	26 THE NOT-SO-NICE JESUS.....	56
07 ATTACHMENT TRUMPS TALENT.....	18	27 CAN YOU STAND JESUS?.....	58
08 PAYING RIDICULOUS ATTENTION.....	20	28 STANDING IN MUD PUDDLES.....	60
09 FROM KNOWING ABOUT TO KNOWING..	22	29 ASK THE OPRAH QUESTION.....	62
10 SHEEP-I-NESS.....	24	30 JESUS DID/JESUS DIDN'T.....	64
11 REMEMBERING TO REMEMBER.....	26	31 DID, NOT DO.....	66
12 WHY ALL THIS USELESS BEAUTY?.....	28	32 OBLITERATING THE DISTANCE.....	68
13 FOLLOWING THE BEELINE.....	30	33 PRIMARY PURSUIT.....	70
14 THE TRUTH ITSELF.....	32	34 THREE QUESTIONS.....	72
15 THE FIRST QUESTION THAT REALLY MATTERS.....	34	35 THE JESUS PUSH-BACK.....	74
16 THE SECOND QUESTION THAT REALLY MATTERS.....	36	36 LESSER GODS.....	76
17 STRIPPED NAKED.....	38	37 PLAYING SHERLOCK.....	78
18 THE SMELL OF JESUS.....	40	38 BITE, DON'T BALK.....	80
19 NO MORE FUNHOUSE MIRRORS.....	42	39 PURSUING PARABLES.....	82
20 THE TOO-FAMILIAR JESUS.....	44	40 YOUR TRUE NAME.....	84

# *The Jesus-Centered Life*

THE LIFE YOU DIDN'T THINK WAS POSSIBLE... WITH THE JESUS YOU NEVER KNEW

For more than two millennia, Jesus has been at the center of pretty much everything. No one has had a bigger influence on your daily life than Jesus, whether or not that's obvious to you.

Did you know...

- Until Jesus, most human beings were slaves, condemned to perpetual hard labor and captive to the whims of their owners. Jesus upended that system of slavery...
- Until Jesus, women had no rights whatsoever in society. Jesus gave women dignity and status...
- Until Jesus, many pagan religions tried to “appease the gods” with human sacrifice—often children were the most popular sacrifices. Jesus elevated children as treasures to be nurtured...
- Until Jesus, each culture and society determined the passage of time differently—many created “calendars” based on

when the current monarch assumed his office. Because of Jesus, all of human history is organized around His birth and death—it either happened before Him or after Him...

- Until Jesus, becoming a “learned person” was a goal reserved only for the rich and elite. Jesus called everybody, no matter their social status, to love God “with our whole mind,” and institutions of higher learning and libraries sprang up as a result...
- Until Jesus, the most common form of government was totalitarian and despotic. Jesus stripped rulers of their self-proclaimed deity, paving the way for common law and limited government...
- Until Jesus, the sick, infirm, and disabled were considered disposable. Because Jesus emphasized the dignity of the person and elevated the plight of the poor, mercy for

those who are hurting became a societal norm, leading to the building of hospitals and social service organizations...

- Until Jesus, forgiveness was a disgusting sign of weakness. Jesus told us to forgive “seventy times seven,” and made the love of our enemies the marker for true love...

Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan says this: “Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western Culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of super magnet, to pull up out of the history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?”

Everything seems to orbit around the things Jesus said and did. So you’d think that someone whose influence is so widespread, whose name is so well-known, and whose impact is so lasting would be the most *understood* person in the world.

*But he’s not.*

Most of us think we have a pretty good handle on who Jesus is and what He did. But we don’t. He’s the most-known, least-known person in history. It’s like this—sometimes the people we know the least are the people we’re around the most. We take for granted that we know who they really are, because they’ve always been part of the wallpaper of our life. So we need to be re-introduced to the people and things we think we already know, because we don’t really know them as well as we think we do.

And that’s the point of this book—to challenge and renovate what you think you already know about Jesus, so you can grow in your relationship with Him. The three of us are no different than you in this—we’re very aware of how much we’ve “missed” who Jesus really is, and we’re hungry to know Him better.

Thanks for going on this journey with us... We believe it will change your life the way it’s changed our lives...

**KURT JOHNSTON, RICK LAWRENCE,  
AND JEFF STORM**

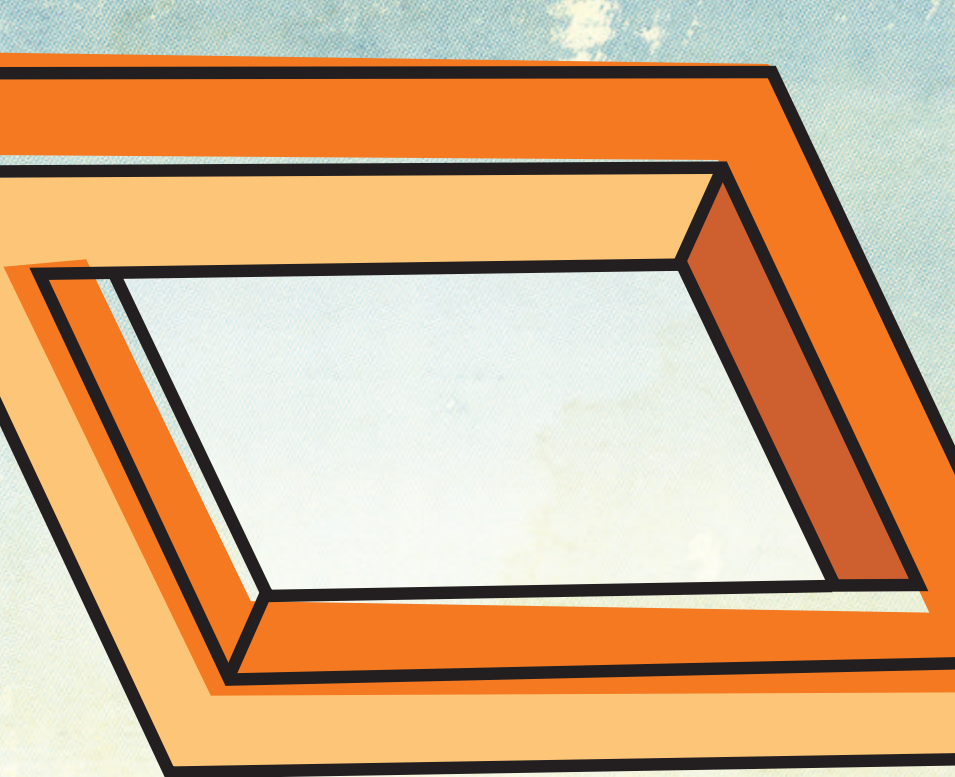
# An Acronym Gone Bad

Remember the “What Would Jesus Do?” movement? A few years ago it was really big—the central question people were asking themselves was simple: “If Christians are supposed to be following Jesus, why aren’t they making more of an impact in their daily lives?” The movement’s answer was to imagine what everyday life might be like if all of us simply talked and acted more like Jesus. Well, that would change everything—especially if we took a Taco Bell burrito, blessed it, and fed a stadium full of people with it. But, by any measure, the WWJD movement didn’t change everything.

Maybe the “Christian” lives we think we’re living are actually disconnected from who Jesus really is. It’s fine to imagine what we think Jesus might do when a friend betrays us or the test comes back with a “D” on it or we break our finger in a fluke accident right before the big game, but really the whole thing desperately depends on how well we really know the true Jesus, doesn’t it? Here’s something profound: We can miss Jesus entirely by arrogantly assuming that our imagined responses to a partially understood Jesus mean that we’re really following Jesus.

**Q: IN ONE SENTENCE, WHAT DOES  
“FOLLOWING JESUS” MEAN TO YOU, ANYWAY?**





## LIVING IT OUT

QUICK, GO FIND A PENCIL...

WE'LL HUM WHILE WE WAIT FOR YOU TO GET BACK...

SINCE THIS LITTLE BOOK IS ALL ABOUT RE-DISCOVERING JESUS, IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO CONSIDER HOW YOU CURRENTLY VIEW HIM, IMAGINE HIM, AND DESCRIBE HIM.

IN THE FRAME ABOVE, WRITE DOWN A BUNCH OF STUFF ABOUT JESUS; ANYTHING YOU WANT. ONE-WORD DESCRIPTIONS, THINGS YOU KNOW HE SAID, MIRACLES HE PERFORMED, WHATEVER COMES TO MIND. FILL THAT THING UP, AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN. YOU MIGHT EVEN WANT TO WRITE YOUR ANSWER TO TODAY'S QUESTION: "WHAT DOES FOLLOWING JESUS MEAN TO YOU?"



AS YOU WORK THROUGH THIS BOOK, COME BACK TO THIS FIRST EXERCISE FROM TIME TO TIME TO SEE HOW YOUR PICTURE OF JESUS IS CHANGING, MATURING, MORPHING AND, BEST OF ALL, HOW IT'S BEGINNING TO CHANGE YOU ALONG THE WAY!

# Why All the

We'd like to apologize for something we're pretty sure has happened to you—somewhere along the way, someone in a church has probably told you that you *should* love Jesus because, well, you're *supposed to*... Jesus doesn't want a “supposed-to” relationship with us—He wants to be known and loved for who He is. And the only way that's going to happen is for us to slow down and get to know His heart.

Have we really soaked in the personality of Jesus—pursued Him as the most fascinating, magnetic, lightning-bolt person who ever lived? And if He's really all that incredible, why are “supposed-to's” even necessary? People who are caught up in a romantic relationship don't have to be told to focus on the person of their affection; it's hard to stop thinking about them, actually. No matter what we're doing or who we're doing it with, our thoughts stray to the object of our passion. And that's not because we “should” be zoned in on the object of our affection—we simply can't help ourselves, because we're mesmerized by so much beauty. **Jesus wants to capture our hearts**, not force our obedience.

OKAY, NOW HERE'S A LITTLE  
THOUGHT FOR THE DAY:  
HOW DO YOU THINK PEOPLE  
IN YOUR LIFE (PARENTS,  
SIBLINGS, FRIENDS,  
TEACHERS, STRANGERS)  
WOULD BE AFFECTED IF THE  
JESUS-IN-YOU WAS GIVEN  
GREATER FREEDOM TO LIVE  
OUT, IN YOUR EVERYDAY  
LIFE, SOME OF THE SAME  
QUALITIES THAT YOU FIND SO  
ATTRACTIVE IN HIM?





# *‘Shoulds’?*

## **LIVING IT OUT**

IF YOU'RE READING THIS BOOK WE'RE GUESSING YOU'D SAY THAT YOU LOVE JESUS. BUT WHY? HOPEFULLY, IT'S NOT BECAUSE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU SHOULD-LIKE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO! SO WHAT IS IT ABOUT JESUS THAT DRAWS YOU TO HIM? NEVER REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT THAT? THAT'S OKAY, MOST PEOPLE HAVEN'T. SO HERE'S YOUR CHANCE! THERE'S SOME

← SPACE TO JOT DOWN SOME OF THE THINGS YOU LOVE ABOUT JESUS—THINGS ABOUT HIM THAT HAVE DRAWN YOU TOWARD HIM, NOT BECAUSE YOU SHOULD, BUT BECAUSE YOU WANT TO!

# What's the Big Deal

Hey, if we call ourselves Christians, that means Jesus is a big deal to us, right? Well, for a lot of us, Jesus isn't really at the center of our orbit. We like to think He is, but other pursuits in our life are often a lot more important to us than the pursuit of Jesus. When we asked more than 20,000 Christian teenagers if they expected their future life to "center around Jesus," the average response was "maybe/maybe not." It'd be super-hard to admit that we've sidelined Jesus, but we have so many other must-do's and must-have's and must-be's pressuring us. It's not like we're the first to get lured into this trap...

Incredible as it sounds, the thousands of people who were following Jesus all left Him when Jesus upped the ante for them... He'd just told them that they'd need to "eat the flesh of

---

## LIVING IT OUT

FOR PETER, AND MOST OF THE EARLY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, FOLLOWING JESUS WAS SOMETIMES SCARY, OFTEN CONFUSING, AND OCCASIONALLY PAINFUL! IT WASN'T EASY, BUT IT WAS SO WORTH IT!

THERE'S PROBABLY BEEN STUFF IN YOUR LIFE THAT WASN'T EASY, BUT WAS SO WORTH IT!

- GETTING GOOD GRADES-NOT EASY, BUT SO WORTH IT!
- TRYING OUT FOR A SCHOOL PLAY OR SPORTS TEAM-NOT EASY, BUT SO WORTH IT!
- BREAKING A BAD HABIT-NOT EASY, BUT SO WORTH IT!
- CHOOSING NOT TO PUNCH YOUR LITTLE BROTHER-NOT EASY, BUT SO WORTH IT!

# About Jesus?



the Son of Man and drink His blood” if they wanted to follow Him (John 6:53). That freaks them out, so they abandon Him. And Jesus asks His remaining disciples this vulnerable question: “You do not want to go away also, do you?” (v. 67). Peter responds with this equally vulnerable declaration: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (v. 68-69). In effect, he’s saying: “I don’t know what ‘eat My body and drink My blood’ really means, and a lot of what You say is a mystery to me, but You’ve ruined me for You.” The ultimate reason we put other things, not Jesus, at our life’s center is that we can. We’re not yet “ruined” for Him.

---

YET MANY CONTEMPORARY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS HAVE PAINTED A PICTURE THAT FOLLOWING HIM IS SUPPOSED TO BE EASY, FUN, AND FULL OF SUNSHINE. MAYBE IT’S TIME TO RE-THINK WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW JESUS... MAYBE FOLLOWING HIM IS, IN SOME WAYS, MORE LIKE A BUNCH OF OTHER STUFF IN YOUR LIFE—**NOT EASY, BUT SO WORTH IT!**

HERE’S AN IDEA! JOT DOWN YOUR TOP “NOT EASY” PART OF BEING A TEENAGER WHO IS TRYING TO FOLLOW JESUS. THEN, UNDER IT, WRITE DOWN WHY, EVEN THOUGH IT’S NOT EASY, IT’S “SO WORTH IT!”

why it’s so worth it →

## THINK YOU KNOW JESUS? Think again.

For around 2,000 years, Jesus has been at the center of pretty much everything, and no one has had a bigger influence on our daily lives than Jesus. Most of us think we have a pretty good idea of who Jesus is and what he did.

### *But we don't.*

Sometimes the people we know the least are the people we're around the most. Isn't that weird? We're convinced that we really know them, because they've always been part of our lives. But we need to get re-introduced to them, because we don't really know them as well as we think we do.

This highly interactive, chunk-size devotional is about moving your "orbit" closer to the Jesus you never knew and living out the life you didn't think was possible.

*Get ready for an exciting,  
life-changing adventure!*



THE JESUS-CENTERED  
LIFE

Encounter Jesus in a  
fresh way throughout  
every Jesus-Centered  
resource.



**RICK LAWRENCE** is the longtime editor of Group Magazine—he loves leading teenagers into close encounters with Jesus.



**KURT JOHNSTON** is a youth pastor who's spent his entire life helping teenagers understand how much Jesus loves them.



**STORM** is the art director for Group Magazine and author/designer for *Stripped Clean*. He is also the father of two teenagers.



**simply youth ministry**

helping youth workers with what matters most

**Group**  
Real. Bold. Love.

ISBN 978-1-4707-4010-8



9 781470 740108  
Religion/Christian Ministry/Youth



# **THIS IS A SAMPLE**

## **The number of pages is limited.**

Purchase the item for the complete version.

