



IRRESISTIBLE LOVE

A JOURNEY TO THE
HEART OF JESUS

JOE WHITE

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

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Irresistible Love: A Journey to the Heart of Jesus

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To Debbie-Jo

My bride, my hero, my best friend.

As with Jesus, your love has been irresistible for more than 50 years.

How blessed can a man get!

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INTRODUCTION

“Whatever you’ve known of Jesus before . . .”

THIS BOOK IS NOT the last word on Jesus, nor is it an attempt to be the most informative, compelling, or insightful book about the Man Major Ian Thomas referred to as “Christ, the Astonishing Preacher,” and of whom Albert Einstein remarked, “I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.”

This book is, however, the story of the Man of the cross as He has revealed Himself to me over my 67-year journey to His heart through life’s ever-educating laboratory, through His inspired Word, and through countless encounters with both young and old, illustrious and downtrodden, learned and uneducated, optimistic and hopeless.

This book is an old and broken author’s attempt to open a window into what I believe is a lifetime’s greatest quest: to know “the breadth and length and height and depth” and to know the irresistible love of God not casually, not superficially, not religiously or merely cognitively, but to begin to know Him as, indeed, we have been fully known.

As I handwrite this introduction from my blue leather seat aboard my flight to San Antonio to undergo open-heart surgery, I can promise one thing: This book will be raw and

authentic; there will be no far-fetched theories, no ghost-writer, and no made-up stories. Am I fearful of the surgery and the weeks of recovery? My shaky handwriting today would say *yes*. But, as I've gone under the knife so many times before, I believe wholeheartedly every word in this book and in the "Author and Perfecter of our faith" of whom this book is written.

Just as my heart surgeon will go deep into my beleaguered coronary system, where the manufacturer's warranty has outlived the manufacturer's guarantee, I hope to dig deeply and honestly into the gold mine of faith together with you.

To a football coach, "going deep" means to send a receiver far down the gridiron for a long bomb from the quarterback, hoping for a spectacular pass play. To a scuba diver, "going deep" means to explore marvelous places on a hidden coral reef that few have set their gaze upon. To a spelunker, "going deep" means to crawl far into unexplored crystal caverns where the stalactites, stalagmites, and gypsum crystals are unharmed and virgin pure.

To a Christian counselor, "going deep" means having the privilege to listen patiently to someone who's hurting and to coexperience the healing work of an empathetic Savior who "pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with loving-kindness and compassion" (Psalm 103:3-4).

But to an author who has spent four decades preparing to write a book that could perhaps take a curious hitchhiker on a journey of fulfilling intimacy, "going deep" means to know richly the One of whom David prophesied as Mark 11:9 says, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

He's the One whom Isaiah would refer to as "Wonderful

Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Yes, He’s the One whose works and observances permeate the libraries of the world, far excelling any other figure in human history. He is the most quoted teacher who ever instructed and the most widely admired figure who ever lived.

William Shakespeare said that Jesus was his “Saviour, my Hope, my Creator. Apart from His mercy I have no hope for eternal life.”¹

Charles Dickens said, “The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.”²

John Grisham said, “Accepting Jesus Christ was the most important event in my life.”³

Johann Sebastian Bach, considered in music as the “Master of masters,” said, “Jesus is my joy.”⁴

Blaise Pascal, father of the science of hydrostatics and differential calculus, said Jesus is the true “God of men. Without Jesus there is only sin, misery, darkness, death, and despair.”⁵

President Abraham Lincoln said His Word was “the best gift God has given to man.”⁶

Mother Teresa said, “I serve because I love Jesus.”⁷

At a post-game appearance with reporters on December 4, 2015, LeBron James said, “There’s only one guy ever in the world that everything will be all right when He comes back, and that’s Jesus Christ.”⁸

And most importantly, Jesus is the One of whom God said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Finally, to me, this book is meant to awaken your fascination with the One who loves you so much that He gave His life as a ransom for your soul.

PART ONE

**FINDING GOD'S
IRRESISTIBLE LOVE**



WHO'S YOUR JESUS?

THE “AMERICAN JESUS” has blue eyes, fair skin, and wavy, light-brown hair discreetly highlighted with sandy blond streaks. His hands are soft and tender, and His beautiful scarlet and purple robes have just been returned from the dry cleaner. He is warm, cuddly, and always plays it safe. Traveling with Him is like traveling with a sweet, quiet, old grandpa who’s a friend to everybody. You meet Him in church on Sunday morning between 10:30 and noon, late enough to ensure a good night’s rest on Saturday but not too late to miss the opening kickoff between the Cowboys and the Redskins. During church, beautiful love songs are sung to Him, and you’re left feeling cozy and “worshipful.” The lights and sounds create the perfect ambience, along with the mastered audiovisual effects projecting pleasant color palettes on the giant screens before you.

It all feels so . . . He seems so . . . He makes life feel so . . . so predictable, so safe, so comfortable.

If He were a pristine coral reef, you could observe Him by merely placing a dive mask over your face and a snorkel in your mouth. You could smoothly skim the surface of the tranquil, blue water below with no risk of fright from a green eel waiting motionless between two coral-laden rocks for his next unfortunate capture. Nor would you have to worry about a spiny prick on your skin from a barnacle waving its gypsum-like arms in an attempt to woo a small, helpless nutrient into its grasp.

This is the American Jesus. To snorkel safely above Him brings promise of financial prosperity and pain-free living.

Perhaps you've met Him. Perhaps you've admired Him. Perhaps you've "accepted Him" as "Savior" or even "Lord." Perhaps you've watched Him on many Sunday mornings from the comfort of your church pew or auditorium-style chair.

For our convenience, we can even snorkel above Him from the cozy couch in our climate-controlled living room as He parades before us on our 54-inch flat-screen TV when it's a little too damp and chilly to go outside or when the golf foursome was forced to take an 11:00 a.m. tee time.

American Jesus. He's pictured on billboards and T-shirts throughout the land. He hangs delicately on a smooth, golden cross awaiting God to gently escort Him out of this world and return Him safely to His eternal home.

You can easily message American Jesus on Facebook or "friend" Him on Instagram. Nice, smiley-faced pictures and catchy Bible verses appear alongside brief, chatty messages from a few onlookers who decide to tag Him from time to time.

Maybe you've tried American Jesus and wonder if that's all there is. Maybe you, like me, feel this version of Jesus is far too plastic, disingenuous, and highly unfulfilling. Maybe snorkeling above the reef leaves *a lot* to be desired.

A DEEPER DIVE

I've made many acquaintances while traveling and encountering an extensive cross-section of the world's diverse cultures, and folks have many serious unanswered questions that inhibit faith in the Jesus of the Bible. *How do I know the Bible is true? How can I be sure Jesus is all His followers believe Him to be? How can a good God allow suffering and evil? Is the resurrection of Jesus a myth? Is Darwin or the Bible the accurate account of the origin of the cosmos and the creation of mankind? Why don't all sincere religious practices lead to heaven?*

Perhaps you've been afraid to ask the hard questions, fearing the Sunday school pictures you saw as a child might be another Santa Claus myth.

The word *scuba*, as you may know, is an acronym for "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus." Though heavy and cumbersome when strapped to your back on the side of a boat, this apparatus becomes perfectly buoyant as you dive into the ocean water below. Then *wow!* A whole new, breathtaking world opens up beneath the surface. As you dive deeply into the multicolored and textured coral reef 40 to 80 feet below, ocean life explodes before your eyes.

Day five of creation vividly leaps off the pages of the first chapter of Genesis and becomes a real-life aquarium all around you. The majestic proclamation of Genesis 1:20 is now in living color before you: "Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures.'"

Although snorkeling a safe distance above the heart,

emotions, and personality of Jesus is entertaining, wait until you put on your scuba tank and dive deeply into the relational intimacy of the “Hebrew Jesus”; the biblical Jesus; the sun-darkened, olive-skinned, brown-eyed Miracle Worker with calluses on His palms and a captivating gleam of adventure in His eyes.

There in the deep dive, where a tiger shark or manta ray may pass within your view, you will meet the Man who leveled the crowd with a tongue-in-cheek word picture of a freshly caught fish with a Roman coin in its mouth in order to answer an opportunistic Pharisee’s questioning jab.

Deep in the coral reef of intimacy, you’ll get to know the Man who would celebrate weddings and feasts with His disciples one moment and then who would wail deep, painful tears at a friend’s funeral the next. He would place His hands softly and compassionately on the face of a little girl who had died far ahead of her time and speak a prayer that would restore vibrancy to her lifeless body. When His Father’s sacred Temple was being transformed into a marketplace of mockery and defilement, those same hands would fashion whips to accompany His voice of righteous fury as He single-handedly drove an entire band of opportunistic marketeers out of His Father’s place of worship and prayer.

It’s the Jesus of Scripture whose heart of compassion and mercy would instantly console, restore, and forgive a woman who had turned her marital bed into marital disgrace as He boldly confronted the Jewish leadership with their hypocrisy.

Down in the Bible’s oceanic depths, where the schools of colorful fish live and the coral reefs are vibrant, you’ll begin to shoulder the cross beside Him as He heroically endures the excessive bloodshed of the Roman scourge and yet has the courage to carry the cross outside that tumultuous city and

onto the hill of Golgotha, where He is stripped and nailed with three blacksmith spikes onto a Roman cross to receive the punishment you and I deserve for our sins.

Just last night, I was traveling in Nicaragua after spending a day encouraging my dear friends at “Amigos for Christ” in their effort to relocate families from cardboard huts in the city garbage dump into more permanent housing. And as the astonishing day came to a close, I was able to talk intimately with a Nicaraguan driver named Thomas.

On the return trip to the city, we were arbitrarily placed in Thomas’s Suburban for an ever-so-short two-and-a-half-hour ride back to the Nicaraguan airport. We talked man-to-man and heart-to-heart about the “Hebrew Jesus.” We put on our scuba tanks and dove deeply into Thomas’s many hearsay misconceptions about the “Jesus of the Bible.” Thomas had been raised by an impersonal earthly dad and lived in the crucible of conflicting “Christian” denominational interpretations of Scripture.

“Doubting Thomas” fit his mind-set well. His heart was beaten down and calloused from decades of emotional and spiritual defeat.

But as “Hebrew Jesus” came alive to him in that 150-minute encounter, he described his heart as gigantically expanding and emotionally warmed. Through tears, refreshing feelings of wonder, and previously unexperienced peace, Thomas dove deeply into a relationship he had only imagined in his wildest dreams.

As he embraced Jesus and the whole of Scripture from which His story is told, Thomas welcomed tears of joy and fulfillment that welled up behind his glasses. He wept as I gave him the Father’s blessing his own dad had never extended to him. I told him how proud I was and what good I saw in

him. There, in the front seat of his beat-up blue Suburban, he removed his 45-year-old “snorkel and mask” and descended deeply into the dangerously wonderful depths of knowing the Jesus of Scripture.

As we bid farewell, I embraced him as I embraced my oldest son when he made his first varsity three-point shot at the buzzer to win a highly competitive high-school basketball game.

LET’S DIVE TOGETHER

If you’re ready for a deep, open-water dive and willing to shuck the familiar mask, fins, and snorkel, let’s dive together! Another never-before-seen experience awaits you in the depths, where life is vibrant and colors are splashed behind every coral-laden boulder.

Like my new Nicaraguan friend Thomas, you may have to jettison some old, cumbersome baggage on the way down. Preconceived limitations, worry, fear, old scars, and precautionary walls may need to float to the surface as you descend into this adventurous wonderland. No doubt there are stingrays, sharks, and barracuda below, but as the pages of this book unfold and we unpack the truths of Scripture together, you’ll find that even though predators are in the water, there is peace in their midst and enough excitement in the journey that you’ll return again and again and *never* grow too old or complacent to desire more and more every day of your life.

One thing is certain. Once you go deep, you’ll never want to snorkel on the surface again.