

come and see



AN INTRODUCTION TO JESUS
AND HIS WAY OF LIFE

Jonathan Widdess

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An introduction to Jesus and his way of life
By Jonathan Widdess

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ONE

Something has gone wrong



*Cause I'm living an un-human life
Inches deep and a mile wide
Day by day losing my mind
To the electronic glow
Jess Ray, "City of My Peace"*

One morning I was sitting in a coffee shop in the Old Market, watching a couple at the next table. They barely spoke. Occasionally one of them would show the other something on a screen, and the other

would nod, and they would go back to their phones. I caught myself reaching for mine. When I'd finished my latte they were still there, still staring at their phones.

Later that same day, I met a young couple in my study, both working hard, a toddler being passed between them. They had come to arrange a christening. They told me how tired they were. "I know I should pray more," one of them said. "But I just don't have time."

Something is wrong. We are not living the lives we want to, and certainly not the lives we were meant to. You probably know this already. The feeling hits differently for different people. Sometimes it comes in the middle of a busy day. Sometimes late at night, when the noise has finally stopped. We are getting through the days without quite living them.

This is not simply a personal failing. The world we have built is impossibly fast, and it is relentlessly accelerating. We can FaceTime people on the other side of the planet while barely knowing our next-door neighbours. The phone in our pocket promises company and delivers exhaustion. Our economy

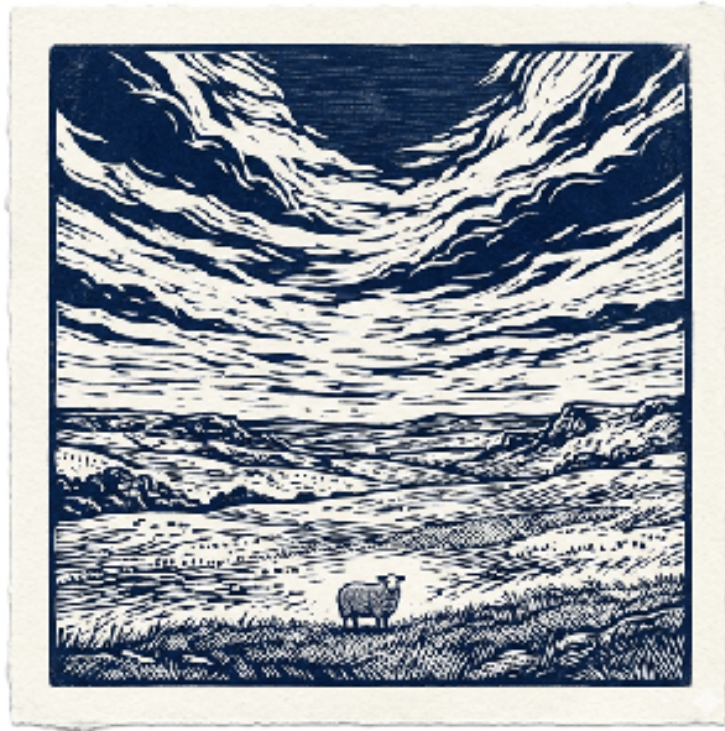
runs on dissatisfaction, always suggesting that the next purchase or the next achievement will satisfy us. We rush from one thing to the next, and family life is strained under the pressure. Many of us carry a nagging sense that we were made for something more.

Human beings have always known restlessness. But nowadays the noise is louder, the pace quicker, and many of the old shelters of community and shared story have been dismantled faster than we have found anything to put in their place.

*And it feels like medication
And it's good for me, I'm sure
But it don't matter how your love
feels anymore
It'll never be the cure
Olivia Rodrigo, "The Cure"*

TWO

A story Jesus told



Jesus told this story.

Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours

*together and says, "Rejoice with me;
I have found my lost sheep." (Luke
15:4–6)*

The sheep did not set out intending to get lost. It did not rebel or run away in protest. It wandered. It grazed here, then there, following what seemed good in the moment, until it looked up and found itself somewhere unfamiliar, alone, unable to find its way back.

No-one sets out hoping to be lost. We followed the path as best we could, and somewhere along the way we took a wrong turn without even realising we had. Lostness hardens into habit, and the deeper things get drowned out. And so now we not only drift from God accidentally; we actually resist him. We want life on our own terms, and our lives are arranged so the deeper questions never quite surface. That becomes a choice we make every day. We have become disconnected from ourselves, from one another, and from God. How can we come home?

*The sheep did not find its way back.
It was found.*

Jesus told this story to make one point above all. The shepherd goes out and searches until he finds his sheep. And when he does, there is only joy and a party. God is like that shepherd: he goes looking for everyone who has wandered away. The question is whether we can trust Jesus when he tells us what God is like.

THREE

Who is this man?



Jesus of Nazareth lived in first-century Palestine under Roman occupation, in an obscure province at the edge of an enormous empire. He taught for about three years and wrote nothing. He never travelled more than a few hundred miles from where he was born. Twelve men were invited to follow him as disciples, one of whom betrayed him. The Romans executed him as a criminal at around thirty-three years of age. He left behind a ragtag band of about 120 followers.

Two thousand years later, more human beings have been shaped by his teaching than by any other figure in history. Yet Jesus presented himself as far more than a wise teacher offering helpful advice for a better life.

Luke tells us what happened when someone met Jesus. Zacchaeus was a tax collector in Jericho, which meant he worked for the occupiers and grew rich at the expense of his own people. When he walked down the street, people looked away. He had got used to it. It still hurt, but he had got used to it. He had built a life for himself. But he was lost inside, and he knew it.

When Jesus came through the town, the streets were packed. Zacchaeus was short, and nobody was going to make room for him. Nobody ever made room for him. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree, up into the branches where nobody could see him. He was only hoping for a glimpse.

Jesus came down the road. And then, right beneath the tree, he stopped. He looked up. At Zacchaeus. And he smiled, as though he had been looking for him all along and was glad the search was over.

Come down, Jesus said. *I want to come to your house today.*

Nobody had ever said that to him. By the end of the meal, Zacchaeus had given half of everything he owned to the poor, and promised to repay everyone he had cheated four times over. Jesus had not told him to do any of it. He had simply come to his house and had lunch with him.

That is what being found does. Zacchaeus received a welcome he had done nothing to earn. And receiving it changed everything.

If Jesus is just a wise teacher, we remain in charge, free to take his advice or leave it. But if he is God in person, he becomes the most important person in the room.

*He said: "I am the way, the truth,
and the life." (John 14:6)*

What is striking about Jesus is not only what he taught, but how he lived. Despite the many demands on him, he was unhurried, and genuinely present to whoever was in front of him. He welcomed people others avoided, and faced his own death with

courage and resolve.

*He seemed, in some deep way, at
home in the world while the world
was not at home with itself.*

People found in his presence something they had not expected: a welcome, a sense of coming home. He saw behind their masks with empathy, and they were set free.

On Good Friday Jesus was crucified. His followers scattered. On the cross, Jesus spoke of being forsaken by God. He was cut off from his Father, entering our lostness, and so is able to bring us home.

By Sunday morning the tomb was empty.

*People do not normally rise from the
dead. That is the point.*

If Jesus remained dead, then he is simply another admirable figure from history. But if he rose, then death itself has been defeated, and his promises can be trusted.

There is much more to be said about this. That is what Credo is for. This invitation is to take a step onto the bridge, not to study its engineering. The question that matters here is: what if it's true?

If it is, his invitation is not just a comforting idea. The life he promised is available here and now: a life freed from the weight of everything that exhausts us.

The frightened men and women who had scattered when Jesus was arrested became people of astonishing courage over the course of just a few weeks. Both they and the world would never be the same again.

FOUR

A different way of living



The lost sheep is carried home, and there is a party. He is the guest of honour, and there is great joy.

Being found makes possible a whole new kind of life. Jesus calls people to follow him, to learn a way of life that is more fully human than the one we have settled for.

This life can only be received as a gift. It takes more than simply agreeing with his ideas. It means surrendering our need for control, and putting our

trust in him.

Following him means being transformed by the Holy Spirit into a person of love, a person like Jesus. He gives us new strength to live freely and simply, to forgive others, and to stop clinging to what does not give life. We learn how to pray, how to be still, how to share his life with others. He leads us to entrust him with everything: our money and our relationships, our hopes and our dreams. Little by little, we find our lives finally beginning to make sense.

And we do not do this alone. The sheep is carried home to the flock, reunited with the ninety-nine. That flock has a name: the church. It is an imperfect community, often disappointing, occasionally maddening. But it is where the shepherd brings his sheep, and where the party happens.

In the next chapter are three small steps that help us to receive Jesus' gift of life and become his apprentices. These are practical ways of letting ourselves be found, and of learning how to really live.

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me, watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 11:28–30, The Message)

FIVE

Practices for the journey

These practices are small ways of opening ourselves so that God can reshape our desires and slowly form in us the kind of life we cannot produce by effort alone.

Practice One: The Daily Pause



In the cool of the early morning, or late at night, Jesus regularly withdrew from the crowd to be still and to pray. One of the most helpful things you can do to recover your life is to follow his example.

The Daily Pause is the practice of choosing a

moment each day to stop, to step away from the hurry, to let yourself be found before the day demands everything else of you.

Try this. Find a moment each morning, before your phone, before the news. Start with just thirty seconds: stop, breathe, and say simply *Here I am.* Then listen, or rest in the stillness. Add a little more time each day. By the end of the week, five minutes will feel natural. Your mind will wander. When it does just return, gently, to the stillness.

Practice Two: Walking with the Gospels



The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are four accounts of Jesus' life, written by people

who knew him, or who knew those who did. In them we find conversations and arguments, sermons and meals with strangers, miracles, healings, and surprising reversals.

Reading an ancient text may feel strange at first. Stay with it. Read slowly, a short passage at a time, letting the scenes become vivid. This is one of the oldest ways of coming to know Jesus as a person, rather than as an idea.

Try this. Begin with Mark, the shortest and the most urgent of the Gospels. Read one chapter slowly, as though you are watching it happen. Ask: what do I notice? What surprises me? What does this tell me about who Jesus is?

Copies of Mark's Gospel are available from All Saints and Holy Trinity Churches in Hereford, and modern translations of the Bible from any good bookshop.

Practice Three: Breath Prayer



The world wears us down, mentally and spiritually. We carry the anxiety in our bodies: in shallow breathing, tight shoulders, the knot in the stomach, the tension that never quite goes away.

Jesus promised his followers a different kind of rest. The rest you find in knowing that the shepherd has found you, and that you are safe.

Breath prayer is one of the oldest Christian practices. A short prayer, quiet enough to pray with a single breath, repeated slowly until it settles into the body as much as the mind. Christians have always believed that God's own breath, his Spirit, is as close as the air we breathe. It can be prayed when you can't sleep, while you're waiting for the kettle to boil

or the traffic lights to change, or when you're walking somewhere.

Try this. Take this simple phrase and let it follow your breathing. Breathe in: *Jesus*. Breathe out: *Fill me now*. Repeat slowly, and meditatively. When you drift, return to the breathing.

SIX

The next step

Credo is a six-week course for anyone who wants to explore the Christian faith, or return to it. The conversations are honest and unhurried. No question is off-limits, no background assumed, and nobody will ask you to believe anything before you are ready.

If you are curious, sceptical, or simply not sure what you think, you are exactly the kind of person we had in mind when we wrote it.

To find out when Credo is next running, or to have a quiet conversation, get in touch:
whm.org.uk/credo



SEVEN

A prayer for being found

If you want to take a first step, you could pray something like this:

*Jesus, I have been wandering,
and I didn't know it.
I'm not sure I know how to come home.
But I'm willing to try, so
I turn towards you now.
Come and find me.
Amen.*

*What if there's another way to live?
There is never enough time. Families are
under impossible pressure. The phone in
our pocket promises company and delivers
exhaustion. There must be a better way.*

*Come and See is a short, honest
introduction to Jesus of Nazareth and his
way of life.*



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