

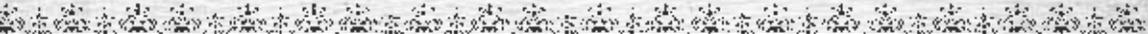
Life
APPLICATION®
Study Bible *Devotional*



Daily Wisdom from the Life of JESUS

the GOSPELS

Life
APPLICATION®
Study Bible *Devotional*



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Daily Wisdom from the Life of Jesus



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*To one of the many behind the scenes, now with the Lord,
a relentless practitioner and enthusiastic spokesman
for Bible application*

JAMES WINFIELD WILSON
1928–2009

*PK, husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather,
Bible translator, friend*

TABLE *of* CONTENTS

Introduction

- WEEK 1 Jesus' Coming Is Announced
- WEEK 2 Jesus Is Born
- WEEK 3 Jesus Grows Up
- WEEK 4 Jesus Is Baptized
- WEEK 5 Jesus Confronts Satan
- WEEK 6 Jesus Meets Nicodemus
- WEEK 7 Jesus Encounters a Samaritan Woman
- WEEK 8 Jesus Heals
- WEEK 9 Jesus Teaches about the Sabbath
- WEEK 10 Jesus Preaches the Sermon on the Mount
- WEEK 11 Jesus Teaches the Disciples about Prayer
- WEEK 12 Jesus Is Wrongfully Accused
- WEEK 13 Jesus Describes God's Kingdom
- WEEK 14 Jesus Calms the Sea
- WEEK 15 Jesus Commissions the Twelve
- WEEK 16 Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand
- WEEK 17 Jesus Challenges the Pharisees
- WEEK 18 Jesus Reveals His Identity
- WEEK 19 Jesus Tells What Following Him Will Mean
- WEEK 20 Jesus Is Transfigured
- WEEK 21 Jesus Presents the Realities of the Kingdom
- WEEK 22 Jesus Describes Discipleship
- WEEK 23 Jesus Tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan
- WEEK 24 Jesus Talks about His Return
- WEEK 25 Jesus Says He Is the Good Shepherd
- WEEK 26 Jesus Attends a Banquet
- WEEK 27 Jesus Talks about Being Lost and Found
- WEEK 28 Jesus Raises Lazarus

- WEEK 29 Jesus Speaks to the Rich Young Man
- WEEK 30 Jesus Tells the Parable of the Vineyard Workers
- WEEK 31 Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar
- WEEK 32 Jesus Confronts Zacchaeus
- WEEK 33 Jesus Is Anointed by Mary
- WEEK 34 Jesus Enters Jerusalem
- WEEK 35 Jesus Cleanses the Temple
- WEEK 36 Jesus' Authority Is Challenged
- WEEK 37 Jesus Teaches about the Future
- WEEK 38 Jesus Is Betrayed
- WEEK 39 Jesus Celebrates the Passover
- WEEK 40 Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet
- WEEK 41 Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit
- WEEK 42 Jesus Teaches about the True Vine
- WEEK 43 Jesus Prays for His Followers
- WEEK 44 Jesus Prays for Himself
- WEEK 45 Jesus Is Arrested
- WEEK 46 Jesus Is Denied by Peter
- WEEK 47 Jesus Is Tried by Pilate
- WEEK 48 Jesus Is Crucified
- WEEK 49 Jesus Dies and Is Buried
- WEEK 50 Jesus Is Resurrected
- WEEK 51 Jesus Appears to the Disciples
- WEEK 52 Jesus Gives Final Instructions

Topical Index

Scripture Index

INTRODUCTION

They delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. PSALM 1:2-3, NLT

The picturesque language of the first Psalm describes the potential impact of God's Word in people's lives. Meditating and delighting in God's Word produces trees of desirable and unusual character. These trees take their stand by a river that gives them life. You might call it a river of life, and you might also call what flows in that river "living water." These trees are described as "bearing fruit each season," which can mean, among other things, that whatever the season of life, the trees produce fruit appropriate for that season. These trees are also ever-green, since their leaves "never wither"—the seasons may come and go, and the fruit ripens and is harvested, but these trees persevere. They change and grow, yet remain the same. And these trees prosper.

The "trees" of Psalm 1 know what to do with God's Word. They live beside it, and it lives in them. They "delight" in what they discover from God's Word because they allow it to change the way they live. The results of their continual meditation are practical applications that lead to direction, change, truth, correction, and an increasing sense of God's involvement in their lives. We become those trees when we let Scripture speak into our lives that way—when we commit to becoming people who know what it means to both hear and do God's Word (James 1:19-25)—when we anticipate delight in God's Word.

The Birth of the LASB

The *Life Application Study Bible* (LASB) began during a coffee break. Someone asked a question, "If you could give students a Bible with built-in tools that would help them overcome unfamiliarity with Scripture and give them confidence to respond in obedience, what would you include in that Bible?"

Those of us sitting around the table that day were committed to communicating God's Word in ways that would give young people the best chance to experience its life-changing power. The coffee got cold as we brainstormed the kind of notes and other features that we were convinced might help people to come across the threshold of God's Word and into the life they could find in those pages. We were excited about the possibilities, but we had no idea what God would bring about as a result of that discussion. We also did not know what producing that Bible over the next several years would take. Our delighted naiveté was a tribute to the glory of God. We were about to join that throng of people through the ages who have been drawn into God's plans and purposes only to realize they had become part of something infinitely larger than themselves.

The point of the *Life Application Study Bible* wasn't to add to the Bible. Rather it was to provide people with tools that would help them experience the Bible. We didn't think the Bible needed help in being God's Word; we did think that people could use help in dealing with

practical obstacles between themselves and God's Word. Judging from the responses to the LASB we've received over the years, God has used it in that way in countless lives.

The *Life Application Study Bible Devotional* was developed as one answer to the question: How can we encourage the readers of God's Word to *delight* in his Word? Application sounds like work—and often is. But it's the work we were designed to do. Rather than the frantic and hopeless work of trying to save ourselves, Bible application is the joyful work of gratitude for the priceless gift of salvation we have freely received through Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10)!

A metaphor similar to the psalm writer's picture of fruitful trees was used by Jesus to describe us. He spoke of vines and branches (John 15). Other places in the Bible point to the life God wants us to experience and uses the idea of roots (Ephesians 3:17-19; Colossians 2:6-7). The trees in Psalm 1 aren't running around the countryside getting good stuff done for God; rather they are healthy trees producing succulent fruit in season. What trees ultimately "do" is what God does in and through them. Good fruit is evidence of a tree or branch yielded to the purpose for which it was created. Attentive time spent in God's Word will bring about good fruit. The *Life Application Study Bible Devotional* is a tool to help you spend that time.

The Devotional Plan

This *Life Application Study Bible Devotional* allows you to spend time meditating day and night on the life of Jesus in order to thoroughly delight in that central part of God's Word. The pace is designed to take you through a year of concentrated reflection on the lessons found in Jesus' words and actions.

One of the features in the *Life Application Study Bible* is a "Harmony of the Gospels," located between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts. That extended chart offers a chronological list of 250 key events in the life of Jesus and where those events are found in each of the Gospels. (The Harmony is also built into the text of the Gospels; every paragraph mentions its possible Gospel parallels.)

Those 250 key events were organized into 52 larger sections to form the structure of this *Life Application Study Bible Devotional*. You will not only spend a year with Jesus; you will also spend each week in deliberate meditation on a specific event in his life.

We set out to avoid a typical devotional style, which can be light on Scripture and heavy on illustration. Many devotional books might be described as "hear and feel" approaches to God's Word, with an emphasis on feel. We wanted to aim at informed devotions—more of a read-hear-think-feel-and-do approach. The Bible has a captivating quality all its own, and we miss a lot when we move on to tangents too quickly. This *Life Application Study Bible Devotional* is for those who want to spend more time in God's Word than they have been spending, not less.

Each Week

Each week's six devotions concentrate on an event from Jesus' life, looking at the parallel passages in the Gospels related to that event. The accounts of Jesus' life vary in valuably revealing ways. Spending a week on each event will encourage deeper reflection and understanding. You will discover much more in any part of God's Word than can be exhausted by a few moments of reading.

Each Day

Each day's devotional reading includes four sections designed to establish a rhythm of reflection and ongoing meditation in your life. They will challenge you to personally respond to God's Word.

- Reading the Word—The day's focused selection from God's Word, chosen from that week's parallel passages from the Gospels.
- Setting the Scene—An extended reflection on the passage, highlighting details, background information, and other features that broaden the significance of the passage. Each Monday's devotional will be longer, introducing the major themes of the week.
- Getting Personal—Brief notes and questions to help you personalize the lessons of the daily Scripture reading.
- Talking to God—Suggestions for shaping an extended time of conversation with God each day.

The Scripture texts behind the *Life Application Study Bible Devotional* alternate among the New Living Translation, the New International Version, and the New King James Version. But the devotions can be used with any Bible.

We entrust this *Life Application Study Bible Devotional* to you with the same hope and prayer that has been wrapped around the *Life Application Study Bible*—that you would experience the root-deepening and fruit-ripening results of standing next to the waters of life in God's Word and delight as you meditate on them day and night.

Dave Veerman

Neil Wilson

SPRING 2011

JESUS' COMING IS ANNOUNCED

Week 1, Day 1

✿ *John 1:1-18; Luke 1:30-38; 1 John 1:1-3*

Because he is God, Jesus has always existed. This week, we will explore Jesus' true identity—before and after his earthly birth—and the announcement of his coming. We will discover the real Jesus and know how we should respond to him.

JESUS LIVES AND CREATES

Setting the Scene

Many believe that the apostle John, writer of the Gospel bearing his name, had first been a disciple of John the Baptist, who had pointed him to Jesus. Then John must have become an intermittent disciple of Jesus, for Scripture details another time when Jesus called John along the Sea of Galilee, where he had returned to his fishing trade with his brother, James, and their father, Zebedee. This time when Jesus called, John and James left everything, father and boat included, and followed him (Mark 1:19-20). At this point Jesus had already turned water into wine (John 2:1-11), cleared the Temple the first time (John 2:13-22), and been visited by Nicodemus at night (John 3:1-21). This calling of John and James also occurred after Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist (Luke 3:19-20), Jesus had spoken with the woman at the well (John 4:1-26), and Jesus had been rejected at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30).

So John and his brother James became two of Jesus' original twelve disciples and, along with Peter, enjoyed a special relationship with Jesus. At times Jesus called just the three of them to see an important event, such as his Transfiguration.

John, therefore, was an eyewitness to Jesus' life and teachings. In his letter to the church, John wrote: "We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands" (1 John 1:1, NLT). As one who had seen Jesus up close, John wanted everyone to understand Jesus' true identity.

READING THE WORD

✿ *John 1:1-4, 14, NLT*

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He existed in the beginning with God. ³God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. ⁴The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. . . . ¹⁴So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

TALKING TO GOD

Thank God for sending his Son to earth. Ask him to deepen your understanding of Jesus as fully divine and yet fully human.

JESUS LIVES AND CREATES *continued*

We learn in John 1:14 that “the Word” refers to Jesus. Theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks, used the term “word” (in Greek, *logos*) in a variety of ways. In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, “the Word” is described as an agent of creation (Psalm 33:6), the source of God’s message to his people through the prophets (Hosea 1:1-2), and God’s law, his standard of holiness (Psalm 119:11).

For Greeks, “the word” could mean a person’s thoughts or reason, or might refer to a person’s speech (the expression of thoughts). As a philosophical term, *logos* was the rational principle that governed the universe, even the creative energy that generated the universe.

In both the Jewish and Greek conceptions, *logos* conveyed the idea of beginnings, as in Genesis where the expression “God said” occurs repeatedly (Genesis 1:3ff). John may have had these ideas in mind, but his description shows he was speaking of Jesus as a human being he knew and loved, who was at the same time the Creator of the universe, the ultimate revelation of God, and the living picture of God’s holiness, the one who “holds all creation together” (Colossians 1:17, NLT). Jesus as the *logos* reveals God’s mind to us.

Clearly, John wanted everyone to know Jesus was not merely a man. Jesus was the eternal, all-powerful God who existed before time, created everything, and gave life.

Getting Personal

What qualities of Jesus convinced John that Jesus was divine, God in the flesh?

Why is Jesus’ divinity crucial to the Christian faith?

If Jesus had been just a very good man, his life and death would have provided a great example of how a person should live. We could honor him and learn from his lifestyle. If Jesus had been only a great human teacher or orator, we could be motivated and inspired to work and achieve. But a great moral leader and powerful speaker can’t save us from our sins, can’t change us on the inside. Jesus can. As the divine Creator, he has the power to make us new.

Setting the Scene

This week's passages reveal that Jesus was born as a baby. The divine Creator humbled himself and entered the human race as a flesh-and-blood human being. The apostle John knew Jesus man-to-man, having lived, eaten, conversed, and traveled with him. John had heard Jesus teach and heal, and had seen him suffer and die. According to John, "the Word became human and made his home among us" (John 1:14, NLT).

But no one was closer to Jesus than his mother, Mary. In this passage, an angel approached this startled teenager and explained that she would have a baby, but not just any baby, "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35, NLT). God would come to earth supernaturally but through natural means: conception, pregnancy, and birth. Jesus was (and is) both divine and human, the God-man. No one knows exactly how that works, but we see the evidence. Jesus was fully God and fully man—at the same time.

Imagine what Mary must have been thinking and feeling at this moment. Angel visits didn't happen every day! And Gabriel's message was even more startling—a virgin conceiving, by the Holy Spirit, and birthing God's Son. Yet Mary responded with faith and submission. No wonder she had "found favor with God."

Getting Personal

How does knowing that Jesus was human help you?

If you were in Mary's place, how would you have responded to the angel's announcement?

When do you find it difficult to submit to God's will?

Jesus was a living, breathing, and feeling human person. He wasn't a divine being dressed up like a human; he wasn't acting a part. Jesus fully took on flesh and experienced firsthand all that we experience. Thus, the Bible tells us, he can understand us and fully sympathize with us (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus, the Creator, became a baby, a child, an adolescent, an adult—with all of the human physical, psychological, and emotional qualities, but perfect, without sin. He knows us in every way. He knows you. And get this—he loves you and wants only the best for you. That's a truth almost as amazing as Gabriel's announcement.

READING THE WORD

✱ *Luke 1:30-38, NLT*

"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" ³⁴Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." ³⁵The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing is impossible with God." ³⁸Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

TALKING TO GOD

Meditate on Luke 1:37: "Nothing is impossible with God" (NLT). Pray for faith like Mary's to believe God in every situation.

READING THE WORD

* *John 1:10-13, NLT*

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. ¹¹He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ¹²But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

* *1 John 1:1-3, NLT*

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ²This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. ³We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us.

TALKING TO GOD

Thank God for the gift of salvation through Jesus. Ask God to open your eyes and your ears to his work in the world, so that you can proclaim what you "have actually seen and heard."

JESUS SAVES

Setting the Scene

The divine Son of God, the true Light, came to the earth he had created but was rejected by most—but not everyone. All who put their faith in him, back then, today, and in the future, are reborn—spiritually, divinely transformed. John's letter affirms that Jesus is the "Word of life" and "eternal life." The salvation message is simple: Jesus, the God-man, entered human history, revealing sin and showing the way to eternal life. The first response is to recognize our sinfulness and to acknowledge that Jesus is the way. The second is to "believe" and "accept" the Savior.

When the first disciples believed and were regenerated by the Holy Spirit, they entered into a close relationship ("fellowship") with the Father and with his Son. The readers of 1 John had not seen and heard Jesus themselves, but they could trust that what John wrote was accurate. Believers today are like those second- and third-generation Christians. Though we have not personally seen, heard, or touched Jesus, we have the New Testament record of his eyewitnesses, and we can trust that these eyewitnesses spoke the truth about him.

Getting Personal

What convinced you to put your faith and trust in Christ?

How does being a child of God open up doors of fellowship with others?

When Jesus began his public ministry, many rejected him. Certain leaders felt his teaching threatened their status and authority. Some couldn't believe his claims—to be God in the flesh, their Messiah. Others couldn't get past Jesus' humble beginnings, which hardly befitted a king. Some struggled with Jesus' call to deny self. Today people reject Jesus for those same reasons. A man claiming to be God, the forgiver of sins, and the only way to heaven—that's tough to swallow. But now, just as then, many do believe and receive eternal life.

The word savior means "one who saves, rescues, or delivers." Jesus the Savior has delivered you from your enemy, Satan, rescued you from sin's power, and saved you from sin's penalty. You're forgiven, free, and on your way to heaven.

Setting the Scene

Yesterday, we read John's declaration of his fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:1-3). Today's reading takes the relationship even closer: father and child. Those who believe in Jesus are "reborn" by God and become his children.

Family lineage and heritage were important to John and his fellow Jews. The Jews prided themselves on being God's chosen people through whom the whole world would be blessed. They knew, of course, that a person was Jewish by birthright. But they may have assumed that being born Jewish would also mean they automatically were God's children. Not so fast, John says. First, becoming a member of God's family is open to all who believe in Christ. Second, being of a specific race, nationality, family, or religion does not guarantee a spot at God's table. Only those who "believe" and "accept" are "reborn" into this family.

These days, many assume they have a relationship with God because they are relatively good people, attend church, or have a Christian family history. But God's family membership comes by faith alone. Each person is responsible for his or her own relationship with Christ.

The family analogy goes much further. As members of God's family, we have Jesus as our brother (Romans 8:29) and all other believers as our brothers and sisters. We're accepted; we're affirmed; we belong.

Getting Personal

How does knowing you are God's child affect your day-to-day choices?

According to this passage, how did you acquire "the right" to become God's child?

As God's children, we have a heavenly Father who cares about us and watches over us. We have an older Brother who is with us and who is interceding for us. We have the Holy Spirit inside us who comforts, guides, and leads us. We have brothers and sisters who encourage, teach, and assist us and hold us accountable. We're not alone.

We should relate well to other believers. This may seem like a tall order, but we don't pursue these relationships in our own power. With God's help we can be his kind of people.

READING THE WORD

* John 1:12-13, NLT

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

TALKING TO GOD

Talk with God the Father about your relationship with your earthly father. Ask him for a greater understanding of what it means to be his child.

READING THE WORD

* *John 1:14-17, NLT*

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. ¹⁵John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

¹⁶From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.

TALKING TO GOD

Thank God for the "gracious blessings" of his unfailing love and his faithfulness. Ask him to expand your vision of his glory and keep your focus on Jesus.

JESUS EXEMPLIFIES

Setting the Scene

John the Baptist (the "John" referred to in verse 15) acknowledges that Jesus existed long before him. From Luke 1:26, we learn that Elizabeth, John's mother, was six months pregnant when Gabriel made the grand announcement to Mary. So John was born at least six months before Jesus. But John knew that Jesus was much more than his blood relative through Mary; Jesus was the eternal Son of God, the Messiah. Truly Jesus is far greater than John and Moses and any other Old Testament prophet or king. John submitted himself to Jesus and sent his followers to him.

Because Jesus is God, he is perfect in every way. He is the perfect example, so we should look to him for an example of how to live. He is the perfect teacher, so we should listen to him and learn about God, morality, relationships, the meaning of life, and the future. He is the perfect sacrifice, fulfilling the requirements of the law, becoming sin, and dying in our place, so we should rest in him alone for salvation.

The apostle John affirms this by saying that Jesus was "full of unfailing love and faithfulness" and that he had given his people "one gracious blessing after another." That is, John had never found Jesus lacking in any way. John's description invites us to trust Jesus' ability to meet our needs. All believers receive Christ's blessings, but nothing can deplete Christ. No matter how much we receive of him, he keeps on giving. We don't need to seek any other source of spiritual power but Christ.

Getting Personal

What gracious blessings have you experienced because you know Jesus?

What other spiritual sources have you been tempted to consider recently (in the media, in books, in conversations)?

The author of Hebrews gives the secret to running the race of life. He says, "We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith" (Hebrews 12:2, NLT). Jesus is the initiator and the perfecter of our faith. He is all we need.

What helps you keep your eyes focused on Christ?

Setting the Scene

Gazing at the skies on a clear night, away from the city lights, we can feel overwhelmed by the vastness of space—and very small in comparison. God can seem distant. We can also feel far removed from the Father when we struggle with conflicts or grief. At those times we must remember to look to Jesus, who perfectly represents the Father. Only the Son communicates God’s glory to us. The phrase “is near to the Father’s heart” pictures Jesus as a child, enjoying a close and warm relationship with his Father. It also suggests the image of two companions enjoying a meal together. According to an ancient custom, the one who reclined next to the master at a meal was the one dearest to him. This is the Son who “has revealed God to us.” The Son lived among people to explain God with his words and by his person. No one can know God apart from Christ. Later John writes about the time Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied” (John 14:8, NLT). Jesus answered, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!” (John 14:9, NLT).

Jesus is the visible, tangible image of the invisible God. He is the complete revelation of what God is like. This was startling news for Jews, who knew that no human could see God and live. Yet Jesus could say, “If you want to know what God is like, look at me!”

What is God’s love like? Look at Jesus. How does God feel about hypocrisy? Look at Jesus. What about God’s goodness, grace, and mercy? Look at Jesus.

Getting Personal

What can you do to focus more on Jesus?

God has revealed himself generally in nature and specifically in Scripture and perfectly in Christ. When you feel distant from the Father, remember that his Son is near you and his Spirit is in you.

As you share the faith with others, keep the focus on Jesus. People may believe in God as an idea, a concept, or even a Supreme Being—distant and unknowable. But they need to deal with Christ. What they do with him makes all the difference.

READING THE WORD

* John 1:18, NLT

No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.

TALKING TO GOD

Pray that Jesus would make his character and presence real to you today.