

Jessica LaGrone

Inside
the
Miracles
of
Jesus

Discovering *the*
Power *of* Desperation



FORTY-DAY READING PLAN

If you would like to use this book as a daily devotional and delve deeper into the Scriptures, here is a forty-day plan to read the chapters in this book, explore the referenced Scriptures more deeply, and reflect on some personal applications these stories and Scriptures might have for your own life with Jesus. Find a journal or notebook to make notes, copy Scripture verses that are speaking to you, and write out your reflections to the questions each day.

Day 1: Read chapter 1.

Day 2: Read Mark 7:25-26; 9:17-18, 24; Luke 18:35-38; John 5:1-9; 11:21. Where do you see desperation? In the miracle stories, people come to the end of themselves—running out of ideas, options, strength, and resources—and Jesus steps in to make things right.

Day 3: Read John 2:1-12. How are the water, wine, and wedding signs that Jesus uses to point us to something deeper? Signs exist to call our attention to something more important, to act as the guide to what we are looking for. John tells miracle stories to point us to Jesus.

Day 4: Read John 2:5. How would the story be different if the servants had decided to take matters into their own hands? Listening for

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instruction and then doing God's will means we're putting the whole messy situation in God's hands, acknowledging that we are simply the servants of his will.

Day 5: Read John 2:1-12 as though you have never heard the story. What jumps out at you? What questions do you have for Jesus? What might God be speaking to you about through this miracle story?

Day 6: Look up some instances of how obedience leads to a miracle: Exodus 14:21; 17:5-6, 9-10. How does God use something Moses already has in each of these miraculous events?

Day 7: Read Job 38:25-28, 37-38; Psalm 113:5-6; Matthew 16:15; Mark 4:41. When have you said to yourself, "Who is like our God?"

Day 8: Read chapter 2.

Day 9: Read 1 Samuel 17:48-50; 1 Kings 18:41-46; 19:11-13; Matthew 13:31-32; James 3:5. How are small things used in big ways? The scarcity of the ingredients reminds us that it's God's power, not human ingenuity or provision, to which we should give our attention and praise.

Day 10: Read Mark 6:30-44. When have you laid out your scarcity or shortage before God, showing him just how impossible things look? When blessed in Jesus's hands, the five loaves and two fish turn out to be a feast. Jesus actually divides five loaves among all of them, and then amazingly he divides the two fish among them all.

Day 11: Read John 6:32-35. What is Jesus saying about bread? God provides for all of our needs. It doesn't always make sense. We can't always figure out how he will do it. We don't always understand his methods. But he will always be there to meet our needs. God always provides.

Day 12: Read Matthew 4:1-4. Where do you see any scarcity and desperation in Jesus's temptation? How does Jesus respond?

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Day 13: Read 1 Kings 17:13-16. Can you think of a time God provided for your needs just when you thought you had run out? The miracle story in the New Testament of the feeding of the five thousand also echoes one of the greatest stories of abundance found in Scripture: the encounter of the prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.

Day 14: Read Luke 5:1-11. When have you ever said to God, “OK, if you say so. . .”? We try everything we can in our own strength, and we only find failure, so Jesus is a last resort. The good news is that Jesus doesn’t reject us just because we take a while to do it his way!

Day 15: Read chapter 3.

Day 16: Read Mark 4:35-41. What do we learn about the storm? What does Jesus say to the sea? When we are in the midst of extremely hard times, it’s so easy to question whether God cares. These disciples had witnessed Jesus going out of his way to heal and help and save so many people from danger and distress.

Day 17: Read Genesis 1:2 and Revelation 15:2. What does the water symbolize? Each of Jesus’s miracles in some way combats the evil powers of the world and shows that God is triumphant over them.

Day 18: Read Matthew 14:28. Where do you sense a desire for God to call you out of the ordinary? We all have them in our lives: places where we live day in and day out, going through the everyday, boring motions. We forget sometimes that the ordinary places are also where the extraordinary is most likely to happen.

Day 19: Read John 21:1-11. What would you have done if you were in the boat that night? The first time, the miraculous presence of a holy God causes Peter to notice his own sin. But later, after all they’ve been through together, Peter actually drops everything, including the catch!

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Day 20: Read Mark 6:45-52 a few times. What sticks out to you as you read the miracle story? What might God be saying to you through this passage?

Day 21: Read chapter 4.

Day 22: Read Luke 5:12-16. What things do you need to take boldly to Jesus, expecting that he can give you the healing you seek? God wants *you* to approach him with bold humility and offer him your needs. He wants you to know that there's nothing so damaged in your life (or the lives of others) that it would deter him from touching you.

Day 23: Read Mark 2:1-11. What is special about the act of friendship in this story? Who are your friends that carry you to Jesus? In community, sometimes we are those who carry, and sometimes we are those who are carried.

Day 24: Read Psalm 133:1; Luke 10:30-37; Galatians 6:1-10. How does a community who bears each other's burdens point to God? The Bible paints a picture of community where our burdens are not our own. They are to be shared with others when needed but never in a way that is unhealthy or exempts us from personal responsibility.

Day 25: Read Mark 9:14-29. The father expresses a desire to believe wholeheartedly in Jesus, while at the same time he confesses a cautious, tentative hope. He has faith, but yet he lacks faith. If we're honest, most of us in our greatest moments of need could say the same thing to God. We are a people who have faith and need faith all at once. When has this been true for you?

Day 26: Read Luke 12:7. What does this verse tell you about God's love and care for you? God knows the number of hairs on our heads, and although he pays attention to the tiniest of birds, we are worth more than a whole flock of them! When you wonder if God sees you, hears you, and

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cares about you and your concerns, remember that it's just not possible for God to forget about you.

Day 27: Read Mark 7:24-30. What do you learn about desperation? According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus wins every controversial conversation he has with the religious authorities, yet he allows himself to be persuaded by this desperate parent. Take that in for a moment. Desperate persistence moves the heart of God!

Day 28: Read Mark 7:29-30. What is the result of the woman's persistence? Have you ever come to God with such desperation and persistence?

Day 29: Read chapter 5.

Day 30: Read Mark 5:21-37. What jumps out at you in this passage? What are the similarities between the two miracles in this passage?

Day 31: Read 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 and Revelation 21:4. What do they say about death? What does it say about God that he would send Jesus to defeat death? God began the world as a place where death had no place in the unspoiled creation that was his perfect will. In order to return his people to a place with no more death or mourning or crying or pain, Jesus undertook a comprehensive campaign of war against death itself!

Day 32: Read Mark 5:41-42; Luke 7:14-15; and John 11:43-44. Even though Jesus raises these people from the dead, eventually they die. How does that broaden your idea of what a miracle looks like?

Day 33: Read Mark 1:41-42; 9:14-27; Luke 5:12-16; 7:11-15. When have you known Jesus's compassion in your life? In the Gospels, Jesus feels and acts on compassion by moving toward the people he encounters who are in deep need. Before many of the miracles, Jesus displays or is described as having this compassion that leads to action.

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Day 34: Read Psalm 41:3 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. How is God's grace sufficient for our struggles? We know not everyone will be healed in our "not yet" world. We know that not everything will look or function the way God wants it to. We know that we will find ourselves desperate for Jesus to work a miracle.

Day 35: Read chapter 6.

Day 36: Read Luke 1:26-38. What are some of the promises of God's presence and power? In Jesus, God and humanity have become one. How can this even be possible? To define God is to paint categories that are outside of human possibility. He is without limits in his knowledge (omniscience), location (omnipresence), and power (omnipotence).

Day 37: Read Luke 2:4-12. How did God enter the world? God's condescension means that he came down so we could be together. It means that he bent to our level, that he stooped low from the thing that made him God and took on the things that make us human.

Day 38: Read Matthew 8:1-3; 15:21-28. How did Jesus bend low to meet a need?

Day 39: Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. What is the exchange of riches between Jesus and humankind?

Day 40: Read Galatians 4:4-7. What is the deep blessing on what it means to be human? The Grand Miracle of the Incarnation means a deep blessing on what it means to be human. Because God chose to unite God and humanity in Jesus Christ, who we are is forever bound up with who God is. It forever changes how we see ourselves and our relationship with God.



NOTES

1. The Gift of Desperation

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2. Timothy Keller, *Encounters with Jesus: Unexpected Answers to Life’s Biggest Questions* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 59.

3. Kamila Blessing, *Families of the Bible: A New Perspective* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 41.

4. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 253.

2. The Miracle of Abundance

1. Stuart Briscoe, *Brave Enough to Follow: What Jesus Can Do When You Keep Your Eyes on Him* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 76.

2. Mark Buchanan, *Your God Is Too Safe: Rediscovering the Wonder of a God You Can’t Control* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2001), 39.

3. James Martin, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), 258.

4. “Bethsaida,” *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (La Habra, CA: Lockman, 1998), <http://biblehub.com/greek/966.htm>.

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5. "Gospels" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 294.

6. Buchanan, *Your God Is Too Safe*, 38.

7. Arland J. Hultgren, "Commentary on Luke 5:1-11," *Working Preacher*, February 7, 2010, www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=506.

3. Miracles on the Water

1. Todd Bolen, "Jesus and the Sea of Galilee," first published in *Bible and Spade* magazine (Fall 2003); reprinted on their website Associates for Biblical Research, March 6, 2009, www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/03/Jesus-and-the-Sea-of-Galilee.aspx.

2. James Boyce, "Commentary on Mark 4:35-41," *Working Preacher*, June 21, 2015, www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2470.

3. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 263.

4. Scott Walker, *Footsteps of the Fisherman: With St. Peter on the Path of Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 35.

5. Dr. Frank Staggs, quoted in Walker, *Footsteps of the Fisherman*, 37.

4. Jesus Our Healer

1. Mark Pearson, *Christian Healing: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2004), 4.

2. *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. "baros" (La Habra, CA: Lockman, 1998), <http://biblehub.com/greek/922.htm>.

3. *New American Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. "phortion," <http://biblehub.com/greek/5413.htm>.

4. Craig S. Keener, "Mark 7:24-30," *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 146.

5. A Two-for-One Miracle Story

1. *The Princess Bride*, directed by Rob Reiner, written by William Goldman (Beverly Hills, CA: Act III Communications, 1987).

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2. Many of these points of similarity are found in Joseph R. Dongell, *The Gospel of Mark, Onebook: The Biblical Journey* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2015), 91.
3. Dongell, *Gospel of Mark*, 91.
4. Dongell, *Gospel of Mark*, 91.
5. Stephen Seamands in Theology and Practice of Healing class (TH 635) at Asbury Theological Seminary (Fall 2015).
6. Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: Zondervan, 1992), 1305.

6. The Grand Miracle

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3. "The Apostles' Creed, Traditional Version," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 881.
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5. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (first published 1947; New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 173–74.
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10. "The Synod of Alexandria," quoted by Robert E. Webber in *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 65.
11. Lewis, *Miracles*, 236–37.
12. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: Collier, 1970), 159–60.