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THE BIGGEST LIE

I am trying to change your mind.

Perhaps you knew that when you picked up this book. But I want to be completely transparent.

There's a sea of subliminal messages out there, all created by artificial intelligence in back rooms of tech companies designed to keep you unaware of their persuasions. It's the deal we make and, for the most part, we're okay with it. It's fine when it comes to clicking on a video or buying some shampoo, but it's not how we should treat the big questions in life.

And I am trying to persuade you about something far more significant than soap. I want to persuade you that Jesus is who he said he was and that he has enormous relevance to your life.

That's this book in a nutshell.

Jesus is relevant.

A little over two thousand years ago, a man stepped off a small fishing boat and onto a stony beach. There was nothing impressive about the way he looked. A carpenter by trade, he likely had strong, calloused hands and forearms tanned by the middle-eastern sun. He worked with his father. He lived near his siblings. He came from a parochial part of the country, a small settlement tucked away in the north, far away from the celebrity and politics of the capital.

And yet, when *this* man stepped out of the boat and onto the beach hundreds of people crowded round him. They jostled and shouted. They asked questions and wanted to get his attention. Neighbors and friends swapped rumors about him and the impossible things he did—stories of healing sickness with a few words and giving sight to the blind. Someone said he could change the weather. Others recounted his clashes with the religious leaders and his ability to hold an audience for hours. And everyone, it seemed, wanted a piece of the action.

In all the chaos, a father stumbled through. Jairus was desperate. His twelve-year-old daughter—his only daughter—was sick. She was about to die. Jairus was a leader of the local synagogue. Religious. Upright. Respected in the community. He'd tried everything to help his daughter and nothing had worked.

But there was something about this carpenter. Deep down Jairus knew, he *knew*, this man was the only one who could help. As he pushed his way through the crowd, forcing others back, he raised his hand and shouted.

Making it to the front he fell down at the man's feet, wet sand soaking through his clothes.

Jesus stopped.

You may know stories about Jesus. You may not. You might think they are something for religious people. People who are into “that kind of thing.” For *those* people, the stories are interesting—maybe. But for you, right now, in the twenty-first century, well, it's just not immediately obvious what these events, what *this* man, has to do with you.

A lot has happened since Jesus walked the earth, but people are still people. Seeking meaning and hope. Struggling with money, and worry, and grief. Smiling over successes and kicking themselves over failures. Feeling shame. Feeling elation. Searching for answers. Believing lies.

Jesus hasn't changed either, nor has his availability to meet with every person, including you.

Each chapter in this book focuses on an individual encountering Jesus from the New Testament. During each interaction Jesus exposes a lie that many of us have been brought up to believe as self-evident truth. Every exposé contains a common thread: The truth is more relevant to you than feels comfortable.

The encounters all come from one of four Bible books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. These accounts are biographies recording Jesus' time on earth—the same story captured from four unique perspectives. And what

they show runs to the heart of what it means to be human.
For you. For me. Jesus meets our greatest need.

We begin with Jairus, the desperate father on
the stony beach.

LIE 1

I DON'T MATTER TO GOD

Jairus begged Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter. So, Jesus followed the distressed man through the winding Palestinian streets to his home; the crowds pressed in, eager to see Jesus and watch what he might do for the sick girl.

There were always crowds around Jesus, too many people for him to care about personally, right? One woman thought so as Jesus and Jairus hurried past:

Jesus went with him [Jairus]. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." (Mark 5:24–28)

This desperate woman had suffered under the “care” of her first-century doctors for over a decade. We can only imagine what they were prescribing for her constant hemorrhaging. But, whatever it was, it wasn’t working. It was making her a whole lot sicker and a whole lot poorer. And all the while she was isolated from her community. With her condition, she wouldn’t have been considered “clean.”

No wonder she didn’t want to be noticed. She didn’t think she mattered enough to Jesus to try and attract his attention. He was busy with other more important things, not least going to help Jairus’s sick daughter. She only wanted anonymous healing and to slip away in secret. But that’s not how Jesus does things:

Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’” But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. (Mark 5:29–33)

Jesus wouldn't let her dissolve back into the crowd. He wanted a face to face with her. Those watching could see her shaking as she fell to the ground in front of Jesus, terrified to see his reaction to her.

Just Another Face in the Crowd?

If you came face to face with Jesus, what do you imagine his reaction to you would be? Would he shake his head disapprovingly? Would he welcome you with open arms? Perhaps he would start encouraging you to try harder? Would he want to be your buddy? Maybe he's so horrified by your life, he would walk away in disgust? Perhaps he would barely notice you, having more important things to do?

Despite the rush to get to Jairus's daughter, Jesus cared enough to stop and seek out the woman who thought he wouldn't have time for her. As she bowed, trembling at his feet, his words cut through the lie:

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mark 5:34)

Others had shunned her, exploited her, and failed her. Yet, Jesus shows God's heart toward this broken woman. He calls her "Daughter," grants her peace, and restores her.

Read through Mark's Gospel and you'll see this isn't an isolated case. Every single person mattered this much to Jesus. He had time for everyone, the rich, the

poor, those shunned by society, and those popular and respected. He had time for the important Jairus and for the unnamed woman.

Jesus sees each individual as they are meant to be. He does the same for you. Jesus doesn't rate your value based on your looks, how much is in your bank account, your lineage, or your lifestyle. It doesn't matter if your self-esteem is sky-high or so low it doesn't register on the chart.

However you feel about yourself, Jesus shows us that "I don't matter to God" is a lie.

The Truth: You Matter to God Because...

... He Made You

Our first ancestors were made perfectly by God. In the very first book of the Bible, we read how God created Adam and Eve in his image (Genesis 1:27). In each person you meet, and in yourself, you can see echoes or reflections of God's character. Those characteristics appear in people in multiple ways, but two come to mind.

First, we have the capacity to be self-aware; that is, we have a conscience. Science twists itself into knots, trying to understand how protoplasm and calcium come together to be able to think and know *that* we're thinking.

Secondly, we reflect God's heart of love; the Bible says God is love (1 John 4:16). To truly love is one of the most amazing things about being human.

Bearing the image of God means that all descendants of Adam and Eve have these marks of the divine in them.

That's why everyone from every corner of the globe has value, worth, and dignity—including a panicked father and a bleeding woman. Anyone being true to the Christian faith will value all people.

Jesus sees the inherent value in all people, including you. And what Jesus thinks about you is far more crucial than what you feel about yourself.

You matter to God because he made you. He made you with a purpose.

... He Made You to Know Him

I have a famous friend named Wesley Korir. He's a marathon runner who has won the Boston marathon and the LA marathon twice. He even ran in the Olympics for Kenya.

I suspect he has fans who know more about him than I do. But if those fans saw him in the street, Wesley would walk straight past them unless they asked him for his autograph. On the other hand, if Wesley happened to run into me on the street, he would shout out to me and hug me. Many people know *of* Wesley. They know *about* him. I know him.

God made everything in creation but only humans were made to know God in a living, dynamic, two-way relationship. We were made to “walk with God” (Genesis 3:8), not just to get things from him and slip away like the woman in the crowd. Jesus wants that personal meeting with all who come to him in faith.

... He Made You To Know Him As Father

Every culture I've lived in has an endearing word for father: Daddy in English, *Papa* in Spanish, and *Baba* in Swahili, Kurdish, and Arabic. Often it's the first word a baby will learn. In Aramaic, the language of Jesus, it's *Abba*. When the disciples ask Jesus, "teach us to pray," Jesus goes right ahead and invites them to call God "Father" (Luke 11:1-2).

Many in the world have bad fathers; sometimes they are the ones who best know what a good father should look like. God knows how to be a good father.

The Gospel author John writes that those who believe in Jesus are given the right to become a part of the family: "to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

Remember what Jesus called the woman the moment she knelt before him and told her story? He shows her God's fatherly heart by calling her "Daughter."

... He Made You To Know Him As Father Forever

We can only imagine what was running through Jairus's mind as he anxiously waited while Jesus talked to the woman. If only they could get moving again! But as Jesus was still speaking to the woman, Jairus received the blow:

... some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" (Mark 5:35)

Despite the news, Jesus continued to the house, now filled with the loud wailings of this important man's many friends and family.

[Jesus] took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. (Mark 5:40–42)

With tender compassion, Jesus restored another life and another family. But as Jesus raised this twelve-year-old, he didn't just transform her parents' sorrow to joy; he showed us on a small scale, what he will do on an ultimate scale.

Jesus can give us eternal life—knowing and enjoying our Father God eternally in an ever-maturing relationship. We are deeply valuable to God because we are eternal beings. He created us as infinite beings. Our bodies die, but our spirit will live forever. We matter to God. He made us to spend that forever with him.