

❖ INTRODUCTION ❖

This book is ... solely an expression of my personal search “for the face of the Lord.” (cf. Psalms 27:8).

Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*

Like the deer that yearns for running streams,
so my soul is yearning for you, my God;
my soul is thirsting for God, the living God.

Office of Readings, Morning Prayer
Easter Week II, Monday, Cf. Psalm 42: 2-3

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This book is for the beginner and for those beginning again — to bring us closer to Jesus, who is every Christian’s greatest desire. Have you lost the thrill of those first spiritual experiences? Are you unsure how to connect with Jesus on an everyday basis?

Maybe fellow Christians tell you that Jesus is their best friend, brother, helper in time of trouble, a joyful presence in glad times, and much more. And you’re wondering what’s wrong with you because you never felt that way.

Or possibly you had that solid connection once and now it’s gone. Your “familiar” friend Jesus is nowhere to be found.

You’re not alone.

In my own case, I just didn’t feel that close to Jesus.

Naturally, I’ve had some close moments. You can’t be a Christian and not have times of connection, sometimes even tinged

with a touch of transcendence. But the everyday Jesus, the one who walks beside you? I just didn't feel it.

My head told me he came to be the bridge between us and God, to restore our proper relationship with the divine, and that when we see him we see the Father (John 14:9).

What my heart told me is that a deeper connection to Jesus is key to being a vibrant Christian whose faith keeps growing. I know faith is not just about following your feelings. That way lies disaster. Our feelings can be fickle. But I also felt that Jesus shouldn't be the last person of the Trinity I always turned to.

Was he drawing me to him by being a bit standoffish? Was he right beside me but I couldn't recognize him? Was I not slowing down and spending enough time to connect? I didn't know.

I did know that if Jesus asked me, "Who do you say I am?" then I'd have spent a lot of time stammering before coming up with an answer. That's not right. That's not right at all.

Deeper friendship became my overall prayer goal. I began keeping a notebook of prayers, scripture, and inspirational quotes that might help me to know and love Jesus better. And it began to work. Slowly, gently, gradually, I began to get closer to Jesus.

It took going back to the basics. As Thomas Merton remarked about rereading old journals, "you find out that your latest discovery is something you already found out five years ago. Still it is true that one penetrates deeper and deeper into the same ideas and experiences."

I think this is why we enjoy reading lists like "25 Basics You Must Never Forget" even when we feel like we're experts already. We are reminded of how much we've learned, how much we've forgotten, and how much we're not applying properly.

When I began turning my notes into a book I wondered if anyone would be interested. Then I saw that Pope Benedict XVI (a.k.a. Joseph Ratzinger) wrote the first Jesus of Nazareth book to help draw him closer to Christ. I realized that thousands of years ago the psalmists longed for closeness with God. And I fell into conversation with a friend who said, "Julie, you don't understand. I just don't feel that close to Jesus! I don't know how!"

I do understand. We aren't the first to feel this way. I hope that this book helps all of us to see the face of the Lord.

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Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see."

John 1:38-39 (RSV)

❖ USING THIS BOOK ❖

This book is arranged to lead from the most basic search for Christ into varied, deeper ways to encounter him. Everything is aimed at leading you to encounter Christ in your own way.

Each page contains scripture or an inspirational quote for reflection, a brief commentary, and a prayer. Spend regular time in a quiet place for 10 or 15 minutes each day, or longer if you like. What matters most are your own reflections as you turn your mind and heart to God.



The material on each set of facing pages is designed to work together to give a fuller range for reflection.

Whether your eye is drawn first to the right- or left-hand page, both are meant to complement each other for richer insights. The general theme is indicated by the title going across the pages.

Each page also can stand alone for daily prayer so feel free to skip around if you'd prefer.



This is about forming a friendship that will last through eternity. Moving through the book will help foster a daily habit of prayer and a way of reflecting that will continue long after you come to the end of this book. Our relationship with Jesus should continue growing throughout our entire lives.

I pray these pages act as a springboard for your own prayers and a deeper friendship with Jesus Christ.

BEGINNING TO PRAY

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*For me, prayer is a surge of the heart;
it is a simple look turned toward heaven,
it is a cry of recognition and of love,
embracing both trial and joy.*

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Manuscrits autobiographiques

❖ LISTENING ❖

I will stand at my guard post,
and station myself upon the rampart,
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me...

Habakkuk 2:1

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Down in my bones, my deepest need is to know Jesus better.

Drawing closer to God, which is the ultimate point of prayer,
means I have to listen as well as speak. Ideally I should listen
more than I speak.

So, when my prayer time begins, I always read this bit of
Habakkuk first. It reminds me that often my duty is to be receptive,
to collect myself and push away distractions, to be still. To listen.

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Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

❧ MEETING GOD

Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them
the fire of your divine love.
Send forth your Spirit
and they shall be created
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Traditional

Into this most intimate relation – God and I – we do not come by speaking, but only by silence; when we are recollected, our inmost soul is opened and the sacred presence can manifest itself. ... We must be serious about this. A life properly lived includes practice in silence.

Romano Guardini, *Learning the Virtues That Lead You to God*

“Come Holy Spirit” is a prayer I say before every mass, before every prayer time, and before I read the Bible. In short, it is the prayer that calms and focuses me so I can open my heart and mind to God.

As I seek Jesus, listening for his voice, I turn to the Holy Spirit to help me on the journey.

Holy Spirit, fill my heart, teach me to listen, and lead me to a deeper love of Jesus.

BACK AT THE BEGINNING ❧

In the middle of the journey of our life
I found myself astray in a dark wood
where the straight road had been lost sight of.

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy**

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*

As I come to Jesus, I think about the fact that I've had to begin again so many times. Does this mean I'm a failure? Shouldn't I have moved past this point for good?

Beginning again can be delightful. The changing of the seasons. A new baby. (Is that why Jesus came to us that way?)

Beginning again can seem too simple, too familiar, or like a waste of time. But if I'm lost, I've got to retrace my steps to get back to “the straight road” I strayed from.

Beginning again can reveal the unexpected. No season is identical. Every baby is unique. Is this why Jesus said we need to be like little children? (Matt. 18:3) The simplest thing is fresh, new, and exciting to their eyes.

It's all in my attitude. Jesus is waiting. I want to begin again.

Where have I gone astray? Show me, dear Lord. Lead me in the way of prayer and draw me closer to you.

* translated by Seamus Heaney

❖ “BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU?”

“But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?”
Mark 8:29 (NIV)

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Jesus is not just asking the disciples.

He’s also asking us. You. Me. Looking into our eyes.

What do I say?

Do I answer automatically? Am I unsure of what to say?

If anyone ever wanted proof that the Bible is a living document used by God to speak to our hearts, this verse settles it. It is immediate. Personal. It puts me on the spot just the way Jesus did to his disciples so long ago.

It is the question of a friend, of someone who wants to be known for himself. There are unspoken vibrations of the question he will ask Peter after his resurrection, “Do you love me?”

That’s the point of knowing anyone fully. “Do you love me?”

I must look deep within my heart. I’ll see the times he has given me tender love, understanding, and friendship. I’ll also see the times I’ve taken him for granted, ignored him, and haven’t listened. “Do you love me?”

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Jesus, help me to know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly.

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?” ❖

Everyone wants the key to finding God. But there is no lock!
Father John Libone

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This is why there are so many different ways to pray. There is no magic formula for reaching God. It depends on each of us.

God, who created us, doesn’t insist on only one style of prayer from his variable, changeable creatures. I can trust him to meet me where I am, in the way I’ll be best able to know him.

What is important is that I lift my heart and mind to God.

I may change prayer methods but I must not change that intention.

God never changes. He’s there, waiting for me however I pray.

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“Ask and you shall receive.” I’m here, Jesus. I know you are too. Help me find you.

❧ SPEAK AS TO YOUR DEAREST FRIEND

When you say only the things that you believe you should say, rather than being honest, any relationship grows cold, including one with God.

James Martin, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*

Speak with familiarity and confidence as to your dearest and most loving friend. Speak of your life, your plans, your troubles, your joys, your fears. In return, God will speak to you—not that you will hear audible words in your ears, but words that you will clearly understand in your heart.

St. Alphonsus de Liguori*

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When was the last time I spoke to Jesus this directly and honestly? As if I were speaking to my mother or best friend or husband or child?

It's hard. I tend to pray with a request or a specific issue. I certainly don't chat as if I were having a cup of coffee with Jesus. Yet, when I remember to do so, something changes.

Pouring out my thoughts and worries and hopes I let myself laugh and be heartfelt and even get angry with God. It is those moments which make a truthful, personal relationship.

Sometimes it makes me feel silly. But silly moments can be how we learn to love.

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*Jesus, today I'm happy ... grateful ... worried ... excited ...
frustrated ...*

* translation via *Adventures in Daily Prayer* by Bert Ghezzi

IN RETURN, GOD WILL SPEAK TO YOU ❧

Prayer is a work of God but demands commitment and continuity on our part. Above all continuity and constancy are important.

Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience November 20, 2011

Five years of prayer went by. Like any five-year span, it included both good times and bad. ... I prayed through all of it, and the result of my prayers was always the same.

... A shocking sense of vitality and beauty present in both happiness and in the midst of pain. The only thing I can think to compare this experience to is reading a great novel or watching a great movie. The scene before you might be a happy one or a sad one. You might feel uplifted or you might feel heartbroken or you might feel afraid. But whatever you feel, you're still loving the story. Through prayer, I came to experience both pleasure and sorrow in something like that way. In God, the life of the flesh became the story of the spirit. I loved the story, no matter what.

Andrew Klavan, *The Great Good Thing*

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Let's not fool ourselves. I am distant from Jesus because I haven't made enough of an effort to know him. I've not been constant, committed, continuous in prayer.

Not only must I speak to him as my dearest friend, but I must continue to speak. If one person never speaks to the other there can be no conversation and no friendship. That would be a friendship out of balance, out of focus.

Life is out of focus without Jesus.

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Draw me to you, dear Lord. Remind me when I forget to pray.

❧ LET ME KNOW YOU

Let me know you, you who know me. Let me know you as I am known, strength of my soul, enter into it, and prepare it for yourself, so that you may have and hold it, without spot or wrinkle.

St. Augustine*

You, Lord, are the object of my love and desire. I blush for myself, and renounce myself, and choose you — for I can please neither you nor myself unless I am in you.

St. Augustine*

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These are the words of my heart's dearest longing.

I must make them my prayer.

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Lord Jesus, let me know as I am known. I can do nothing where you do not enter in. Enter into my soul.

* translation via *A Year with the Saints* by Paul Thigpen

YOU WHO KNOW ME ❧

The prayer preceding all prayer is, “May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou that I speak to.” Infinitely various are the levels from which we pray. Emotional intensity is in itself no proof of spiritual depth. If we pray in terror we shall pray earnestly; it only proves that terror is an honest emotion. Only God Himself can let the bucket down to the depths in us. And, on the other side, He must constantly work as the iconoclast. Every idea of Him we form, He must in mercy shatter. The most blessed result of prayer would be to rise thinking, “But I never knew before. I never dreamed ...”

C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

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This is truth itself.

“May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou I speak to.”

How many times I get in the way of the very prayers I speak. “There is no lock!” Except the ones I install myself.

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Jesus, help me to know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly.

LOOKING AT
JESUS' MANY "FACES"

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*Though the New Testament writings
display a many-layered struggle
to come to grips with the figure of Jesus,
they exhibit a deep harmony despite all their differences.*

*Joseph Ratzinger, Jesus of Nazareth:
From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*

❧ I DESIRE ONLY YOU, LORD ❧

Certain attitudes deriving from the mentality of “this present world” can penetrate our lives if we are not vigilant. For example, some ... overly prize production and profit; thus prayer, being unproductive, is useless.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2727

[Jesus] spoke to Thomas Aquinas from a crucifix hanging in the St. Nicholas chapel: “You have written well of me, Thomas! What do you desire?” Thomas replied, “*Non nisi te, Domine.*” Only you, Lord.

Richard John Neuhaus, *The Second One Thousand Years*

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I have to return to the beginning often. It doesn't take long for me to forget to listen, to spend time, that I can't force results in prayer. It is about taking my time. It is about remembering the reason I pray every day. I want to be able to say, “I desire only you, Lord.”

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Show me, Lord Jesus. Draw me closer.

❧ O MOST MERCIFUL REDEEMER

Thanks be to you, my Lord Jesus Christ,
For all the benefits you have won for me,
For all the pains and insults you have borne for me.

O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother,
May I know you more clearly,
Love you more dearly,
And follow you more nearly,
For ever and ever.

St. Richard of Chichester, 1197-1253, prayer recorded at his deathbed

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Reflecting on this prayer goes a long way toward answering “Who do you say I am?”

It reminds me that Jesus has done me great good at a great cost to himself.

I dwell on what it means that he is my redeemer, my friend, and my brother.

I have meditated on these matters countless times and they remain evergreen. Just as Jesus is himself: inexhaustible and ever new.

To know him more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly has become my daily prayer. Easily remembered, always top of mind, and it says it all.

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Pray aloud the prayer above.

MAY I LOVE YOU MORE DEARLY ❧

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance, he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
of those 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 2:5-11

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It was eye opening for me that obedience was key to Christ, both as a fully human person and as the key to his actions glorifying God. It never really registered until reading these lines.

Jesus came to undo the damage done by Adam's and Eve's disobedience through his perfect obedience. What does that tell me about him?

I think of the complete love and trust he has in God the Father's plan. I think of the tender love he has for us, to make this ultimate sacrifice. Only such love could inspire such obedience. Only such love could give it. What a great God and Savior!

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May I become like you, dear Lord Jesus, becoming obedient to God in all things so my days may be lived for His glory.

❧ TO PRAY “JESUS”

The divine name may not be spoken by human lips, but by assuming our humanity The Word of God hands it over to us and we can invoke it: “Jesus,” “YHWH saves.”* The name “Jesus” contains all: God and man and the whole economy of creation and salvation. To pray “Jesus” is to invoke him and to call him within us. His name is the only one that invokes the presence it signifies.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2666

In Jesus Christ there is no separation between the medium and the message: it is the one case where we can say that the medium and the message are fully one and the same.

Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light*

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Jesus “translates” God for us. This is profound. I can say his name and it is God’s name. Because Jesus is fully God and fully human, his name contains everything to do with that relationship.

When I say Jesus’ name I’m not just talking to air. He is literally there with me. In that moment.

“His name invokes the presence it signifies.”

I must reflect on that.

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Jesus, be with me.

* *Rom 10:13; Acts 2:21; 3:15-16; Gal 2:20.*

INVOKES HIS PRESENCE ❧

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd.

John 10:10-11 (ESV)

Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”

Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God. That you believe in him whom he has sent.

John 6:28-29 (NIV)

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What does it mean to believe in Jesus? It sounds simple.

Believing in Jesus is more than acknowledging he is fully man, fully God, the Son of God. (It’s already complicated.) If I believe in Jesus then I should follow him, just like a sheep following the shepherd, in fact.

To believe in Jesus, then, means that I am then called upon to “act” on the commands he gave: to love one another, to forgive, to see Jesus in others.

In fact, I suddenly can see that the whole Catholic faith grew up in an effort to fully “believe in him whom he has sent.”

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Lord I believe. Show me what it means to believe.

❖ CALL TO ME

Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell you great things beyond the reach of your knowledge.

Jeremiah 33:3

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Can it be that simple? This is a big promise.

True, it is made to Jeremiah, but in that mysterious way of Scripture, it is also made to you and me.

Will simply asking draw me closer to Jesus? Or to ask it another way, do I dare to believe in Jesus and the promises of God?

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Lord Jesus, answer my search with yourself.

AND I WILL ANSWER YOU ❖

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

John 4:5-10

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Jesus is waiting for the Samaritan woman in the middle of her daily routine. The last thing on her mind is an encounter with the living God in the flesh! More than that, Jesus tells her if she'd only have asked, he'd have given her an outrageous gift — the living water.

This is an enactment of the promise made to Jeremiah on the opposite page. How much more direct can Jesus get? He waits for me in the same way, in the middle of my everyday routine. I simply have to see him, to listen, to have that conversation.

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Jesus, I don't know what to ask for except to grow closer to you. Fill me, dear Lord, with the living water and show me the way I should go.