



## No Greater Love

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*“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13 NIV)*

Who is this Jesus, who came to lay down His life for His friends? And who are His friends? And what does it mean that He *“laid down His life?”* Have you ever asked yourself those questions? I used to ask them. Not so long ago, I found the answers. That’s why I wrote this article, to share those answers with you.

### Who is this Jesus that I am Supposed to Love?

Jesus Christ is a unique person. He is the only perfect human being ever born. He is the exact representation of God; God with skin on. He is the only Son of God, and before He was born as a man, He existed as the “Word of God”. It’s hard for us to picture exactly what that means.

So let’s just focus on His humanity. We know humans, and we have lots of information about the human Jesus. Let’s answer the question, “Who is this Jesus I am supposed to love?”

### Jesus is the Heart of God

Jesus has gifts of love, acceptance, creativity, storytelling, influence, excitement, and popularity. These gifts are called the Gifts of the Heart.

Jesus loves all people and sees the wonderful potential of every person. He loved all kinds of people when He lived on earth, even tax gatherers and prostitutes; the kinds of people that the religious rulers of the day wouldn’t be caught dead with. Jesus went to their homes and had meals with them!

Jesus was a great storyteller. In fact, people are still repeating His stories! He called His stories parables. Everywhere Jesus went there was a party, and people would come from miles around just to hear His stories. He even served food at His parties; bread and fish.

It was always crowded when Jesus spoke, and they were always running out of seats. People would pack the room, hang in the windows, and even come down through the roof just to hear



Him. He was very popular.

Jesus was influential. In fact we number our years based on the date of His death. No human being has ever been as influential as Jesus has!

Jesus is the Heart of God.

### **Jesus is the Soul of God**

Jesus has gifts of peace, prayer, deep thinking, listening, mediation and humility. These gifts are called the Gifts of the Soul.

Jesus is called the Prince of Peace, and peace permeates Him. He came to bring peace to the world. He loved to get away all by Himself so He could pray to His Father. Sometimes He would stay up all night long just praying.

Jesus was a deep thinker, or philosopher. For thousands of years, learned scholars have studied His words and tried to understand them. His words are so unique that they are simple enough for a child to understand, yet complex enough to satisfy the most deep-thinker.

Jesus is a great listener. Do you know that He listens to all the prayers of everyone all over the earth at the same time? He hears every single voice that is raised to Him. And Jesus is a mediator. The Bible tells us that He is the only mediator between God and man. Jesus is working constantly to bring the desires of those who follow Him to God.

Jesus is humble. He was born into a poor peasant family. As a newborn, his bassinette was a feeding trough for cattle. Even though He occupied a throne in Heaven, during His adult years on earth He was homeless. He rode into town on the back of a donkey, which no ruler would ever be caught dead riding! He humbled Himself more than any other human ever has, when He submitted to being crucified on the cross.

Jesus is the Soul of God.

### **Jesus is the Mind of God**

Jesus has the gifts of perfection, sensitivity, compassion, order, discernment and self-sacrifice. These gifts are called the Gifts of the Mind.

Jesus is perfect. He was tempted in every way when He lived on earth, but without sin. He never failed at anything He tried. Can you imagine that kind of perfection?

Jesus is sensitive, He wept at sad things; the death of his friend, the future of His people. He



was also compassionate. He said that He didn't come for the healthy, but for those who were sick. He cared for those who struggled. He wanted to reach out and help them.

Jesus was orderly. Did you know that when He fed the crowds of people with a few loaves of bread and a few fish, He divided them up into groups of 50 and 100 first? I bet that He would have loved Excel if it had been invented then!

Jesus is discerning. He easily identifies problems. Even when people tried to hide their problems, Jesus knew what was wrong at the very core of the person.

Jesus was self-sacrificing. He was a friend to everyone, even those who hated Him. His act of self-sacrifice was greater than anyone before or since. He willingly allowed Himself to be sacrificed on the cross for the good of mankind.

Jesus is the Mind of God.

### **Jesus is the Strength of God**

Jesus embodies the wonderful gifts of power, leadership, accomplishment, problem solving and goal achievement. These gifts are called Gifts of Strength.

Jesus is powerful. The wind, waves, animals and demons were at His command. Nothing could overpower Jesus if He didn't allow it to.

Jesus is a great leader. In just 3 short years He took 12 unlikely, untrained men; trained them and left them. Over 2000 years have passed, and their teachings and traditions are still changing people's lives.

Jesus accomplished a lot with His high energy. The bible says that if they wrote down everything that Jesus did in His life, the entire world couldn't hold all the books.

Jesus was a problem solver. There was no problem that was too tough for Jesus. People would stand in line all day long just to have Jesus solve their problems. He did that through the use of miracles.

Jesus was a high achiever. The oldest part of the bible, the Old Testament, contains many goals for Jesus to accomplish. We call them prophecies. Jesus accomplished every single one of those goals, down to the last detail. When He was done, He declared, "It is finished."

Jesus is the Strength of God.



## Who are the Friends of Jesus?

Now that we've taken a look at who Jesus is, let's consider who the friends of Jesus are.

We are the friends of Jesus. I know that's hard to comprehend, but we are. Jesus knows each one of us intimately. He knows what we are thinking. He knows when we leave and when we come back. He knows what we are going to say before we say it.

In the descriptions of Jesus, did you see yourself represented? People are created in the image of God, and that means that each of us resembles Jesus a little bit. Each of us is unique, and each of us has at least a little bit of the Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength of Jesus. Most of us can identify one area that most closely describes us.

### Heart-focused

Did you see some of Jesus's Heart in yourself? Are you outgoing, creative, seeing the good in all people? Do you love to tell stories? Does going to a party really excite you? Those who are Heart-focused are often comfortable on stage, at the center of attention. They are influencers and love to talk. If this sounds like you, then you might be Heart-focused.

### Soul-focused

Did you see some of Jesus's Soul in yourself? Are you quiet and pensive? Do you love to philosophize and think deeply? Are you good at seeing both sides of every issue? Do people come to you and pour out their troubles? Do you have a reputation as a good listener? Do you put others before yourself, and are you more comfortable not being in the limelight? If this sounds like you, then you might be Soul-focused.

### Mind-focused

Did you relate to the Mind of Jesus? Are you orderly and detail-oriented? Do you love to find problems, or are you good with numbers? Do you care deeply about those who are impoverished or abused? Do you spend a lot of time making sure everything is perfect? And are you a self-sacrificing friend? If so, you might be Mind-focused.



### **Strength-focused**

And how about the Strength of Jesus? Did you see yourself in that description? Are you energetic and outgoing? Have you accomplished a lot in your life? Do you prefer to be in charge, and do others look to you for leadership? Do you have confidence and do others think of you as powerful? If so, you might be Strength-focused.

No matter if you are Heart, Soul, Mind or Strength focused, Jesus knows you like the back of His hand. He knows what it feels like to be in your skin. He can relate to you.

### **A Life Laid Down**

It is important to understand first of all who Jesus is, and then who we are before we can understand what it meant for Jesus to lay down His life for us, His friends.

### **The Most Important Thing**

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"*

*"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'*

*Mark 12:28-30 (NIV)*

Throughout the entire bible, from beginning to end, the most important commandment has always been to love God with everything we've got: heart, soul, mind and strength. Even though God keeps telling us that, for some reason we keep failing to do it.

We have lots of reasons for not loving Him. It may be inconvenient, it may not be a lot of fun, it might not fit into our agenda...you get the picture. What it all boils down to is that we are too selfish to love God so completely and in such a balanced way. Our selfishness takes many forms such as lying, laziness, greed, anger, being judgmental, and rebellion. We call these things *sin*. Sin is letting our selfishness get in the way of our loving God.

Our real problem with sin is that it is part of who we are, it is in our DNA. No matter how hard we try, we can never love God the way He wants us to.



So the relationship that God wants with us is impossible. A relationship requires two participants. And one of us is unwilling, so there can be no relationship.

This sounds like an impossible situation, doesn't it? But God wasn't satisfied with just telling us how to love Him. He knew that we needed a visual aid.

### Love Illustrated

God sent Jesus to earth as a human man to illustrate in a very real way what it means to love God completely. And in the process He also illustrated how completely He loves *us*.

Jesus went through a lot of suffering when it came time for Him to die on the cross. He was betrayed by one of His closest friends, He was treated unfairly. He was imprisoned, beaten, mocked, and crowned with thorns. He had to carry His cross, and then was nailed to it. His pain must have been immense, but He never complained about it. He even refused to take a drug to deaden the pain.

As He hung on the cross, struggling with His life ebbing away, the onlookers mocked and scorned Him. They ridiculed Him. Instead of expressing frustration at this, He merely asked God to forgive them.

Jesus also suffered on the cross because the sin of the world was placed on Him. A man of perfection, who never sinned once in His life, had to bear the guilt, pain, shame and brokenness that our sin causes.

Jesus made one comment on the cross that expressed what I believe was His greatest pain.

*"And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")" (Mark 15:34 NIV)*

This statement reflects the great love that God and His Son have for us and the great price that love demanded. No greater love could have made this sacrifice. Jesus said that He and His Father are One. For all of eternity, they have existed as One in thought, deed, intention, power and in nature. But the greatest love required the greatest sacrifice; the broken relationship of God the Father and God the Son.

As the sin of the world was placed on Jesus, His Father had to break their relationship. At the time of Jesus' greatest need, His Father turned His back away and refused to come to the aid of His only Son. I think that at that moment, the angels in Heaven must have been holding their breath, wondering if the entire universe was going to come apart at the seams.

God had to make this greatest sacrifice. Our sin is so natural to us that there is only one way



that we will ever stop sinning. When we die we will stop. That is the only thing that can stop us, death. Pretty extreme, but that is what it will take.

That's why Jesus had to die with the sin of the world on Him. And God was honor-bound to turn His back on Jesus at that time, because if He hadn't, God would be a hypocrite and a liar. And we know that isn't true!

Three days after Jesus died, He rose from the dead. He overcame sin and death. We call that the resurrection. The bible doesn't record the reunion between Jesus and His Father. Wouldn't you have loved to witness the healing reconciliation of God the Father and God the Son? Their relationship will never be broken again. Today they are seated next to each other in Heaven. That was probably the cause of a great sigh of relief from the angels!

### **So What Difference Does this Make?**

We've taken a look at who Jesus is. We have considered who we, His friends, are. We've looked at the sacrifice He made. So now what? What difference does this make in our lives?

Jesus's job on earth is finished now. He did the work to earn us the right to have a relationship with God. He is waiting for each one of us to receive this relationship. It is a gift, a present, from Jesus to us.

#### **The Offer**

Jesus said, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33 NIV)

When Jesus lived here, He saw lots of trouble; broken relationships, poverty, abuse, loss of loved ones, wayward children. He doesn't sugar-coat things for us. He wants us to know that in this world we will see trouble.

Jesus experienced every possible human emotion when He was on earth. And since we are each created in His image, He knows each of us like the back of His own hand. He knows what it feels like to be in your skin. He knows the emotional pain you feel, and He wants to give you healing.

He wants us to be encouraged, He has overcome the broken world we live in. He offers us peace; real spiritual peace with God. He knows that kind of peace is the only thing that can help us in this difficult life.



## **The Decision**

Jesus offers us a gift, and choosing the gift is as simple as A, B, C.

A – Admit that I am a sinful person; and that I cannot and do not love God the way I should.

B – Believe that Jesus did pay the penalty for my sins; that He died on the cross for me, so that I could have a relationship with God in this life.

C – Count the Cost. No one would build a house without counting the cost of the budget. And no one should accept this gift without counting the cost. Do you want to let God have control of your life? Will you be willing to change some of your ways to match His plans for your life? Are you ready to make room for a relationship with the God of the Universe?

In 1995, I made this decision and asked God to help me to love Him the way He deserves to be loved. I counted the cost, and jumped in with both feet. I am all in! And I have never regretted my decision for one moment.

My life hasn't been perfect since making that decision, don't forget Jesus said "you will have trouble." And I have. But my decision meant a lifetime of growing to know God more completely; and a lifetime of gradual change for the better for me.

Now don't get me wrong, I still sin! I am still the same imperfect Deb. But my sins have been forgiven once and for all. My sins don't build a wall between me and God. I have a burning desire to love God completely. So when I sin, I feel remorse and try to turn away from it quickly.

If you have never made this decision, I hope that this article has helped you to understand what it is all about. It is really an amazing thing, to be in a relationship with God. If you would like to make this decision and be in a relationship with God today, you can talk to God and ask Him for that. You can use your own words, or just follow the A, B, C above.

I would love to know if you have made this decision today or if you have any questions. Would you be willing to email me and let me know? [deb@debpotts.com](mailto:deb@debpotts.com) I would love to send you a free booklet to help you get started on your adventure with God.

...because U count, deb