

dr matthew jacoby

thrive

NOV'24-JAN'25

LIVING LIFE AS GOD INTENDED

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Thrive: Deeper

Thrive Deeper is a companion product to the Thrive Daily Reading Guide. In Thrive, Dr Matthew Jacoby works through books of the Bible taking readers on a journey of discovery through the Word. Every 2 weeks we release a new episode of Thrive Deeper which is a discussion around the past fortnights readings in Thrive.

find out more at
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THIS ISSUE

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NOV'24-JAN'25

HEBREWS TO JUDE

- words of life

In this edition of *Thrive* we will read through the letter to the Hebrews as well as the epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude. These biblical writers bring a different and complimentary perspective to that of Paul who wrote the other New Testament epistles and they are full of profound lessons for us today. I have drawn a lot from these books and I am confident that they can be as life changing for you as they have been for me. So, join me again in this edition of *Thrive* as we continue reading the Bible together.

MJ

EMPHASISING JESUS

Hebrews 1 & 2

FRIDAY
1 NOV

We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but we know why. This letter to the Hebrews is an appeal to Jewish Christians to withstand the temptation to play down the importance of Jesus. The higher the status that Jewish Christians accorded to Jesus, the more opposition they aroused from their fellow Jews. If they would have affirmed Jesus as a mere prophet or even as an angelic being they would have kept the peace. But the moment they exalted Jesus to the position of Lord over all creation and the very incarnation of God himself, they deeply offended their fellow Jews. So, the writer of Hebrews reminds them that Jesus is so much greater than the prophets, the angels and even Moses himself. Let us recognise that it is still tempting today to play Jesus down. It is usually acceptable to talk about God, but there is something about Jesus that people stumble over. Perhaps it is because Jesus brings God closer than what people are comfortable with. Perhaps it is because Jesus is the answer to a problem that people don't want to admit they have. Perhaps it is because Jesus confronts people with a summons that they don't want to obey. Whatever the reason, we must not shy away from associating ourselves with Jesus. An indistinct God who is out there somewhere will not be very confronting for people. But, in Jesus Christ, God becomes very distinct, and his call becomes very clear. In Jesus, God is speaking with greater clarity than in any other act of divine revelation.

Read Hebrews 1 and 2

Ask God to give you opportunities to share your faith in Christ with others.

Promise and Purpose – Psalm **143**

Most of the psalms are prayers. People usually think of prayer as asking God for things, that is, as supplication. But prayer is much broader than this. Prayer is simply conversing with God. God does, however, want us to ask him for things and supplication is indeed an important part of prayer. Moreover, God promises us that when we seek him, he will answer us. However, it is important for us to know that he doesn't want to be our 'genie in the bottle' that we bring out whenever we need something. God wants our supplication to be an expression of our relationship of faith with him. God's promise to answer our prayers has a context in which God is God and we are his children. It is a context in which we are following Jesus rather than asking Jesus to follow us. Psalm 91:15 says, "He will call upon me, and I will answer him". But who does this refer to? It refers to "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High". In John 15:7 Jesus says, "Ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you". But the verse begins with the words: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you..." And then the next verse clarifies why God wants to answer our prayers: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit." In other words, the promises of God apply for the purpose of God. We can walk in God's purpose if we want to because God is committed to helping us do this.

Read **Psalm 143** and **John 15:1-8**.

Ask God to help you walk in his ways.

Hebrews 1

God has spoken. He has spoken through prophets who were uniquely called to write down what God revealed to them. Their writings have been preserved in the collection of books we call 'the Bible'. God's greatest act of communication, however, was through Jesus Christ. Jesus was not just another messenger like the prophets. And he was even more than an angelic messenger. John refers to Jesus as 'the Word'. He is, in other words, the perfect expression of who God is, and his life and teachings are the perfect example of what God wants. The writer of Hebrews wanted to underscore the superiority of Jesus. He refers to Jesus as "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being". Jesus not only came to us in the past, he is still with us. Jesus is present with us and even *in us* by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is 'Christ in us' (Colossians 1:27), so he is referred to in the New Testament as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11). This means that Jesus is still present and is still revealing God to us. You cannot know God just by reading the Bible. You need the illumination of the Holy Spirit. You need the Holy Spirit to help you understand the truth. The only way to understand truth is to embody truth, that is, to become true. It is only as the Holy Spirit shapes you in conformity with God's will that you become truly human. To *be* the truth is the only way to *know* the truth, just as loving someone is the only way to know what love is.

Read Hebrews 1

Ask God to teach you, lead you and shape you.

God wanted to forgive us, but he could not leave the just punishment for our guilt unpaid. Justice is not an external standard that God submits to. God is the source of justice and God cannot be other than who he is. So, God does not forgive us by sweeping justice aside. He forgives us by *fulfilling* the demands of his justice. God could not do this, however, by sending someone else to suffer our just punishment in our place, even if that were a perfect angel. No court of justice would allow an innocent man to take the punishment of a guilty man because justice demands that the guilty one must pay the price of his crime. The only one in the universe who can bear the consequences of the law of God in our place is the God of the law. He can do this because he himself is justice. God therefore became incarnate in human flesh to take the punishment that we deserved. If Jesus Christ was not *fully God* he could not have justly taken away and exhausted the full punishment for the guilt of all mankind. But he also had to be *fully man* to bear that punishment because only a man can die. You may feel that your guilt is too great for God to forgive. If so, ask yourself this question: Is the worth of Jesus' death more or less than your guilt? Let me assure you that his death is infinitely greater in worth than the weight of any number of offenses that you may have committed. There is no sin too great for God to forgive.

Read Hebrews 2

Thank God for giving you a clean slate today.

Intuitively there is something within people that tends to back away from Jesus. Many people are comfortable with a remote and abstract God, but Jesus represents a God who has come to us. He represents a God who is making an absolute claim on our lives. Most people want a God who doesn't interfere too much with their lives. They are happy to observe a moral law and even participate in religious ceremonies, but as soon as God comes to establish his rule in our lives, they recoil. The writer of Hebrews was addressing the temptation of his Jewish readers to back away from Jesus and return to their religion of law and ceremony. We should not think that this temptation is not as real for us as it was for them. One of the greatest temptations that Christians have faced, and continue to face, is the temptation to regress from being a disciple of Jesus to an observer of a moral and ceremonial based religion that essentially keeps God at a 'safe distance'. Is Jesus really the Lord of your life? Are you following him or are you chasing your own goals and hoping that Jesus will follow you? If you find that you have become distracted and have let your commitment to Jesus slip, then know that God doesn't want to condemn you. You don't have to change to be forgiven. You must simply turn back to Jesus, and he will lead you step by step to a fuller life in which you will rest in his purpose for you.

Read Hebrews 3

Commit yourself to Jesus and ask him to lead you through the next step that he wants you to take.

God wanted to lead the Israelites to a place where they could live in rest. To live in a state of rest is to live, as it were, in the flow of God's purpose. It is to lean into this purpose and let this purpose carry our lives forwards. To be at rest is to be like a plant in the right environment which grows uninhibited and bears the fruit it was made to bear. A plant does not exhaust itself to grow and bear fruit. In the right environment, it does this naturally. This is rest. God's purpose is the environment in which we must rest and where we will grow and bear fruit. When God called the Israelites to enter into the promised land (their place of rest, where they would fulfil God's purpose) they became fearful and would not follow his lead. As a result, something very tragic happened. Instead of leaving the desert to enter the fertile land of Canaan they turned back and wandered around and around in the desert for the rest of their lives. This is the sad fate of many people. They will not entrust themselves to God, but instead they let their own ambitions and fears dictate their path in life. As a result, they end up wandering around and around in a desert-like existence. Their lives bear little or no fruit and they live without direction or purpose. If you feel that this has been the case for you to any extent, then I have good news. It is never too late to start again.

Read Hebrews 4:1-13

Ask God to lead you and make you fruitful for his purpose.

OUR HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

FRIDAY
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One of the purposes of this letter to the Hebrews is to show how Jesus Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the temple system. The temple was officiated by a priesthood under a high priest whose job it was to represent God's people. The high priest in Jerusalem would present sacrifices on behalf of the people and intercede before God for the people so that God would bless them. The writer of Hebrews wants us to see that the high priesthood was a symbolic institution that points to the real high priest who is Jesus Christ. Jesus ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God and never ceases to plead our case. If you are like me, you will feel your imperfections very keenly. But Jesus keeps affirming before God that our sins have been paid for in full. Not only this, but Jesus appeals to his own righteousness which is credited to our account, and he asks God to bless us in accordance with that. There is a lot of attention being given to your life in heaven right now. Jesus is naming you before God as you read this, and he is asking God to answer you with blessing whenever you pray. So go ahead and ask God to bless you and make you fruitful. Think of who else needs something from God and pray for them. Be bold before God because Jesus is pleading your case right now. Raise your expectations of what God will give you. Ask and keep asking until you see God changing your world and, even then, keep on praying for more.

Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Pray to God with specific requests for yourself and others.