

# QUEST 52

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SAMPLE  
ONLY

UNCORRECTED  
PROOF

A FIFTEEN-MINUTE-A-DAY  
YEARLONG PURSUIT OF **JESUS**

**STUDENT**



**EDITION**

**MARK E. MOORE**

Bestselling author of *CORE 52*



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**MARK E. MOORE**



**WATERBROOK**

QUEST 52 STUDENT EDITION

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To my grandchildren, who will journey beyond me on the quest  
for Christ but who make my own journey toward sunset more  
delightful than the sunrise:

*Jackson Howerton*

*Nya Moore*

*Dominic Moore*

*Duke Howerton*

*Rosalie Moore*

*Lennon Howerton*

*Bear Moore*

*Dean Howerton*

# Contents

Introduction . . . . .	xi
<b>Section 1: The Person of Jesus . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Is God Jesus? . . . . .	3
2. Is Life Random? . . . . .	8
3. Can God Use Me for Big Things? . . . .	13
4. Does God Play Favorites? . . . . .	18
5. Did Jesus Know He Was God When He Was a Boy? . . . . .	23
6. If Jesus Was Perfect, Why Was He Baptized? . . . . .	28
7. Did Jesus Have a Life Purpose? Part 1 . . . . .	33
8. Did Jesus Have a Life Purpose? Part 2 . . . . .	38
9. How Do I Recognize God's Call on My Life? . . . . .	43
10. How Do You Get into Jesus's Inner Circle? . . . . .	48
11. Does My Past Determine My Future? . .	53
12. Who Are Social Influencers for Jesus? Part 1 . . . . .	58
13. Who Are Social Influencers for Jesus? Part 2 . . . . .	63

**Section 2: The Power of Jesus . . . . . 69**

14. Is Christianity Boring? . . . . . 71

15. Can Jesus Turn My Storm into  
a Story? . . . . . 76

16. Can Jesus Provide for My Needs? . . . . 81

17. Is Jesus Really Divine? . . . . . 86

18. Does Jesus Care About My Pain? . . . . 91

19. Can Jesus Make Me Clean? . . . . . 96

20. Is Jesus Impressed with Me? . . . . . 101

21. Can Jesus Restore My  
Relationships? . . . . . 106

22. Can Jesus Give Me Life? . . . . . 111

23. Can Jesus Forgive Me? . . . . . 116

24. What Do We Need from Jesus? . . . . 121

25. Can Jesus Help Me See Clearly? . . . . 126

26. Can Jesus Accept Me? . . . . . 131

**Section 3: The Preaching of Jesus . . . . 137**

27. What Did Jesus Say About  
Social Justice? . . . . . 139

28. What Did Jesus Say About Morality? . 144

29. What Did Jesus Say About  
Religious Duties? . . . . . 149

30. Why Does Jesus Care So Much  
About My Money? . . . . . 154

31. How Does Jesus Feel About  
Prodigals? . . . . . 159

32. How Do I Hear God’s Voice? . . . . . 164

33. How Can I Be Sure I’m Saved? . . . . 169

34. How Did Jesus Lead? . . . . . 174

35. How Can We Share Our Faith Effectively? . . . . .	179
36. Do You Ever Doubt Your Doubts? . . . . .	184
37. What Makes You a Good Person? . . . . .	189
38. Who Do You Say Jesus Is? . . . . .	194
39. What's Worth Worrying About? . . . . .	199

**Section 4: The Passion of Jesus . . . . . 205**

40. Was Jesus Political? Part 1. . . . .	207
41. Was Jesus Political? Part 2. . . . .	212
42. Was Jesus Full of Himself? . . . . .	217
43. What Did Jesus Think About Himself? . . . . .	222
44. How Can I Survive Difficult Days? . . . . .	227
45. How Can We Learn Grit from How Jesus Suffered? . . . . .	232
46. How Do You Stay in Control in a Crisis? . . . . .	237
47. How Do You Endure Pain? . . . . .	242
48. Why Did Jesus Die? . . . . .	247
49. Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead? . . . . .	253
50. What Does Jesus Expect Us to Do Now? . . . . .	260
51. How Can We Make Jesus Famous? . . . . .	265
52. Who Is Jesus? . . . . .	270

Overview . . . . .	275
Notes . . . . .	281



# Introduction

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45–46). Jesus *is* that pearl of great price. He’s worth every effort to obtain him and every sacrifice required along the way. ***This is the quest—to chase after him, the pearl of great price.***

This is *my* quest. Even though I’ve taught about the life of Christ for twenty years at the college level, Jesus still surprises me. I keep seeing him in new and fresh ways. The deeper I dig, the higher I realize he is. The more I see of him, the less I think I really know him. He’s always beyond my grasp, even when he walks beside me.

I’m reminded of an incident in the middle of Jesus’s ministry. His closest disciples had been with him for more than a year. Now they were alone with him in a boat (Mark 4:35–41). A storm threatened to swallow them while Jesus was sound asleep in the stern. The men woke him. They needed all hands on deck, probably to help bail out the boat. They had no clue what Jesus could actually do. He stood up in the boat and rebuked the wind and waves, which obeyed. Instantly.

Just as quickly, the disciples’ terror shifted from outside the boat to inside. They had been afraid of drowning in a storm; now they were afraid of standing in his presence. They huddled in the bow of the boat and asked, “Who is this man?” That’s the question. ***This is the quest—to discover the authentic Jesus.*** Not the cartoon-figure Jesus or a haloed icon in stained glass. The real Jesus—the Jesus who wants to be known.

Perhaps you’re not a religious person; many on the quest are not.

That's okay. Jesus is worth the pursuit regardless of our own past. After all, no other individual has had as much impact on our world as Jesus of Nazareth. He challenged us to love our enemies, thus reordering the rules for social engagement. He prioritized the outcast, renovating social justice. He introduced servant leadership, transforming politics. He demands that we examine our hearts and not just our behavior, revolutionizing ethics. He introduced God to the world as *Father*, thus changing the very nature of prayer. There's no part of our modern lives that hasn't been affected by Jesus of Nazareth—not education, science, religion, society, law, ethics, art, or entertainment. Therefore, he's worth pursuing. He's worth devoting a year to discovering what those first disciples discovered in the boat: he's beyond our expectations and beside us all the way.

Do you want to know him, the real Jesus? Do you want to absorb his influence so you can influence others? If so, *welcome to the quest*.

## The Challenge of the Quest

In the beginning, God made humans in his own image (Genesis 1:27). Sadly, we've been "returning the favor" ever since, trying to make God look like us. It was obvious when ancient priests fashioned idols to reflect their highest ideals of war, sex, riches, and beauty. Their images revealed what they really worshipped. We may think we're more sophisticated, but we do virtually the same thing when we portray Jesus as supporting our cultural values, ethical standards, and social sensibilities.

It's most obvious with our paintings of Jesus. All over the world, images of Christ look like their creators' countrymen. He has darker skin in Africa, lighter hair in Europe, and distinct eyes in Asia. In one sense, that's fine. After all, Jesus came to earth in a recognizable physical form so we could relate to him. We all need to see Jesus in a way we can relate to. The problem comes when we assume that if he *looks* like we do, he must also *think* and *act* like we do.

Our portrayals of Jesus don't end with paintings; they extend to our

preaching. We speak into existence a Jesus that reflects our own values. Virtually every nationality and ethnicity have created a Jesus for their own political and social agendas. We assume that he agrees with our cultures and lifestyles. This quest is too long and too difficult to carry our presuppositions with us, so let's shed them now. Can we admit our biases and set off on this quest with humility, honesty, and submission, determined to follow the path wherever it leads and whatever it costs?

The goal of this book is to help you do just that. Think of it as a field guide to your quest for Christ. All it can do is point you in the right direction. The quest is your own. No one can take this journey for you, although some may take it with you.

## The Strategy of the Quest

The first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—describe the events of Jesus's life. *Quest 52* will highlight fifty-two stories from these four biographies. These will include people Jesus met, miracles he performed, things he taught, and character traits he modeled. After you read about these incidents in the Bible, *Quest 52* will guide you through some thoughts and exercises to help you see Jesus authentically. Think of these fifty-two incidents as mile markers along the way.

Between each mile marker are five days of exercises. It's here that Jesus will meet you face to face.

- **Day 1:** Read the passage(s) from the Bible. *You must not short-circuit this step.* Read the biblical story before moving to the essay. Each essay focuses on one biblical concept from one gospel passage and answers one key question relevant to your life.
- **Day 2:** Look back to the wisdom of the Old Testament to learn more about this mile marker.

- **Day 3:** Look forward to the letters in the New Testament, where fellow pilgrims expressed their own take on this mile marker.
- **Day 4:** Discuss with fellow pilgrims what you're learning on this leg of the journey.
- **Day 5:** Put into practice what you're learning as you follow the path of Jesus.

This quest will likely demand more than we expect, but the pearl of great price is more valuable than we could imagine. So let's pursue Jesus relentlessly; he wants to be found. He may even join us along the journey. Let's begin.

# Section I

## The Person of Jesus

We begin our journey by looking to the person of Jesus. We're trying to discover where he came from and what drove him to his destiny of death. The **beginning** is all about his birth and the striking events surrounding his arrival. The essays about his **purpose** look at his primary motivations from the time he was twelve through his three-year ministry. The next several essays look at his **relationships**, particularly how he treated people: disciples, family, opponents, and outcasts.

**Beginning:** chapters 1–4

**Purpose:** chapters 5–8

**Relationships:** chapters 9–13



# 1

## Is God Jesus?

### Biblical Concept: Incarnation

Read: John 1:1–18

**Who is God? Is** he good? Is he all powerful? Is he one or many? Everyone—whether a pastor, celebrity, atheist, or philosopher—seems to have an opinion. Who has the authority to give an answer?

According to John 1, there's one—Jesus—who can definitively answer the question: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known” (verse 18). If Jesus is whom he claimed to be (God), if he did what the Bible says he did, then nothing could be more important than our quest for him. Whether or not we believe in Jesus, we can't deny that he has had more impact on humanity than any other person in history. Let's start with Jesus to answer the question, Who is God?

### Jesus Is Creator

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). If this sounds familiar, it should. It echoes Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

John connected Jesus, the Word, with the God who created the world with a word. Paul, the apostle, said it like this: “By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. . . . And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16–17). The New Testament claims that the Creator, God, took on human flesh in the person of Jesus.

Is there evidence for this? Well, one could point to the predictions he fulfilled (Luke 24:44; John 5:39), his divine birth (Luke 1:30–35), his sinless life (Hebrews 4:15), or all the miracles he performed. However, the most remarkable (and historically verifiable) evidence is his resurrection from the dead (see chapter 49). It was this one event that transformed the world.

Ultimately, you need to make up your own mind about who Jesus is. However, you would be in good company if you declared him Lord. After all, *Jesus claimed* to have all authority (Matthew 28:18), even to forgive sins (Mark 2:10) and judge the world (John 5:24–30). His *friends affirmed* he was God’s Son (Matthew 14:33), even God himself (John 20:28). Even Jesus’s *enemies admitted* he was the Son of God (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:39–43). Throughout the New Testament, we have very clear declarations that Jesus is God (John 1:18; 12:41; Romans 9:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20). However, he’s a different kind of divine being—one who is near.

## Jesus Is Here

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This idea that God became flesh is called the Incarnation. And, of course, it sparks all kinds of questions like “How can God be in heaven and on earth at the same time?” Without being dismissive (because questions like this are interesting), can we just admit that they are beyond human ability to answer? Oddly, this is kind of comforting. The God I worship is greater than my capacity to comprehend.

How could I ever know the unknowable God if he didn't make himself known? We can't take a shuttle to heaven. So, if God wanted us to know him, doesn't it make sense that he would show up at our level? If you want to play with a child, what do you do? You get on the floor. That's similar to what God did in Jesus. He met us where we are.

Some of the best things we believe about God are because we've seen them in Jesus. Three are unique to Christianity:

- 1. God is near.** Christianity is the only global religion where God is both personal and knowable. We're invited into a relationship with him. To this point, John 1:12 says, "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." This was a brand-new idea in the Bible, that through Jesus we can pray to God as Father, even calling him Abba (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).
- 2. God is love.** I think most people have no problem believing that God can love people who are considered good. But can you imagine a religion where God loved not only those who loved him but also the people who hated him or wanted nothing to do with him? This is exactly what Jesus does! Check out what he said: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). And he modeled that from the cross, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Only through Jesus do we know that "God show[ed] his love for us . . . while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8).
- 3. God suffers.** Now, there's a crazy idea! How could God suffer? Look through the Old Testament, and you'll find only two descriptions of God suffering (Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10). This is an offensive idea in many religions. Yet in Jesus we see a God who suffers for those he loves even while they're unlovely. Now, *that* is a God worth worshipping. This is a God we never could have imagined without the incarnation of Jesus.

## Jesus Is Clear

This brings us full circle to John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” Without Jesus, no one would have painted God with these particular brushstrokes. Imagine how different our world would be without the example set by Jesus. He showed compassion to sinners, generosity to strangers, love to enemies, and honor to women and children. All these ideas are tied to the Incarnation.

This image of God as near, loving, and suffering isn’t just a philosophical idea. It shows us how to be the best siblings, friends, and teammates. Jesus shows us the most important attributes of God. That’s why, rather than asking, “Is Jesus God?” we should ask, “Is God Jesus?”

### Key Points

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- The entire New Testament claims that Jesus is God.
- The Incarnation is necessary if we’re going to know God.
- The Incarnation isn’t just a philosophical idea; it shows us how to be better people.

## This Week

- ☐ **Day 1 (Eyes):** After reading the essay, answer this question:  
What is the most important thing you know about God because of Jesus?
- ☐ **Day 2 (Ears):** Where do you see Jesus in Psalm 2 and Psalm 110?
- ☐ **Day 3 (Heart):** Think about Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, and Hebrews 1:8. Using these three verses, write a short prayer, telling God what you believe about Jesus.
- ☐ **Day 4 (Voice):** Discussion:
  - What would it take to convince you that your brother or cousin is God's Son?
  - Other than Jesus, what resources do we have to know God? How do we learn who God is?
  - What might you believe about God if you knew nothing about Jesus?
  - What do you believe about God because you have seen Jesus?
- ☐ **Day 5 (Hands):** Put into practice one aspect of the Incarnation: be present. Schedule an evening with your family when you'll shut off all screens (phones, computers, TVs, etc.).



# 2

## Is Life Random?

### Biblical Concept: Genealogy

Read: Matthew 1:1–17

**Have you ever been** bored reading the Bible? You can admit it; you won't get struck by lightning. The genealogies are the worst. So, why did God begin the New Testament with a boring description of Jesus's family tree?

Because the genealogy puts Jesus in real history. The gospel doesn't begin "Once upon a time." It's about real people with real problems, just like you and me.

Genealogies were a big deal for Jews. The book of Genesis includes genealogies telling the family stories of Adam, Noah, and Abraham. Through these genealogies, we can trace the entire story of salvation. This is an important point: when God saves the world, he does it through imperfect people. Adam and Eve introduced sin. Noah got drunk. Abraham denied being married to his wife. If God did his best work through these people, then perhaps we, too, can play a role in God's work in our world.

## Genealogy in Matthew

Matthew did something both subtle and brilliant. (Pardon me while I geek out.) He broke down the genealogy of Jesus into three sections, each with fourteen names (Matthew 1:17). Have you ever stopped to count them? I did (which tells you something about my social life). The first and third sections do, in fact, have fourteen names. But the middle section has only thirteen names. Why?<sup>1</sup>

I thought that might have been all Matthew had to work with and he was just rounding up. Nope. Back in the Old Testament, that pesky middle section has *seventeen names* (1 Chronicles 3). What? Why would Matthew leave out four generations, then say there were fourteen? Did he miscount? Maybe, but remember, he was a tax collector, and they were really good when it came to numbers.

The solution is in *how* Matthew counted. He gave one person a double portion (counting that person twice, which is very Jewish). Who? David. *King* David. He's the symbolic firstborn in Jesus's genealogy. In fact, Matthew's whole book describes Jesus as the new King David. How could this be? King David committed adultery, murdered a man, and ultimately tried to cover his sin. Still, somehow he's found in Jesus's genealogy.

## Inclusion of Women

Matthew's use of numbers is quite Jewish. His inclusion of women was *not*! Women were seen as second class in first-century Jewish culture. For a woman to be included in a genealogy, she would have had to be extraordinarily noble. But the women in this genealogy weren't noble. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law in order to have a child as an heir (Genesis 38:6–30). That's seriously messed up! Rahab was a pagan prostitute who hid the spies when Joshua led the invasion against Jericho (Joshua 2). Not exactly the poster child of morality. Ruth was a Moabite, the traditional enemy of Israel (Ruth 1:4). Bathsheba had an affair with King David (2 Samuel 11:3–4). Even Jesus's own mom

was accused of having sex before she was married. Mary was an unmarried teenage mother living in a small town. She would have been bullied by peers. All these women knew the sting of gossip, yet they were the very ones chosen by God, placed in Matthew's genealogy, and used to grow the faith of future generations!

## Lessons from the Genealogy

**God uses people to accomplish his purposes.** He doesn't usually intervene with miracles; he invests in relationships. He walks with each of us to develop us into difference makers. God uses our gifts and successes, but he can turn even our failures into faith. He never wastes pain. Regardless of your past, God has a plan for your life.

**The people God uses are fallible.** David was a moral mess; the women in this genealogy were scandalous. Tamar and Bathsheba survived the trauma of sexual sin. Rahab was probably a victim of poverty or culturally sanctioned human trafficking. As is so often the case, their sin was not just what they did but what was done to them. Ruth was a victim of the tragic death of her husband, compounded by racism. Yet God used them all, redeeming their pain to include them in his plan. He'll do the same with you. You can play a part in sacred history! Your name won't be included in Scripture, but there's a book of life being written in heaven right now. You have a verse to contribute, and it has eternity written all over it. You have a role to play, regardless of the pain you've experienced.

**Jesus is God's Son.** Humanly, Jesus was Mary's son. Legally, he was Joseph's son by adoption. Fundamentally, he was God's Son. "Like Father, like Son" has never been truer than in the case of Jesus. Though he stepped into human history through a very real genealogy, he came from the Father's side, from heaven to earth. The story of Jesus is both eternal and historical. He's the bridge that spans the divide between our physical re-

alities and the eternity we sense in our souls. Through him, we rise beyond our own genealogies to a forever future with God.

**Life isn't random.** It may feel as if our relationships are disconnected and our choices make no difference. As if all is chance. But this “boring” genealogy betrays the truth that God has a plan. He's going to restore the beauty of Eden. And wonder of all wonders, you can be part of that plan.

## Key Points

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- Genealogies tell the story of God's salvation.
- Matthew's genealogy shows God's meticulous plan of salvation.
- The inclusion of these women reminds us that all are invited to play a role in God's plan to save the world.

## This Week

- ☐ **Day 1 (Eyes):** After reading the essay, write a simple sentence describing what you wish God would write about your contribution to his story of salvation.
- ☐ **Day 2 (Ears):** Read the story of Rahab in Joshua 2 and 6. What are the similarities between her life and yours? Her faith and yours?
- ☐ **Day 3 (Heart):** What was it about Rahab that made her such a model of faith according to Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25? Now read Galatians 4:4. When do you think God decided that Mary would be Jesus's mother?
- ☐ **Day 4 (Voice):** Discussion:
  - Share a bit of your family history. Where did your family come from? Was there anyone famous or infamous in your extended family?
  - What strengths and weaknesses did you inherit from your father and mother?
  - Share the sentence you wrote in the day 1 exercise.
  - What barriers might keep you from living up to that sentence? What resources or skills will you need to acquire or develop?
- ☐ **Day 5 (Hands):** This week, do one thing to acquire a resource or develop a skill you listed in the day 4 discussion.



# 3

## Can God Use Me for Big Things?

**Biblical Concept: Annunciation**

Read: Luke 1:26–45

**We want our lives** to matter. This desire for significance comes from the Creator himself. He wove it into our spiritual DNA. It drives the majority of decisions we make: what teams we root for, what colleges we choose, and what relationships we build.

The difficulty, however, is that we want to be better than we actually are. This is certainly true for me. I want to make a difference, but I doubt my ability to do much that matters. That's why the story of Mary is so inspiring. She shows us the way to do big things for God.

### **God's Call, Not Our Character**

Mary is honored throughout the world. Yet there's a huge gap between her biography and her legacy. She lived in Nazareth, a small town the locals laughed at (John 1:46). She was a peasant girl; her fiancé was a day laborer. Yet God chose her to give birth to his Son.

No wonder she was confused when the angel Gabriel greeted her: "O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). She couldn't figure out

why such an important messenger had been sent to her. She wasn't just confused; she was concerned. Gabriel had to put her at ease to even have the conversation: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (verse 30).

There's an important lesson here: *the impact of your life is determined not by your ability but by your availability*. God has a plan for you that's based on his goodness, not your greatness. Mary was willing to offer her life to God. That willingness is the only thing we need to be used by God for big things.

### **God's Power; Our Willingness**

Gabriel made a wonderful and frightening announcement. Mary was going to have a child. That was great news. Not just any child—an extraordinary child. He would be Mary's son by birth but God's Son by vocation. That means he would sit on David's throne as the greatest king of Hebrew history. His kingdom would extend into eternity, having no boundaries in space and time.

Mary asked, "How will this be?" (verse 34). After all, virgins don't give birth. Nonetheless, the God who spoke life into existence could certainly populate a single womb with a word. As the angel Gabriel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (verse 35). Just so we're clear, this wasn't sexual. No, it was the power of God coming upon Mary, creating life in her womb as he had done with his word in Genesis 1. This was creation, not cohabitation.

What made Gabriel's promise frightening is that Mary was engaged. In Jewish culture, engagement was a legally binding contract. If this teenage bride-to-be ended up pregnant, the contract would be broken. In fact, she could be killed. According to the Mosaic law, she could be stoned for adultery if she were unfaithful to her fiancé (Leviticus 20:10). Her reputa-

tion would be that of a tramp. Yet without hesitation, she replied, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Read that carefully. She was *wishing* that God’s will would prevail regardless of the cost.

That’s the secret of God using any of us for big things. It’s not about our ability but about our willingness to submit to God’s will. Would you risk your relationships to do something big for God? It may take that. Would you sacrifice your comfort to leave a legacy? It will demand that. Would you risk your reputation to make a difference for God? There’s no other path into God’s purpose than your submission: “Let it be to me.”

## God’s Provision

All this was overwhelming for Mary. In the days ahead, she would wrestle with doubt and difficulties. She would face ridicule and rejection from family and friends. That’s why God gave Mary two things he will *always* give you when you accept the challenge of his call: a reason to believe God and a relationship to sustain you.

Elizabeth was a relative of Mary. She was old and had never been able to have kids. Yet by the miraculous hand of God, she was pregnant with John the Baptist. At the beginning of Elizabeth’s third trimester, Mary arrived at her door. She was barely pregnant. Yet the moment they met, the fetus in Elizabeth recognized Jesus in Mary’s womb and leaped for joy (verse 41). Notice how specific Elizabeth was: “Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (verse 43). That’s a lot of importance put on an embryo. Truly Elizabeth spoke truth: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (verse 45).

Mary would stay with Elizabeth for the next three months, likely until John was born. She witnessed God’s faithfulness. Mary was encouraged by Elizabeth’s mentoring. Those three months gave Mary the strength she needed to return home, to face her fiancé, and to endure a difficult pregnancy. Let this be a lesson to us. If God calls you to a task,

he will always give you enough evidence to believe and the relationships you need.

You can do anything he calls you to if you will only say, “Let it be to me.”

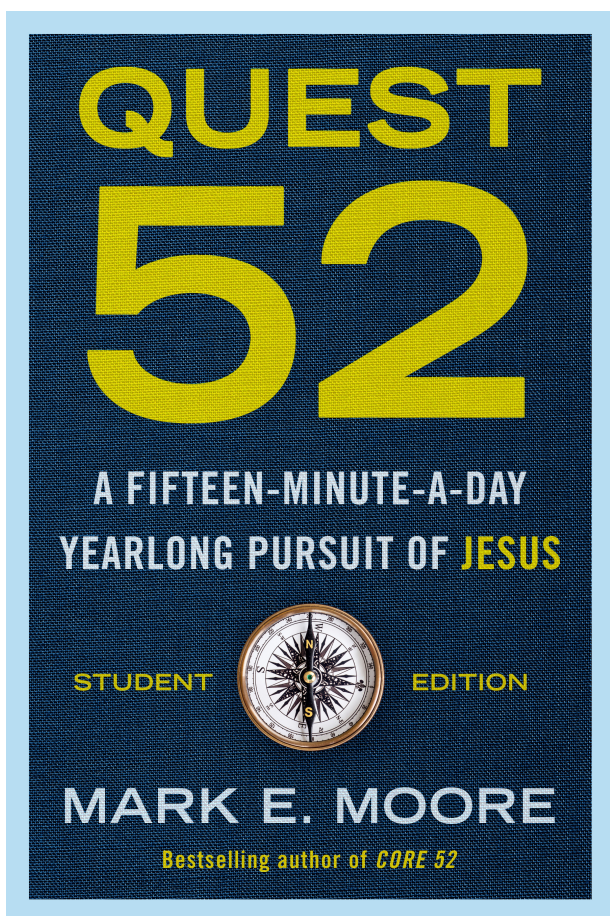
## Key Points

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- The impact of your life is determined not by your ability or your history but by God’s call.
- To do great things for God, we must give up our own wills and be willing to say, “Let it be to me.”
- When God calls you to a task, he will provide both a reason to believe and a relationship to sustain you.

## This Week

- ☐ **Day 1 (Eyes):** As you read the essay, what similarities did you see between your situation and Mary's?
- ☐ **Day 2 (Ears):** Read Isaiah 9:1–7. What descriptions of Jesus are found in this prophecy?
- ☐ **Day 3 (Heart):** Think about Colossians 1:15–17, Hebrews 1:3, and Revelation 1:8. What do these verses say about Jesus *before* he came to earth?
- ☐ **Day 4 (Voice):** Discussion:
  - Who are the heroes in your life that led you to a place where you could believe? These could be family members, mentors, or peers.
  - If you were Mary, what would be your greatest concerns about accepting God's call? What are your greatest concerns about accepting God's will in your own life?
  - What is God calling you to do with your life to bring him glory?
  - What are the obstacles keeping you from your next step in fulfilling God's plan for your life?
- ☐ **Day 5 (Hands):** Write a short description (three sentences) of what you think God wants to do with your life over the next three to five years. Now list three action steps you need to take this year to move toward that goal.



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