



LOVING JESUS
A 30-DAY GUIDE
WITHOUT LIMITS

COMPLETELY
Blessed

Unwrapping God's Extraordinary Gifts

SHANNON ETHRIDGE

Best-selling author of the Every Woman's Battle series



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Italics in Scripture quotations indicate the author's added emphasis.

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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AN INVITATION INTO THE GENEROSITY OF GOD

What did you get me?” That’s the question my children always ask around their birthdays and Christmas. I hope they’ve learned that it’s more blessed to give than to receive, but who doesn’t love to get gifts? Especially really good ones!

Speaking of good gifts, look what God says about the gifts He gives to us.

I love all who love me. Those who search for me will surely find me.
Unending riches, honor, wealth, and justice are mine to distribute.
My gifts are better than the purest gold, my wages better than sterling silver! I walk in righteousness, in paths of justice. Those who love me inherit wealth, for I fill their treasuries. (Proverbs 8:17–21)

Better than gold or silver? Riches, honor, and wealth *without end*? Treasuries *overflowing*? Wow! What a great gift giver God must be to grant His people such love, favor, and blessing. Fortunately, He doesn’t make us wait until our birthdays or Christmas to open these extraordinary gifts. We can unwrap and enjoy them every day and even share them with others without worrying about blowing our gifts budget.

Welcome to *Completely Blessed*, the third devotional book in a series of four, which are intended to follow the lead book, *Completely His: Loving Jesus Without Limits*. If you’ve not yet read *Completely His* or the first two devotionals, I encourage you to do so to ensure you get the most from the series. But if you choose to read this book first, you’ll still be enriched by it—and the three other devotionals in the series.

Each of the devotionals is designed to deepen your commitment to your

heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and to help you embrace your role as His beloved bride. In these thirty-day devotionals, we'll carefully consider the following:

- how far God has gone to reveal Himself to us and draw us closer (explored in *Completely Loved: Recognizing God's Passionate Pursuit of Us*)
- how God can use you mightily in spite of your shortcomings (demonstrated in *Completely Forgiven: Responding to God's Transforming Grace*)
- how God lavishes both His presence and His presents upon us (the message in this devotional)
- how our love for God cannot be contained but can be shared naturally (examined in *Completely Irresistible: Drawing Others to God's Extravagant Love*)

The first devotional focuses on God's interactions with various people in the Old Testament in order to gain a clearer glimpse into His character and to understand how He passionately pursues us. The second devotional takes a closer look at some of those saints and sinners in the Bible, as well as God's reaction to them, so that we can celebrate the forgiveness we've found in Christ. In this devotional, we'll unwrap some of the mysteries contained in the New Testament as to the wonderful blessings we've been given by our generous and thoughtful God. We'll consider such questions as:

- What are some of the unique gifts God grants to us that continually add to the quality of our existence?
- What blessings do we glean from applying Christ's ancient parables to our modern-day lives?
- What part does God invite us to play in His great salvation drama?
- How can I cultivate a heart overflowing with gratitude toward my generous God for the multitude of blessings He bestows upon me?

Over the next thirty days, we'll consider such things as lilies, light loads, and lead roles. We'll examine the value of compassionate friends, firm foundations, and fertile soil. We'll celebrate prodigal sons, prayer, green pastures,

and the promise of paradise. We'll join Jesus at wedding banquets, watch Him turn water into wine, and even go walking on the water.

I'm so glad you'll be joining us on this thirty-day journey. Get ready to be showered with blessings as we consider many of the most extraordinary gifts one could ever hope to receive!



A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Daily reading: John 1:1–18

Key passage: In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone.... The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was going to come into the world....

We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us—one gracious blessing after another. (John 1:1–4, 9, 16)

*W*ANTED: SAVIOR OF THE WORLD
Applicant must...

- be able to transcend space and time,
- intimately know God and represent Him perfectly,
- be willing to leave paradise and live as a homeless person,
- dwell among people who doubt your credentials and question your sanity,
- be willing to tirelessly heal the sick, encourage the poor, and love the unlovely,

- serve as a light in a dark world and overcome all forms of evil, and
- single-handedly bear the weight of the world's iniquities.

Only the sinless need apply. Send résumé directly to God.

If you are thinking that no one could have filled God's job description for a savior besides Jesus, you are absolutely right. Even before humankind fell into sin, God had a perfect plan to restore us into right relationship and sweet fellowship with Him. His restoration plan didn't come in the form of a prescription or an extreme makeover. It came in the form of a person—a timeless, sinless, and matchless person by the name of Jesus Christ.

Admittedly, the gospel of John's opening lines can be confusing for the person who doesn't recognize the incredible credentials our Savior holds. I recall as a teenager hearing my pastor read the following: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1, NIV). The verse sounded to me like an unsolvable riddle. But now I know that Jesus (the Word) was God made flesh, sent to earth to dwell among us.

Jesus' origins go back much further than Mary's womb. He existed with God before the beginning of time and will continue to exist when time has ended. But Jesus hadn't just been *with* God, like two people can be with each other in a room. As part of the Trinity—God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit—He actually *is* God.

In other words, God Himself came to the earth He created. Why? To demonstrate His lavish love. He desired to be with us for a time and to leave an indelible mark on the history of humanity—indeed, to save us from ourselves and our folly. God came down from heaven in the form of a human being so that we could recognize and relate with Him in an intimate way and learn from Him how we are to live. Can you imagine a more extraordinary and personal gift?

God's gifts to us are as timeless as He is. Just because we're living two thousand years after Jesus walked this earth doesn't mean we have missed out on having a personal relationship with Him. Does Jesus still transcend time and space? You bet. He is both omniscient (knowing all things throughout time) and omnipresent (everywhere at once). Not only that, the gospel

accounts of His life teach us how to intimately know Him. Can Jesus still heal the sick, encourage the poor, and love the unlovely? Yes, He can, and He does so countless times per day. Is He still our light in a dark world? Does He overcome evil still to this day? Does He gladly bear the weight of every sin we commit? Yes, yes, and yes.

God didn't just send a postcard from heaven or a mere memento or token of His love. He gave us a precious gift that keeps on giving. He gave us a living, breathing, walking, talking, loving, healing, teaching, preaching example of His extraordinary love by coming near to us in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ.

HOLDING HIS HAND

Name three reasons why God sent Himself to this earth.

Could God have sent us a greater gift? Why or why not?

How does God's gift to us, the gift of Jesus Christ as our Savior, continue to keep giving and giving? What blessings do we continue to receive through Christ's life, death, and resurrection?

Heavenly Father,

It boggles our minds to try to think of a more perfect plan than the one You devised and executed. Thank You for coming near to us in the form of Your Son, Jesus, to bring light to our world, to save us from our sins, and to show us how to live in obedience and sweet fellowship with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

AN UNDENIABLE SIGN

Daily reading: Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 3:13–17; Luke 4:14–22; John 1:29–34

Key passage: John said, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘When you see the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon someone, he is the one you are looking for. He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Son of God.” (John 1:32–34)

*W*e had just put the groceries away on August 16, 1977, when my mother announced that she was lying down for a nap. Promising not to disturb her, I turned the television volume down low and sprawled out near the set on the green shag carpet. Mom had probably just dozed off when I heard the television announcer make a shocking statement. I went running into her bedroom screaming and crying, “Mom, guess who died!”

She sat straight up in bed, looking terrified, and asked, “Who?”

“ELVIS!” I replied, expecting her to share my heartbreak. Instead, she was furious that I panicked her in such a way.

Knowing I was a big Elvis fan, my mom surprised me three years later. We were on our way back to Texas from Alabama when we stopped in Memphis,

Tennessee. She thought I would enjoy seeing Elvis's palatial home, Graceland, and indeed I did. At that time there was no one greater in my eyes. While standing in line outside the surrounding fence, I overheard one woman talking about how she went to elementary school with Elvis in Tupelo, Mississippi. I can still hear her screechy southern voice declare in astonishment, "Why, he was no big deal back then—just a regular little kid! We had no idea he'd become the King of Rock 'n' Roll!"

As I read today's passage of Scripture, I couldn't help but wonder if John the Baptist and others around Nazareth were thinking something similar about Jesus. *Why, He's just Joseph and Mary's kid! We've known Him all our lives! He couldn't possibly be God's anointed Messiah, could He? King of kings? Lord of lords? Surely not.*

Jesus' humble beginnings did not match the Jews' expectations for the Messiah. As they awaited His arrival, they were looking toward the mansions, not the mangers...scouting for a prince, not a pauper...watching for a warrior on a gallant white steed, not a meek man on a lowly donkey. Boy, were they wrong.

Perhaps this was one reason why God drew Jesus toward the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Jesus certainly didn't need to be baptized—the act symbolizes repentance from sin, of which Jesus had none. That's why I believe God had something else in mind. I think God wanted to give the people a clear, undeniable sign that Jesus was the One sent from heaven to demonstrate God's love and compassion.

Before God gave the sign, only John the Baptist had the spiritual eyes to recognize Jesus as God's own. As Jesus approached him, John declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Soon a man is coming who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before I did'" (John 1:29–30). But his very next words tell us that this was a brand-new revelation for him, as he says twice, in verses 31 and 33, "I *didn't know* he was the one." In other words, "I had no idea the one I've been preparing the way for is our very own Jesus!"

John the Baptist and Jesus were family, as their mothers were related to one another (Luke 1:36). In the first chapter of Luke's gospel, Mary, pregnant with Jesus, makes a lengthy trip from Nazareth to Judea to visit Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John. Mary stays with Elizabeth three months (Luke 1:56). Although we've no way of knowing for sure, I think it's safe to speculate that Jesus and John the Baptist knew each other as they were growing up, yet John had no idea that Jesus was the Messiah until that moment at the Jordan River. He must have been scratching his head in confusion, wondering, *This is the Son of God? Jesus? Our Jesus?*

Ready to begin His ministry on earth, Jesus enters the Jordan River and insists that John baptize Him. In these moments, the sky opens up and the Spirit of God visibly descends upon Jesus. God audibly speaks to John and all who were gathered there, saying, "This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him" (Matthew 3:17). Talk about an undeniable sign! There could no longer be any doubt in people's minds. They heard God with their own ears. They saw the dove descend with their own eyes. They knew the truth in their hearts—Jesus, *their Jesus*, was indeed the Messiah. God Himself had declared that Jesus was His Son.

Not only was this an undeniable sign to the Jews, it is a sign to us as well. God knows our tendency to question and doubt, and so He gave us this gift so that we would know that the King of the universe came to earth as one of us. He aligned Himself with us—hopeless sinners—in order that we could be made saints. He entered this world and served us in humility, then returned to heaven to be with the Father, giving us a foretaste of what is to come for us as well.

HOLDING HIS HAND

What do Jesus' humble beginnings say about our Savior?

How does it make me feel to know that Jesus was willing to identify Himself with me, even though He was sinless? Why?

What might be an appropriate expression of gratitude for how Christ humbled Himself and became one of us in order that He might love us, serve us, and save us?

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for submitting to Your Father's plan for Your life, for truly I am the direct beneficiary of Your extravagant sacrifice. Although sinless, You took on my sins and identified Yourself with me completely. Now I declare, in response, that I am completely Yours. Amen.



POWER OVER THE ENEMY

Daily reading: Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13

Key passage: Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan!...It is written...”

Then the devil left him. (Matthew 4:10–11, NIV)

Once Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit through baptism, the Spirit led Him into the desert to be tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1). What transpires would make a great scene in an old Western movie. Use your imagination, read the following script with a Texas drawl, and see if you don’t agree:

Jesus (wearing a white cowboy hat) goes without grub for forty days and nights. The devil (wearing a black cowboy hat) is licking his chops over the idea that Jesus is famished and vulnerable. However, Satan fails to realize that Jesus’ spirit is strongest when his flesh is the weakest.

Satan invites Jesus to the Not-O-Kay Corral, trying to entice Him with food like a farmer dangles a carrot in front of a mule. “If You’re the Son o’ God, tell them there rocks to become bread, Jesus!” (Matthew 4:3).

“Why you yellow-bellied sapsucker, I ain’t about to do no such thing! It says in My Father’s book that man don’t live on

bread alone,” Jesus replies. “I live by every word that flows out of My Daddy’s mouth!” (verse 4).

Satan is thinking, *But You ain’t et for forty days! Ain’t You starv-ing to death yet?* Jesus, on the other hand, is thinking, *I may be hungry, but I ain’t stupid! My Daddy’s gonna’ feed Me, yessiree.*

Satan slips another shell into his shotgun, saying, “Why don’t You prove Yourself, Cowboy! Throw Yourself off this here temple to prove to everybody that God’s angels are gonna gallop up and rescue You.”

Jesus doesn’t even shake in His boots but boldly sticks His index finger into the barrel of Satan’s gun. “It is written: don’t test God. I ain’t a-gonna play that game, Satan!” (verse 7).

In a desperate, final attempt to cause Jesus to stumble and fall into sin, the devil takes Him to a high mountain and says, “I’ll give You this here mountain range and every other one like it, along with every flea-bitten town on the planet. All You gotta do, Jesus, is drop to Yer knees and worship me” (verses 8–9).

Jesus moseys over to Satan, looks at him with disgust in His eyes, and says, “Get outta’ here, you lyin’ coward! I ain’t about to worship you or anybody else—just My Daddy!” (verse 10).

Satan slithers away with his fist in the air, yelling, “I’ll be back! Just you wait!”

Jesus just smiles and replies, “Oh, I’ll be on the lookout. You can bet yer bottom dollar!”

Okay, so the western touch may seem like a stretch, but you get the idea. Jesus sent Satan packing out of that desert with his tail between his legs. As a result, Jesus accomplished three things:

1. *He revealed His true character.* In spite of His hunger and weakness, He proved that He wasn’t looking for any shortcuts to the fulfillment of God’s plan for the salvation of humanity. He never backed away from doing what His Father asked Him to do.

2. *He revealed the nature of temptation versus sin.* Jesus demonstrated that experiencing temptation is not a sin and that temptation doesn't become sin without our permission.
3. *He revealed Satan's limitations.* Jesus proved that we have the power to resist Satan when we exercise the authority given to us in God's Word. When we do so, Satan will flee from us (James 4:7).

Perhaps you are thinking that God gave this authority only to Jesus. Not so. In Luke 10:19, Jesus tells us, "Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you." In other words, we have the same power over Satan as Jesus had. What a tremendous gift!

Even though God grants us power over the enemy, the e-mails I receive every week in response to the Every Woman's Battle series tell me we've not unwrapped this precious gift. Women frequently say things such as, "I'm *stuck* in this extramarital affair," "I feel *powerless* over temptation," and "I have *no control* over my feelings any more." It's as if Satan has their hands and ankles tied with rope and is aiming a shotgun in their faces. I know that the desperation and weakness people feel is real, but I long to scream through cyberspace, "Satan's faking you out! His power over you isn't real! You're giving in to his torture when you have the strength to get up, get in his face, and command that he flee!"

Of course, in order to exercise our power to do that, we have to use the same weapon Jesus used. When we use the Word of God as a weapon against Satan, we are wielding the mighty sword of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Each of the three times He was tempted, Jesus wielded that sword in Satan's face, replying, "It is written...!"

Do you know what is written in God's Word concerning gunfights at the Not-O-Kay Corral? God predetermines the winner—the good guy. Light triumphs over darkness (John 1:5). God sends Satan fleeing every time when we call on His name in faith and obey His instructions on how to get ourselves out of such gunfights with the devil. So, use God's Word with full

confidence, my dear sister, that He will give you power over the Enemy just as He promises. Then use that power for your benefit and for God's glory.

HOLDING HIS HAND

When I sense Satan challenging me to a gunfight at the Not-O-Kay Corral, do I panic in fear or stand in faith? Why?

What areas of weakness does Satan like to attack in my life? What are three or four passages of Scripture that I could use as weapons when Satan tempts me in these areas?

What difference would it make in my life if I unwrapped God's gift of power over the Enemy and utilized it every day?

Dear Lord,

We're so grateful that You showed us how to have faith in Your Father's words, even in the face of temptation. Remind us that You have gift-wrapped this same power especially for us, and be with us as we confidently exercise our God-given authority over the Enemy. Amen.



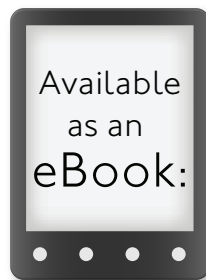
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