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I Was Wrong About Jesus

Written by Bill Perkins

For the first eight years of my life, my family attended a Baptist church. So every Sunday I crafted felt cutouts of Jonah, Moses, and David, sang about the walls of Jericho crumbling down, and acted out stories of Jesus and his many miracles.

While I liked all of these activities, I most enjoyed learning about Jesus. I suppose that's good, since he is the Savior of the World. He just seemed like such a nice guy—always helping people and smiling and blessing children. And while I might not have entirely understood *why* he had to die, I knew it was for a good reason.

As a child, I liked this version of Jesus. But now that I'm an adult, I find him somewhat boring and irrelevant.

People are amazing—every single one of us.

Take my wife, for example.

We've known each other for nearly four years now—first as co-workers, then as friends, then as a couple, and now as spouses. Throughout this time, I've continually gotten to know her. I've learned more about her interests and preferences, her history and upbringing, her hopes and dreams, her humor and feelings.

Her personality is incredibly deep. Sometimes I feel like I've only scratched the surface.

Even after four years I don't fully know this woman. And I never will. Until the day I die, I'll be getting to know my wife.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus is a real person.

He's not a felt cutout. He's not a two dimensional drawing. He's a flesh and blood, living and breathing, sweating and coughing, eating and sleeping human.

But many of us—me included—fix our images of Jesus around the time we step out of childhood. Our ideas of him are tied down to this basic understanding.

It's no wonder we dismiss him as boring and irrelevant. Because as an adult, that storybook version of him is hollow and unrelatable.

He's stuffy. He's nice. He's a flat character without an ounce of personality.

Jesus's personality is anything but flat. He's shocking and radical and even hilarious.

We all know Jesus performed his first public miracle by turning water into wine (180 gallons of it). But have we ever stopped to consider what it says about him? Jesus isn't a stodgy stiff, but joyful and generous and *fun*—the sort of guy who might not be welcome in some churches today.

Most of us have heard about the woman at the well. But do we recognize the implications of this story? Not only did Jesus enter Samaria, a region avoided by Jews, but he spoke to a Samaritan woman—an action that broke every cultural stereotype and prejudice. Jesus doesn't care about societal dos and don'ts. He rejects all forms of discrimination, even if doing so makes him look bad.

Then there's the time Jesus disguised himself to some of his followers who were heading to Emmaus, an interaction filled with subtlety and humor. And, of course, there are the episodes of Jesus clearing the temple with a homemade whip. What made Jesus so upset? Manmade religion—the barriers religious leaders created to keep people from reaching God.

It's no surprise we ignore the complexities of Jesus's personality.

It requires reading beyond the words, putting yourself into the stories. And it's hard to translate a 2,000 year-old book to today's world.

But let's give it a shot—and tell me if you think I'm wrong. In these four snapshots, we see Jesus showing up to a party with a ridiculous amount of alcohol, hanging out with people rejected by religious folks, pulling a cunning prank on his friends, and raging at church leaders who make people feel like they need to get their act in order before walking through the church doors.

Perhaps it's time we tossed the felt cutout of Jesus and started treating him as a real person with a real personality. With fresh eyes, let's give him a look.

I don't think we'll be disappointed.