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BLIND DATES AND A GREAT INTRODUCTION

MY FIRST BLIND DATE: a wipeout! When the guys told me about my date, I got excited. Their description: fine-looking, lots of fun, and a great personality (that last one should have been a hint)!

At 8 p.m. we drove over to meet our dates. I tried to be cool, but I was nervous. Sweaty palms and pits were a dead giveaway. As we waited for our dates, this gorgeous girl came out. She's the one, I thought as my heart pumped faster. But she wasn't. Neither was the next beauty who came through the door. Or the next one. Then someone came out who looked like a cross between the dorm housemother and the janitor. That was my date!

Disappointed didn't even come close to describing how badly I felt. And I could tell pretty quickly that my date wasn't that impressed with me either.

As I reflected later, I could have had an enjoyable evening if I hadn't built up false expectations. I've found that people have false expectations about Jesus too. Those expectations affect what a person thinks about Him—sometimes forever.

WRONG IMPRESSIONS

The way I met my blind date is the way many people are introduced to Jesus. They have been told certain things about Him that have given them all sorts of wrong impressions. The difference between my blind date and the wrong impressions people have about Jesus: people usually hear all bad things about Jesus, when the truth is that He is absolutely good. Wrong impressions make it hard for people to appreciate the real Jesus.

WRONG IMPRESSION #1: “GOD IS OUT TO GET YOU.”

Many people think of God as the celestial Scrooge who sits in the sky with His big stick. Every time you get out of line—whack! whack! whack!—He clobbers you. And if you decide to do what He wants, He will send you to “Bunga Bunga Land” to preach on a street corner.

WRONG IMPRESSION #2: “FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS YOU ARE A WIMP.”

Some people think of Jesus as this weak, pale Jewish fellow who died two thousand years ago. The assumption: “Following Jesus means I must wear a dorky-looking suit and tie, carry a fifty-pound King James Bible, and hang a sign on my back that says, ‘Beat me up; I’m a Christian wimp.’”

WRONG IMPRESSION #3: “FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS KEEPING TONS OF RULES.”

Ask the average person on the street what it means to be a Christian and he will probably answer, “Christianity is a bunch of rules.” Too many people think that following Jesus means to stop doing the ten things they like most and to start doing the ten things they hate the most.

WRONG IMPRESSION #4: “FOLLOWING JESUS IS AN EMOTIONAL HIGH.”

If a person cries, gets “a warm feeling in his heart,” jumps up and down at a concert, or experiences an awesome week at church camp, then that person is a follower of Christ. Not really. A follower of Christ can have strong emotions, but following Jesus is much more than emotions.

WRONG IMPRESSION #5: “FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS GOING TO CHURCH.”

Contrary to popular opinion, God does not live in a box with a steeple where people go to visit Him every Sunday. As important as the church is, God is not limited to a church building. He is present where you live, eat, sleep, and work. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to McDonald's makes you a Big Mac!

Like my blind date, wrong impressions or misconceptions about Jesus can lead to disaster. We need to know Jesus for who He really is—and not miss knowing Him because of a wrong impression.

When you first heard about Jesus, what were your impressions of Him?

A GREAT INTRODUCTION

I walked into the school library and looked around for a place to sit. When I looked over to my right, there she was—the finest-looking lady I had ever seen. I wanted to meet her. I took a “check out” position behind a bookshelf, pushed some books around, and stared at her.

Big problem: she was with a guy. Taking the situation in hand, I walked right up and started talking to the guy she was with. He was a nice guy and had no choice but to introduce me. What a great introduction it was!

After a few minutes, Carol and I started talking. And I kept on talking to her . . . and talking . . . and talking. For all I know, the guy who introduced us is still in the library!

The next night I asked Carol out for a “study date.” Study date defined: carry your books, study for five minutes, then go out and have fun. That’s what we did. The more we talked, the more we enjoyed each other. Over the months the relationship developed from friendship to engagement . . . then to marriage and four wonderful kids.

This was totally different from the blind date. The difference? We started right—with a great introduction.

STARTING RIGHT

To start right with Jesus, we need a great intro, a solid relationship, and fun and enjoyable times together, deepening the friendship. In the process we get a much better understanding of who Jesus really is.

The reason we can have that kind of relationship with Jesus is because of the way He introduced Himself to us. How did He do that?

HE CAME FROM HIS FATHER.

“In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (JOHN 1:1, 2).

HE CAME TO LIVE WITH US.

“So the word of God became a human being and lived among us” (JOHN 1:14, PHILLIPS).

HE LIVED LIKE ALL OTHER HUMAN BEINGS.

“And as Jesus continued to grow in body and mind, he grew also in the love of God and of those who knew him” (LUKE 2:52, PHILLIPS).

Jesus went through His teen years just like all of us. I wonder what teenage problems He suffered through. Legs that looked too long? Feet too big? Squeaky voice? Pimples? He grew up facing all of the same issues we face. When He got hungry, He wanted to eat. When He got thirsty, He wanted something to drink. If His sandals rubbed His toes, He got blisters. He even struggled with pleasing His parents (LUKE 2:41-51).

HE WAS A MAN’S MAN.

“Isn’t this the carpenter?” (MARK 6:3).

Jesus worked hard. He had calloused hands and hard muscles from His work as a carpenter. He didn’t worry about getting a little dirt under His fingernails.

HE CAME TO IDENTIFY WITH US PERSONALLY.

“Now Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God” (COLOSSIANS 1:15, PHILLIPS).

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being . . .”

(HEBREWS 1:3).

Jesus gave us an exact picture of God. He came so we could see who God is. When we look at Jesus Christ, that is exactly who we see—God!

And when He looks at us, He can see the potential of “God in us.”

He came and introduced Himself because He wants us to know Him!

CHECK YOUR INTRODUCTION

From what you just discovered, check the boxes that best describe how you view Jesus.

- Jesus was an afterthought of God.
- Jesus was a Band-Aid® God slapped on a messed-up world.
- Jesus was around from the beginning and part of God’s original plan.
- Jesus was a quick fix to counter the power of Satan.
- Jesus is a great reminder of what God is like.
- The Jesus who lived on earth was all God and all man.
- The Jesus who lived on earth was half-God and half-man.
- Jesus is so far above us that we can’t relate to Him.
- Jesus wasn’t anything like the kids of His day.
- Jesus could not possibly have had zits.
- Jesus was so perfect as a child that no one could relate to Him.
- Jesus was admired and respected by all.

- Jesus had all the same human desires we do.
- Jesus had some of the same human desires we do.
- Jesus had none of the same human desires we do.
- Jesus was God, so human desires were not even an issue.
- Jesus reminds us of God.
- Jesus was, and is, so much like God that we can look at Him and see God.
- Jesus and God were entirely separate from each other.
- Jesus existed after God did.

POWERFUL CLAIMS

On the busiest intersection in a city stands a man wearing a blue uniform, a beaked cap, and a whistle around his neck. When that police officer directs a tractor trailer to turn right, it turns right. However, if a senior at your school goes out there wearing a T-shirt and jeans and blows a whistle, he'll probably have some SUV leave tread marks on his face. The police officer may have no more physical strength and power than the student, but he has authority—the delegated power of the police department, his state, and the United States government.

Jesus had God's authority. That's why He could make the claims He did and then back them up. Right now, forget all the stuff you have heard about Jesus in the past. Check out some of His claims and see what He says about Himself.

JESUS CLAIMED HE CAN FORGIVE SINS.

Teaching in a friend's house one day, a crippled man was lowered into a crowded room through a hole his friends had made in the roof. Jesus told him, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (MARK 2:5).

Some of the religious leaders said He couldn't do that. Jesus' response: *"Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . He said to the paralytic, '. . . get up, take your mat and go home'"* (MARK 2:9-11). And he did!

JESUS CLAIMED THAT GOD IS HIS FATHER.

When the Jewish leaders criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, He said, *"He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him"* (JOHN 5:23).

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW GOD.

Jesus' disciples were in a state of confusion when Thomas asked Him, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well"* (JOHN 14:5-7).

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE ETERNAL.

To a group of skeptical religious leaders Jesus made this claim:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (JOHN 8:56).

When the religious leaders protested that it was impossible for Jesus to have known someone who died hundreds of years earlier, Jesus replied, *"Before Abraham was born, I am!"* (JOHN 8:58).

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE GOD IN HUMAN FORM.

The religious leaders asked Him to tell them if He was the Christ. His concluding statement to them was, “*I and the Father are one*” (JOHN 10:30).

Later, when one of His disciples asked, “*Lord, show us the Father,*” Jesus told him clearly: “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*” (JOHN 14:8, 9).

Don't let anybody fool you. They will tell you that Jesus was a great moral teacher, a religious leader, or a holy man, but that there are many other ways to get to God. False! If these claims are true, then He is a whole lot more. In fact, He is in a class by Himself. How do we know if these claims are true?

PROOF POSITIVE

Throughout history people have made claims that they were God, or had a “special relationship” with God—Muhammad, Buddha, Confucius, David Koresh, and hundreds of other leaders of cults. The difference between Jesus and all other religious leaders is this: He fully backed up every claim He made!

It's one thing to claim to be God. It's another thing to actually prove it. Let's look at a few of these convincing proofs:

JESUS SAID, “I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE” (JOHN 6:35).

He said that after He miraculously produced bread to feed more than five thousand people (JOHN 6:5-13).

JESUS SAID, “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD” (JOHN 8:12).

Shortly after this statement Jesus healed a blind man. He wasn't just a little nearsighted or needed his contact lenses adjusted. He had been blind from birth. Jesus healed at least nine blind people in the New Testament.

JESUS SAID, “I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE” (JOHN 11:25).

Jesus made this statement near the grave of His friend Lazarus, who had been dead for four days and whose body had already begun to smell. A short time later, at Jesus' command, Lazarus got up and walked out of the grave alive!

Jesus said He would rise from the dead after three days (MATTHEW 16:21).

According to Matthew 28, that's exactly what He did. Three days after He had been nailed to the cross, Jesus burst out of the grave!

YOUR INTRODUCTION

Have you had some wrong impressions of Jesus? If you have, we can make those right in the rest of this book.

Or maybe you have had a great introduction to Him. If so, you will get to know Him better as you go through this book.

If Jesus is who He says He is—God's Son who died on a cross to forgive your sins and rose from the dead to give you life—then pay any price, do whatever it takes to know Him!