

THE JESUS WHO SURPRISES

OPENING OUR EYES to HIS PRESENCE
in ALL of LIFE and SCRIPTURE

DEE BRESTIN

Best-selling author of *The Friendships of Women*

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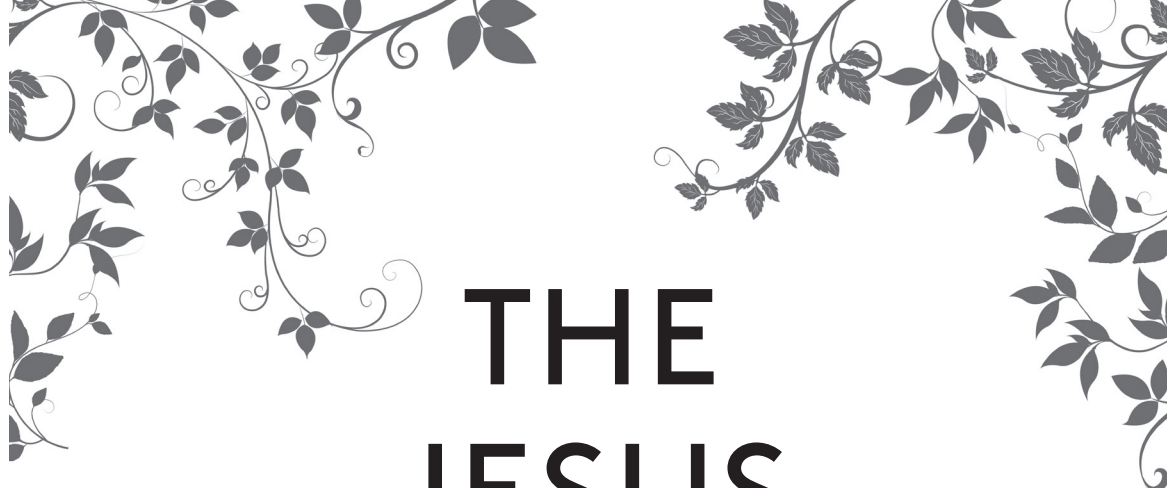
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THE JESUS WHO SURPRISES

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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Dedicated to Katherine Harrington, Miabelle Lano, Octavia Brestin, and Sadie Hale. These four daughters of my four daughters were born the same summer. How Jesus surprised us, turning our mourning into dancing!

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They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

—LUKE 24:32

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How to Use This Book and Bible Study

Welcome! Whether you are reading this book on your own or in a small group, I pray that it will draw you closer to the God who surprises us with His love.

You'll find that each chapter in *The Jesus Who Surprises* includes a Bible study. Each Bible study is divided into five days so you can pace yourself throughout the week. As valuable as I hope each chapter is, I believe that it is in God's Word where we find the greatest power for transformation and for joy!

If you are reading *The Jesus Who Surprises* in a small group and you just got your books at the first meeting, do the Get-Acquainted Bible Study on page 3. Then, for the next meeting, read chapter 1 and complete the first lesson ahead of time. If all of you have your books when you first meet, you can skip the Get-Acquainted Bible Study and go right to discussing the first chapter and first lesson.

For those who are hungry to go deeper (the happiest people you'll meet!), each week you will find short video testimonies for each lesson and ideas for optional sermons you can listen to. You can go to my website (www.deebrestin.com), click on Free Teaching Videos, and find the short video testimonies and sermons mentioned in each study under *The Jesus Who Surprises*. To find the sermons, you can also Google a few key words.

If you're leading your small group or Sunday school class through this study, you might like to read the facilitator notes in the back of this book in preparation for each gathering. You'll find suggestions for each lesson, deeper explanations of certain questions, and helpful hints for making your group the best it can be.

I look forward to journeying with you as we seek and find Jesus throughout Scripture and our lives!

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Optional Get-Acquainted Bible Study

1. Go around the group and share your name and an adjective that begins with the same letter your name does (for example, Introverted Ida, Teacher Tom, Dangerous Dee . . .). When it's your turn, say all the adjectives and names of the people who have gone before you as well!
2. Go around again and share something you are passionate about and why.
3. Jesus was always surprising people. Read these passages aloud, taking time to answer the questions as a group after each reading.

Luke 4:16–22

- a. What observations or comments do you have? (Take time with this.)
- b. Why might Jesus's words and actions have surprised people?
- c. Consider what Isaiah says the Messiah would come to do. Have you experienced any of these benefits from Jesus? If so, explain.

Luke 19:1–10

- a. What observations or comments do you have?
- b. Who is surprised by Jesus and why?
- c. What immediate changes do you see in Zacchaeus that suggest he is having a genuine conversion?
- d. Have you ever had a dramatic change in your life due to Jesus? If so, share.

Mark 4:35–41

- a. What observations or comments do you have?
- b. In verse 41, why do you think the disciples are “filled with great fear”?
- c. Have you ever had a moment when you felt great fear of God? If so, what was it like? Why did you feel fear?

4. The God Hunt!¹ We’ll go deeper into this in the book, but let’s get our feet wet. Because Jesus is alive, He is still surprising us today, but we need to learn how to recognize His gifts and His mindfulness of us.

- a. Your most frequent way of spying God will come through realizing that “whatever is good and perfect is a gift . . . from God” (James 1:17, NLT). Let everything—from a perfect peach, to a kind clerk, to a lovely sunset—cause you to stop and thank Him. At the end of each day, record your best gift of the day. What might you say was your best gift yesterday?
- b. In Psalm 8:4, David looks at the heavens and then asks, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” Can you think of a time when you were quite sure God was being mindful of you—and were amazed?
- c. The richest groups are those where people are so hungry for God that they’ve done their homework. What is your plan for accomplishing your homework for this Bible study (when, where, how)?



A Journey of Surprises

And Our Hearts Burned Within Us

The passion children bring to hide-and-seek is the same
passion we need to bring to finding God.

—KAREN MAINS

When our sons reached grade-school age, they morphed the game hide-and-seek into “scare” hide-and-seek, surprising the seeker by leaping with a roar from the broom closet or the outdoor trash can. Or, if the stealthy seeker spied toes beneath the curtain or noticed a breathing blanket, he’d creep in and grab the hider with a blood-curdling cry.

Our boys loved the adrenaline rush, but their little sister would often burst into tears. I’d say, “No more scare high-and-seek with Sally!”

Sally would protest, “Please, Mommy—I will be *brave* like my brothers this time. Let me play too!” If I relented and let her play, her terror and tears returned.

I wonder if Sally’s feelings were akin to how we feel about Jesus sometimes. We *want* Him to show up, yet if He does, we’re shocked and scared—similar to how the disciples felt when Jesus walked this earth. When a storm comes up with Jesus asleep in the stern, the disciples awaken Him and plead with Him to help. We are told that when He does, “they were filled with great fear” (Mark 4:41), suddenly more afraid of One who could stop a storm than of the storm itself.

That is how Dr. Jeff Johnson, my friend and neighbor, felt during one of his frequent medical mission trips to Honduras. On a Tuesday in July 1998, in Tegucigalpa, a young single mom brought her twelve-year-old daughter to the church, which had been transformed into a clinic for the week. She had taken Carla to six other clinics over the

past several months. Each time Carla had been diagnosed with congenital glaucoma, the same medical condition that caused Ray Charles to go blind. It is permanent and irreversible. Jeff remembers the day well:

Another doctor and I examined her and we formed the diagnosis. Her corneas were smoky white as a result of the extremely high eye pressure, and her eyes constantly wandered. She was unable to fixate on any object and unable to see the light from the flashlight.

We spent time talking to the mother and told her there was no medical treatment available for her daughter. She had now heard the same diagnosis and prognosis for the seventh time.

The team hadn't prayed for her to be healed, yet as they were escorting her and her mother out, Jeff thought, *It wouldn't hurt*. The group surrounded the young girl, Jeff put his right hand over her eyes, and they began to pray.

He says, "I really don't remember specifically what we prayed, and I honestly did not expect anything to happen. After a few minutes, I removed my hand from her eyes and she exclaimed,

"I can see!"

"My response was, 'What did you say?'"

"I can see!"

"We looked at each other, stunned in silent disbelief, while before our very eyes we witnessed a miracle. God had restored the visual pathways to her brain, and as the pressure normalized, her milky-white corneas became clear. As word of this spread through the packed clinic, a 'Holy Silence' swept through the building, for both Hondurans and North Americans alike."¹

The German scholar Rudolf Otto used a Latin phrase for this "holy silence," this awe that people from all cultures feel when they come into the presence of One perfectly holy and powerful. He called it *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. To quote Otto, this phrase means:

- "Mysterium": wholly other, experienced with blank wonder, stupor
- "tremendum": awefulness, terror, absolute unapproachability . . .
- "fascinans": potent charm, attractiveness in spite of fear, terror, etc.²

We have an approach/avoidance reaction to God as we are drawn yet fearful as His holy presence makes us realize how sinful we are. As the old spiritual “Were You There?” says, “Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.”

Jeff had all those feelings the morning of the miracle: bountiful joy, a fearful awe, and a deep conviction of how often he may have short-circuited God’s plan because of a preconceived notion of how He works.

I have come to believe that Jesus finds joy in surprising us but that often we are blind spiritually as Carla was physically. We must ask Jesus to remove the veil from our eyes so we can see Him in every corner of Scripture and of life.

Jesus in the Old Testament

My dear friend Ron came to Christ at the age of seventy, and he delights me with his continual surprise as he discovers things that for me have lost their luster through familiarity. I’ve told Ron I want to follow him around with a notepad because his reactions are so wonderful, so quotable! The other day in a Bible study he said, “I never knew before Jesus that you should listen to your wife.” We burst into laughter. His wife, Debbie, grinned and said, “He’s a changed man!”

Ron and Debbie recently took me to dinner at a restaurant on Lake Michigan. As we watched the waves roll in, Ron asked me what I was writing now.

“It’s a book about how Jesus surprises us by turning up in the Old Testament and in our everyday lives.”

Ron’s fork stopped in midair. He raised his white furry eyebrows. “Jesus is in the Old Testament?”

I nodded. “Yes! Every prophet, priest, slain lamb, and suffering servant is a foreshadowing of Jesus, who is the ultimate prophet, priest, slain lamb, and suffering servant. But it is even more comprehensive than that. It isn’t just that Jesus hides in every Old Testament book, but that *one* story—the story of His promised rescue—threads all the way through. God loved the Son so much, He created a bride for Him in Genesis 1. Then, when that bride was unfaithful, God had to rescue her. That story is the tapestry of the whole Bible, from Genesis through Revelation.”

Ron shook his head: half amazement, half disbelief. I smiled, ready to mentally capture his response. “Dee, *how* do you know that?”

I told him about the Walk to Emmaus, my favorite New Testament story, where

Jesus Himself explains this truth. It occurs on the first Easter Sunday, at the end of Luke, when Jesus surprises two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is here that Jesus reveals that we should be searching the whole Old Testament for Him and His redemptive gospel plan. And, just as it was for these two disciples (Luke 24:16, 31), a veil must be removed from our eyes or we will miss this surprising Jesus, both in the Old Testament and in our everyday lives.

We Had Hoped He Was the One

Often we miss seeing Jesus in our lives because His behavior does not fit our expectations. The two on the road to Emmaus had expected deliverance from their political enemies, but now those very enemies had crucified Him. Who were these two disciples? At least one had to be named in order that this incident could be historically documented—and he is: Cleopas, though he is not named anywhere else in Scripture. And suggestions abound on the identity of the other disciple. Some think it is the wife of Cleopas, but we simply do not know. There is more detail in this resurrection account than in most, lending credence to the belief that Luke’s source was these two disciples themselves. (Luke 1:2 tells us Luke received his accounts from eyewitnesses, and it is fascinating to me that there are more women’s stories in Luke than in any other gospel, so some of those eyewitnesses must have been women.)

A “stranger” who comes up beside them asks, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” (24:17).

They stand still. “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” (verse 18).

Jesus asks them simply, “What things?”

They reply, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth . . . and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (verses 19–21).

Then the two tell Him that “it is now the third day” (verse 21) since all this happened. In Jewish thought, the third day was the day of deliverance. On the third day, Abraham saw the ram in the thicket and Jonah was delivered from the whale. Jesus Himself had told His disciples He was going to Jerusalem to suffer, be killed, and on the third day be raised (Matthew 16:21).

Yet it’s the third day, and they think there’s been no deliverance. Jesus listens to

them describe the “idle tale” of their women (Luke 24:11), who claimed that Christ had risen from the dead. (The Greek word Luke the physician uses that is translated “idle tale” is a medical term meaning “the delirious talk of the very ill”!)

At this, Jesus exclaims, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (verses 26–27).

Then, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (verse 27).

The figure of speech “from Moses . . . to all the prophets” is called *zeugma* and means *all* their Scriptures from “front to back.”³ In other words, Jesus shows them how *every* book of the Bible they have at the time is about the Christ and what He came to do.

Yet it isn’t until they are breaking bread together that evening that Jesus lifts the spiritual veil from their eyes and allows them to recognize Him (verses 30–31). Oh, what a reunion! He whom they thought was dead is alive, and they can see, hear, and touch Him again!

Later they marvel, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (verse 32).

Did Not Our Hearts Burn Within Us?

Just as the disciples did, when we discover Jesus in unexpected places, “our hearts burn within us” and indeed we are transformed. John Piper says, “Beholding *is* becoming,”⁴ referencing 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

The Spirit does a supernatural work in us when we behold the glory of the Lord. When I spy Jesus or His gospel in the Old Testament, my heart melts. Why? Awe comes over me as I see how *every* book in the Bible is about Jesus and His rescue. Over more than a thousand years, many holy men, from many cultures and places, though usually working independently of one another, told the *same* story. How could this be? It is because almighty God Himself is behind the various personalities telling this One Story, this story of His quest to rescue the family He loves.

Sally Lloyd-Jones, in *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, puts it like this:

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It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne—everything—to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!¹⁵

This same Jesus who rescued His people back then is still rescuing us today. Often He appears when we are at our lowest, facing shattered dreams. He *may* surprise us, just as He did for the two on the road to Emmaus, by turning our sorrow into joy. Or He may show up when we least expect Him in answers to prayer, in timing that is too unusual to be coincidence, or through the sense of His holy presence.

I pray that through this book, God will lift a veil from your eyes so that you might more frequently encounter Jesus in Scripture and in life. At the close of each chapter is an in-depth Bible study to help you discover Jesus and His gospel for yourself. Whether on your own or in a small group, you will learn how to go on a daily God Hunt to see Him where you might have missed Him before, just as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus saw Him where they least expected Him.

Luke 24:44, Jesus mentions three representative divisions of the three main sections of the Old Testament: Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Therefore, I am dividing this book and study into those three parts:

1. Books of Moses: representing the historical books of Genesis through Esther
2. Psalms: representing the poetical books of Job through the Song of Songs
3. Prophets: representing the prophetic books of Isaiah through Malachi

When we study the historical books (staying primarily in Genesis), we will see how the story begins: the beautiful music of creation, the song as it becomes discordant, and then the melody of hope reminding us that all is not lost.

When we study the poetical books (staying primarily in the Psalms), we learn how to live in this story, this fallen world, so that despite the sorrow, we may know an inextinguishable joy.

When we study the prophetic books (staying primarily in Isaiah), we will see how the story is going to end. When we realize how accurate Isaiah's prophecies were concerning the first coming of the Messiah, our confidence will grow in the accuracy of his prophecies for the second coming of our Messiah and his prophecies of heaven.

Why the Big Picture Matters

Recently I counseled a young woman who was distressed because her parents, who once seemed so grounded in Scripture, had been swept up into false teaching. She said, “They are so sure that this new teaching is the truth and that they were wrong before. How can we know for sure what’s true and what is not?”

This is such an important question, and one of the main reasons I wanted to write this book.

I told her, “We need to take Paul’s warning to Timothy to heart, about ‘rightly handling the word of truth’ [2 Timothy 2:15]. The word *handling* in the Greek is *orthotomeo*, an engineering term that refers to keeping things straight, aligned—small pieces must fit into the unified whole. God doesn’t disagree with Himself. Any doctrine you embrace must fit into the unified themes of the Bible. The reason, for example, that we don’t believe that something must be added to our faith to save us, as your parents now do, is that the whole theme of the Bible is that the blood of Jesus is sufficient to make the vilest sinner clean. The reason we don’t believe that Jesus is just a great teacher or prophet—as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Scientists do—is that the whole theme of the Bible is that He is very God of very God.”

I went on to explain that when a verse doesn’t seem to fit into the unified whole, it is only an *apparent* contradiction. Either God will make it clear when we see Him face to face, or light will be given to you as you hold it up to the unified themes of the Bible.

For example, in Galatians 5:19–21, Paul gives a list of sins and closes with “Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This, out of context, could lead some to think that if they *don’t* do such things, they will automatically go to heaven. But this interpretation cannot be correct because the unified theme of the whole Bible and of Galatians itself says we are saved only by faith in Christ, not by our actions or inactions.

Failing to see that the Bible is one great story is like failing to look at the cover of a puzzle box before you dive into its one thousand pieces. You may be able to put together the puzzle, but it will be frustrating. You will often be trying to push a piece of the blue lake into the blue sky. How much wiser to first look at the cover! And what treasures we discover when we journey through the Old Testament with Jesus in mind.

In this journey you will see the same themes appearing and reappearing, equipping

you to spot teachings that run like beautiful threads throughout Scripture. And I know, like the two on the road to Emmaus, your heart will burn within you as you begin to spy Jesus in the Old Testament and in every corner of your life.

Bible Study One

Optional online listening opportunity for those going deeper: “Jesus Vindicated” by Tim Keller.

Icebreakers

Skip questions 1 and 3 if you did the Optional Get-Acquainted Bible Study.

1. Go around the group and share your name and an adjective that begins with the same letter your name does (for example, Introverted Ida, Teacher Tom, Dangerous Dee . . .). When it's your turn, say all the adjectives and names of the people who have gone before you as well!
2. Why have you come to this study group, and what do you hope to see happen here?
3. What could you do to help make this discussion group the best it could be?

Week One God Hunt

Each day record your best gift of the day in a sentence: *Today I spied God when . . .* (It could be an encouraging email, a good day at work, the kids going back to school!) At the end of the week, put a star next to your *best* gift of the week to share with others in your group.

Day One: Chapter Review

4. Read the chapter and highlight as you read. Write down one thought that impressed you so you can share it with the group. (Always go around the group with this question, giving freedom to pass.)

5. For those who listened to the Tim Keller sermon, what stood out to you the most about his words?

Today I spied God when . . .

Day Two: The Context of the Walk to Emmaus

Read Luke 24:1–12. (Do this as homework, but when you meet in the group have someone read it aloud and then pause before the questions and ask for comments. God often shows up during these times of looking at the Word together.)

If you were making up this story in the days of Jesus, you wouldn't have women as witnesses. Women were not considered credible witnesses at that time. Yet God values women and had them first at the empty tomb. Luke, who wants to give an orderly account (1:1–4), reports this incident exactly as it happened.

6. What comments or observations do you have after reading or listening to this passage?
7. The word translated “nonsense” or “idle tale” in 24:11 is actually a medical term that Luke the physician uses, meaning “the delirious talk of the very ill.” Why do you think this is the disciples' initial reaction even though the women report exactly what Jesus has said would happen?
8. Did any verse become “radioactive”? In other words, did a verse or phrase send off a powerful charge to you spiritually and cause you to pause? (We'll be considering this question often in our studies, as God so often speaks to us

through our initial, unguarded reaction to something in His Word.) If so, meditate on those words to see what God might be saying to you. What stands out to you as you meditate on them?

Today I spied God when . . .

Day Three: First Look at the Walk to Emmaus

9. As an overview, read Luke 24:13–35 carefully twice and write down any observations, comments, or questions. Did anything become radioactive? Read it aloud again in the group and take turns sharing comments.

Today I spied God when . . .

Day Four: Going Deeper with the Walk to Emmaus

In this retelling of the two disciples meeting Christ while walking to Emmaus, we find humor, pathos, and a deep sense of reality—this truly happened.

10. Read Luke 24:15–24.
- a. What emotions might the two on the way to Emmaus have had as they were walking? What might they have been talking about?

b. What emotions might Jesus have had as He walked alongside these two? Why?

c. Why do you think Jesus asks them what happened (verse 19)?

11. Read Luke 24:25–27.

a. What does Jesus say they should have known, and why? Do you believe Jesus is angry with the two for needing Him to teach them? Why or why not?

b. What does He reveal to them about their Scriptures (the Old Testament)?

12. Read Luke 24:28–35.

*a. What might have felt familiar to the two about this scene?

b. How do the two express their emotions after Jesus vanishes from their sight?

- c. It is still night, but what do they do and why?
- d. What words would you use to describe the scene of the two telling the others that they have seen the risen Lord? What sounds, emotions, exclamations, and questions might have been a part of that moment?
- e. What does the resurrection of Christ mean to you personally?
- f. Did any verse in this story become radioactive to you? If so, explain.
- *13. Briefly share a moment in your life when Jesus became particularly real to you, when your heart burned within you, whether at the time of your salvation or another time.

Today I spied God when . . .

Day Five: The Gospel in the Old Testament

Read Luke 24:36–46. With His new, resurrected body, Jesus could simply disappear and appear, and while the thirteen were talking, He appears before them, allows them

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to touch Him, and eats fish to show He is not a ghost. Then He again turns to the Old Testament—their Scriptures—and shows them how He and His gospel are in it.

14. Describe what happened in this scene.

- *15. What three sections of the Old Testament does Jesus open to and explain, according to Luke 24:44? Since the Greek word *zeugma*, translated “all,” means everything from front to back, explain how the three categories represent the whole Old Testament.

16. Not only will you see Jesus foreshadowed in men like Adam, Job, Ruth, David, Esther, and others, but you will also discover the foreshadowing of God’s planned rescue, or the gospel, throughout the Old Testament. How does Jesus explain this in both Luke 24:26 and Luke 24:46?

- *17. The term *mysterium tremendum* describes how we feel in the presence of the holy. The two on the road to Emmaus felt it. Have you ever sensed it? If so, when?

Today I spied God when . . .

Prayer Time

Take time to give thanks. You can do this with your eyes open! The facilitator will go around the circle and invite you to share your best God Hunt from the week or one takeaway from the lesson or discussion as a way of thanking God for being personal with you. You also have the freedom to pass. You may want to plan ahead what you will share. If so, write it here: