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“There’s nothing I find more meaningful or satisfying to contemplate than Jesus himself. In *Rich Wounds*, David Mathis has written a warm, concise, and celebratory treatment of the Jesus who is everything we need and—may God use this book to help us realize this—everything we want.”

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“David Mathis has a keen ability to unpack theological truths with striking clarity. His gifting is on full display in *Rich Wounds* as he guides us through the life, sacrifice, and glorification of our Savior in reflections that are both poignant and profound. As Mathis directs our gaze to the person of Christ, the heart cannot help but stir with adoration and praise for the Son, who suffered wounds so that ours might be healed. Read this devotional slowly, and delight in the one who makes all things new.”

KATHRYN BUTLER, MD, Author, *Between Life and Death*

“Martin Luther famously said, ‘To progress in the Christian life is to begin again.’ *Rich Wounds* will help you begin again and again by taking you deeply into the surrender, suffering, and exaltation of Jesus. It is filled with profound insight and will help you not just understand but also feel the weight of Jesus’ atoning work.”

J.D. GREEAR, Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, NC;  
Author, *Just Ask*

“This book is a treasure trove of fresh biblical insights, deep devotion, and practical help. Each of its thirty chapters is engaging, moving, and perceptive, with useful prayers and Bible readings to help you immerse yourself in God’s love and compassion in Christ. This book will help you meditate more deeply on the ‘rich wounds’ of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour: his humanity, life, ministry, death, and resurrection and glorification.”

PETER ADAM, Former principal, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia

“This volume sings with an infectious enthusiasm of the Christ whose rich wounds are worthy of many crowns. Written in an accessible style, it moves from the wonder of God’s love displayed on the cross to the stunning eruption of his power in the resurrection, when joy triumphed over sorrow. *Rich Wounds* will help us sing as we think, and think as we sing.”

DONALD MACLEOD, Former principal, Free Church of Scotland College

“Let David draw your eyes away from yourself and on to the rich wounds of Christ—the only wounds that heal.”

ABIGAIL DODDS, Blogger; Author, *(A)Typical Woman*

“I have been nourished by many devotional books, but normally as a spiritual appetizer—an energy-booster—for the day. Mathis’ devotions are more like bite-sized meals. They are chock-full of robust theology and scriptural depth, feeding my soul with the glory of Jesus. The title is fitting: we feed from and are quickly sated by the wounds of Christ on each page.”

MATT REAGAN, Director, Campus Outreach Charleston



# RICH WOUNDS

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The Countless Treasures of the  
Life, Death, and Triumph of Jesus

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DAVID MATHIS



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*To Mercy*



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# INTRODUCTION

## The Many Crowns of Christ

*“His eyes are like a flame of fire,  
and on his head are many diadems.”*

*—Revelation 19:12*

Admiration may be the highest of pleasures, and particularly when we marvel at the life, death, and triumph of Jesus. The treasures of who he is, what he has done, and what he will do are countless. We were made for this: not just to trust and obey God, but to know him, and enjoy him, in Jesus. The joys of knowing Jesus are unsurpassed even now—and they will endure, and only deepen and develop, for all eternity to come.

This Jesus is a king unlike any other. Mere human monarchs and dignitaries have their strengths and weaknesses, their fortes and flaws, the particular glories for which they are remembered and the inevitable missteps they wish to be forgotten. Yet the man Christ Jesus—not only truly human but also truly God—eclipses and far surpasses every other human ruler and celebrity. He is worthy of more than a single crown. As King of kings, and Lord of lords, and Glory of glories, he is worthy of many crowns.

Because of how it helps me admire and marvel at Jesus, one of my favorite hymns has long been “Crown Him with Many Crowns” (Matthew Bridges, 1851). In my own life, it’s one of the few hymns that has been a common thread

from one church to another. I have been singing it for forty years, since I was a child, then in college, then as an adult. Now, my kids know I love it and get my attention when the first bars begin in church. “Dad, it’s your favorite!”

Over the years, in singing this hymn with congregation after congregation, I’ve often been moved to tears of joy as I have pondered, even just vaguely, the great coronation ceremony in heaven, where the risen Christ, always fully God and now in full glorified humanity, takes his seat on the throne of the universe. I love how the hymn’s stanzas celebrate Christ, in turn, as Lord of love, Lord of life, Lord of light, Lord of heaven, Lord of years, Lord of lords. Even as phrase after phrase tells of his glory, the one that has arrested me most over the years is “rich wounds.”

*Crown him the Lord of love!  
Behold his hands and side—  
Rich wounds, yet visible above,  
In beauty glorified.*

*Rich wounds* captures so well the strangeness and beauty—the peculiar glory—of Jesus Christ and his self-sacrifice at the cross for sinners. “Wounds,” of course, is no foreign word to modern ears. Today we speak with surprising frequency about “wounds:” not so much physical wounds as the emotional ones we’re newly aware of and attend to—the “daddy wound” of fatherlessness, the “wound” of harsh words against us, the “wounds” of some trauma that continues to haunt us. As a society, we’ve become freshly conscious of our wounds. We talk about them. We know them.

But here we celebrate *rich wounds*. Jesus was wounded for us: pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. “Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus bore

*our* griefs, *our* sorrows, *our* transgressions, *our* iniquities; he brought *us* peace; he healed *us*.

His wounds, horrific as they were when inflicted on the innocent Son of God, are indeed *rich* wounds, because he is God, and made us rich in becoming poor for us (2 Corinthians 8:9). They are wounds rich in meaning and significance: wounds that have not vanished on his resurrected body. They are still visible—gloriously so, as the hymn tells us, and as we’ll celebrate in this book, especially in chapter 22.

“Rich wounds” flies as a banner over Jesus’ life and death and new life in the resurrection. First came his ability to be wounded, which he embraced by virtue of his becoming man and taking human flesh; then of course came the hand and foot and side wounds he endured in his death; and then, most significantly, came the scars which he now displays on his glorified body, celebrated in the hymn. “Rich wounds” not only brings to mind the cross and his death, not only the life and words and works that led him there, but also his resurrection: his exaltation to God’s right hand, his coronation as King of the universe, and his reign in heaven now. And “rich wounds” speaks to Christ’s ability to transform our wounds today, like his, into marks of beauty—wounds which are not without their pain, nor without subsequent glory.

The thirty chapters in this book are meditations on the many crowns—the many glories—of Jesus Christ, and in particular his redemptive work for his people in his life, sacrificial death, and world-turning resurrection.

Part 1 considers eight glimpses of his glory in his life and ministry, leading up to his Passion week. Then Part 2 pauses to consider his sacrificial death on the cross and its meaning for his people. Part 3 lingers in a place from which we can be prone to move on too quickly: his resurrection.

Many of us do make much of his resurrection—for one day each year. One aspect of this book that excites me most is this opportunity for abiding, pausing, remaining in the glory of the resurrection, which was so prominent in the early preaching of the apostles, yet can at times occupy a relatively small space in our own preaching and theology. Finally, in Part 4, I invite you to walk with me, as we walk with Jesus through his Passion week (often called “Holy Week”)—from Palm Sunday, to Good Friday, to Resurrection Sunday.

Over the years, my church and family have enjoyed recovering the ancient traditions of Advent, Lent, and Holy Week—celebrating these seasons with special meditations to draw our hearts afresh to the glory of Christ. I hope the chapters in this book will serve in this way for some, as devotions for the month leading up to Easter. Certainly, Part 4, which maps onto the eight days of Holy Week, may be particularly helpful then. I have included a passage of Scripture to read alongside each chapter for those who wish to pair it with daily Bible reading. But this book is not only for Lent. I hope that it will feed readers year-round—since we always have need of considering Christ Jesus, made flesh, crucified, risen, and exalted.

I love meditating on the many glories, the many crowns, the many wonders and excellencies of Jesus Christ. Ponder with me his life and ministry, his sacrificial death, his spectacular resurrection, and that one fateful week that was the worst and most wonderful in the history of the world.



Part 1

# HIS LIFE

*“He has done all things well.”*

*—Mark 7:37*





# 1. HIS HABITS

## Time Alone for God

*“He went out to the mountain to pray,  
and all night he continued in prayer to God.”*

*—Luke 6:12*

**W**e may have only glimpses of Jesus’ habits and personal spiritual practices in the Gospels, but what we do have is no accident, nor is it scant. We know exactly what God means for us to know, in just the right detail—and we have far more about Jesus’ personal spiritual rhythms than we do about anyone else in the Bible.

### Quiet Times without a Bible

First, observe the place of Scripture in Jesus’ life. He did not have his own personal material copy of the Bible, like almost all of us do today. He heard what was read aloud in the synagogue, and what his mother sang, and he rehearsed what he had put to memory. And yet throughout his recorded ministry we see evidence of a man utterly captivated by *what is written* in the text of Scripture.

At the very outset of his public ministry, Jesus retreated to the wilderness; there, as he was tempted by the devil, he leaned on *what is written* (Matthew 4:4, 6, 7, 10; Luke 4:4, 8, 10). Then, returning to his hometown of Nazareth, he stood up to read, took the scroll of Isaiah (61:1-2), and announced, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your

hearing” (Luke 4:21). Jesus identified John the Baptist as “he of whom it is written” (Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:27), and he cleared the temple of moneychangers on the grounds of *what is written* in Isaiah 56:7 (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). He rebuked the proud by quoting Scripture (Mark 7:6; Luke 20:17). At every step of the way to Calvary, he knew everything would happen “as it is written” (see especially John’s Gospel: 6:31, 45; 8:17; 10:34; 12:14, 16; 15:25). “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him,” he said (Mark 14:21). “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31).

Let there be no confusion about the central place of God’s written word in Jesus’ life. He lived by what was written.

### How Often He Withdrew

For Christ, “the wilderness” or “desolate place” often became his momentarily sacred space. He regularly escaped the noise and frenzy of society to be alone with his Father, giving him his full attention.

After “his fame spread everywhere” (Mark 1:28) and “the whole city was gathered together at the door” (v 33), Jesus took a remarkable step:

*“Rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” (v 35)*

*What a ministry opportunity he left behind*, some might think. Surely some of us would have skipped or shortened our private spiritual habits to hurry off and bless the swelling masses. To be sure, other times would come when Jesus would delay his personal routines to meet immediate needs. But how many of us, in such a situation, would have the



presence of mind—and the heart—to discern our need and prioritize prayer as Jesus did?

Luke also shows unmistakably that this pattern of retreat and re-entry was part of the ongoing dynamic of Christ's human life. Jesus "departed and went into a desolate place" (Luke 4:42)—not just once but regularly. "He would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (5:16).

So also in Matthew. After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus "withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself" (Matthew 14:13). Even then, the crowds pursued him. Yet he didn't despise them—here he puts his desire to retreat on hold—but had compassion on them and healed their sick (v 14). After feeding them, a crowd five thousand strong, he withdrew again to a quiet place. "After he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray" (v 23).

### Praying Alone and Together

*What is written* animated his life, and when he withdrew, he went to speak to his Father in prayer. At times, he went away *by himself*, to be *alone* (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46-47). "He went out to the mountain *to pray*, and all night he continued *in prayer* to God" (Luke 6:12).

He also prayed with others. The disciples saw him model prayer at his baptism (Luke 3:21), as he laid his hands on the children (Matthew 19:13), and when he drove out demons (Mark 9:29). He prayed with his disciples; even when he prayed alone, they were sometimes at hand (Luke 9:18; also 11:1). He took Peter, John, and James "and went up on the mountain to pray" (9:28). On the night before he died, he said to Peter, "I have *prayed for you* that your faith may not fail" (22:32). All of John 17 is his prayer for his disciples, in the hearing of the Twelve, minus Judas. Then they went out from that upper room and saw him pray over and over

in the garden (Matthew 26:36, 39, 42, 44). He not only modeled prayer but instructed them in how to pray. “Pray then like this...” (6:9-13).

### **Come Away with Me**

Jesus didn't only retreat to be alone with God but also *invited* his disciples to join him. In Mark 6:31-32, he tells them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” Mark explains, “For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.” So also, in the Gospel of John, as his fame spread, Jesus retreated from more populated settings to invest in his disciples in more desolate, less distracting places (John 11:54).

And this is his invitation to us, as well, today: to cultivate habits of withdrawing to hear from God and respond in prayer, and then of returning, with our hearts and minds renewed, to echo the heart of Christ in acts of love toward those he has put along our path. This is my prayer for you as we linger over the glories of Christ in the chapters of this book: that your soul would be fed and formed in quiet moments, meditating on his word, and that you would be newly energized in the callings he has given you.

In it all—in receiving his Father's voice in Scripture and in praying alone (and with company)—Jesus sought communion with his Father. His habits were not demonstrations of raw will and sheer discipline. His acts of receiving the word and responding in prayer were not ends in themselves. In these blessed *means*, he pursued the *end* of communing with his Father.

—

*Father, in our hurried and distracting times, grant that we would be more like your Son—that we would not rush off*

*incessantly to the next to-do, but that we would give our first and best energy to communing with you, hearing your voice in your word, and enjoying the gift of having your ear in prayer. Against the grain of our day, strengthen us to come away and retreat to meet with you, and in grace send us back to engage with our needy world, with our hunger first met in Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: Matthew 14:13-23*

