

More Resources for Learning Jesus

As well as reading the Gospels themselves (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John), here are two lists of resources you might like to use as part of your Learn habit, focusing on the study of Jesus. These lists were put together by author Michael Frost for his book *Surprise the World*.

GREAT BOOKS ABOUT JESUS

- Philip Yancey. *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995. Now a classic. Yancey uncovers a Jesus who is brilliant, creative, challenging, fearless, compassionate, unpredictable, and ultimately satisfying. A great read.
- N. T. Wright. *The Challenge of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999. A highly stimulating treatment of the hard, historical work needed to understand Jesus within the Palestinian world of the first century, as well as a passionate call to follow Jesus more faithfully into our world today.
- J. John. *The Life: A Portrait of Jesus*. London: Authentic Media, 2003. An excellent introduction to the living, breathing human being at the centre of the Christian good news: Jesus of Nazareth. Easy to read, with helpful answers to some of the common questions we all have about Jesus' life. Read it and then give it to your non-Christian friends.
- Dave Roberts. *Following Jesus: A Non-Religious Guidebook for the Spiritually Hungry*. Orlando, FL: Relevant Books, 2004. This book will revolutionize your walk with God, revealing a perspective on Jesus you've never seen before. Explores what a real, dynamic relationship with Jesus looks like. Excellent, particularly if your faith life is getting a little stale.
- Rob Bell. *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005. Looks at how Jesus wants to be reflected in church communities today. The well-researched Jewish background of Jesus is fascinating. Simple but profound.
- John Dickson. *A Spectator's Guide to Jesus*. Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2005. The back cover sums it up: "If you have ever wondered how a crucified Palestinian peasant could end up winning the allegiance of 2 billion confessed Christians today, this book will provide some of the answers." Really useful historical teaching to correct some of the rubbish out there!
- Don Everts. *God in the Flesh*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005. Looks at Jesus via the reactions of those who met him. The real Jesus jumps off the page and comes to life as a compelling person and very, very cool. Short studies included. Good for a personal devotion or maybe a home group discussion.
- Conrad Gempf. *Mealtime Habits of the Messiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005. A funny, quirky, and informative book that looks at forty of Jesus' encounters with others, with questions for reflection. Jesus: alive, fun, engaging, warm, and occasionally dangerous. This will give you an extra shot for the day.
- Mike Erre. *The Jesus of Suburbia: Have We Tamed the Son of God to Fit Our Lifestyle?* Nashville: W Publishing, 2006. Have we settled for a watered-down, safe, comfortable Christianity? Mike Erre paints an exciting, inspiring, and powerful picture of the real Jesus. He challenges us to embrace the message of Jesus Christ as a revolutionary, life-transforming, culture-impacting movement of God. Brilliant! Good for firing you up for a radical life of sacrificial Jesus-following!

Tom Taylor. *Paradox: Coming to Grips with the Contradictions of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006. This book unfolds some of the core mysteries of Jesus' upside-down teachings (for example, die to live, serve to reign, and walk by faith not by sight). More than any other book, *Paradox* helped me understand the lifestyle Jesus wants his followers to live. Really explains why doing life Jesus' way is better than any other.

Kenneth Bailey. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008. At over four hundred pages, this very weighty exploration puts Jesus in his sociopolitical and religio-cultural context. Challenging, but essential reading for those wanting to understand Jesus.

GREAT FILMS ABOUT JESUS

The Gospel According to St. Matthew (1964). Directed by controversial Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, every single line of dialogue comes directly from Matthew's Gospel. Jesus wears a black hooded cloak and seems dangerous and radical. The film is gritty and down-to-earth, and it underscores the revolutionary nature of Christ's message. After viewing this you can understand why the authorities would want to crucify this guy.

Godspell (1973). Sure, it's a musical set in New York City (one sequence even takes place on the roofs of the then-brand-new World Trade Center), but it's a joyous meditation on the teachings of Jesus—especially the parables and the Sermon on the Mount—and how they resonated with the countercultural mood of that time. Controversial in its day, it helps us see the joy of Jesus and his vision for the world.

Jesus of Nazareth (1977). Not really a film but a six-hour miniseries directed by Franco Zeffirelli, this fleshes out the supporting characters in ways that convey the breadth and depth of the impact Jesus had on his contemporaries. *Jesus of Montreal* (1989). A Canadian film about a troupe of actors who put on an unorthodox but acclaimed Passion play that incites the opposition of the Catholic Church. Daniel, the actor playing Christ, finds his life beginning to mirror that of the real Jesus. This is a clever retelling that highlights Jesus' opposition to organised religion.

The Passion of the Christ (2004). Mel Gibson's deeply personal film about the death of Christ was inspired not only by the Gospels but also by the stations of the Cross (a devotional practice built into the architecture of most Catholic churches) and the visions of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, a stigmatic German nun. Its stark, gruesome depiction of the suffering of Christ is unforgettable. More than any recent director, Gibson captures the grand supernatural conflict which gives the death of Christ its meaning.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (2005). Like *Jesus of Montreal*, this isn't a film about Jesus himself, but it presents one of the most beautiful Jesus-like figures in popular culture: the wild but good Aslan, king of Narnia.

The Nativity Story (2006). While it includes inaccuracies like the Wise Men appearing in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth and bends the biblical accounts a bit here and there, this is nonetheless a powerful depiction of simple, beautiful faith, the love of family, and the strange ways that God moves.