

# **Jesus: A Basic Who**

On-Line Bible Study


St. Luke's United Methodist Church


Houston, Texas

by

Delia Halverson

How to use this study:

This study is made up of seven lessons, each of which will take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour to complete, depending on how in-depth you wish to make it. At points in the study you will find a pencil icon  which indicates a place to record your own thoughts on the question. You may also use a “sticky note” paper at any point to write any additional thoughts that come to you as you study.

EDITOR NOTE: This symbol  is in “Wingdings” font. I’m not sure it will come through as a pencil on your computer. If not, substitute an icon that indicates opportunity to write their thoughts.

At the end of the study you will find a list of suggested resources. You can complete the study without additional resources, but any of these will add insight into the text. I would also suggest that you have on hand several translations for comparative study. One translation may give you more clarity than others. Be sure that you have at least one recent translation. I’d particularly suggest the New Revised Standard Version and the Contemporary English Version.

## **Lesson One**

### **Born into Ordinary Life**

**Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-23; Luke 1, 2**

Welcome to *Jesus: A Basic Who*, an on-line Bible study centered on the human nature of Christ. Often we get hung up on the divinity of Christ, which is important. But it is also important for us to realize that Christ was fully human.

When I was in my early 40's our children's youth minister often had lunch with us on Sunday rather than travel across Atlanta, only to have to return for the evening. These were times of conversation and real questioning. On one occasion I spoke of my questions about the divinity of Christ. I said, "If Christ was divine, and you ask me to follow Christ's example, then forget it. I'm not divine. If Christ was human, then why do we lift him above the prophets?" The youth minister shared some thoughts a seminary professor had shared with him. He said, "Have you ever thought that God came to earth, as Christ, not only to show us what God is like, but also to show us that God understands just what it is like to be a human?"


God walking in my shoes? This was a new concept. These insights began to change my thoughts about Jesus in everything I read. This gave me greater understanding of the Trinity. Now I saw the Trinity as our meeting God in three ways, as a creator/parent, as a human, and as a spirit within us. We humans are each different with different personalities, and God has given us three ways to come closer. Some people will find one way better than another, but we all can benefit from all three avenues of relationship.


This study will deal with the human aspect of the Trinity. In this study we do not deny the divinity, but experience divinity through humanity. If we recognize the risen Christ then we see the divine, but we humans need the anchor of the humanity, and God knew that and entered into our humanity. Through this we can recognize the "God with skin on" who came to help us grow in our relationship with God and our relationship with other people.

### **Birth Circumstances**

This is the story of an extraordinary man. We say that, but often we emphasize the "extra" and forget the "ordinary". In this study we will emphasize the "ordinary," an ordinary man who helped his followers grow spiritually so that they (and those who followed them) were able to turn around the Roman Empire, the most powerful political

force of the day. But the man who began it all did not begin by exposing a super natural power, but he began in a very human, common way.


 Read Luke 2:1-7 and spend some time thinking about the common circumstances of Jesus' birth. Then write down as many common adjectives as you can think of that might describe the trip to Bethlehem, the search for lodging, and the location of the birth. How would these adjectives differ from those of the birth of a "royal king" of that day?


 Read Luke 1:26-38 and Matthew 1:18-25. With these passages in mind, write down thoughts that Mary and Joseph might have had about the birth and their common circumstance in life. How might they have felt about the responsibility to raise this child? What would they have thought about the child's acceptance in their community and how they would deal with that?

Read Luke 2:8-20 and the following information about shepherds:

- Shepherding was considered one of the lowest vocations of that culture.
- Generally shepherds were unschooled.
- Shepherds were unkempt in their dress and therefore avoided by the general public.
- Shepherds could not keep the religious laws for cleanliness because of their work, and so they were considered unclean and spiritually unfit.


Read Matthew 2:1-12 and reflect on the social position of these visitors.

 Considering the fact that the shepherds were the first to receive the good news about the birth of the Messiah and the magi were among the first visitors, what does this say about the human social circumstances into which Jesus was born and the inclusiveness of his message?


 Read Matthew 2:13-18. Compare the refugee status of Jesus with the refugee status of those who flee their countries today because of threats and mistreatment. How would all of these circumstances make a difference in Jesus' understanding of people?


## Childhood

We know very little about the childhood of Jesus. We do know what it was like to be a child in the Hebrew community of that day. The early training for children was carried on by the mothers. The fathers took over as vocational training for boys was needed. Girls were trained in domestic arts by their mothers. Girls received no religious training, but the boys attended schooling at the synagogues. Like children today, the children did enjoy games that taught them some of the life-skills. Children were also responsible for certain everyday tasks in the home. The age of thirteen was usually considered the passage from childhood to adulthood. This happened with a religious ceremony for the boy, and he was then treated as an adult.

 Read Luke 2:21-40. This story was likely told to Jesus as he grew older. Write down some thoughts that might have come to him when he thought about what the man and woman in the Temple had said about him. How might these thoughts make a difference in his later decisions about his life?


## Maturing into adulthood


 Read Luke 1:5-25; 39-80. Then reread Luke 1:35-37. What family relationship would Jesus have had with John the Baptist?


 Read Luke 2:41-52. It is likely that Jesus' family journeyed to Jerusalem regularly for the Passover, and they may have stayed with Elizabeth and Zachariah, a high priest, and their son John (the Baptist) who was only a few months older than Jesus. What sort of relationship might the boys have developed during their teen and young adult years?


Each of us grows in our faith through experiences, relationships, and questioning. The questioning, or inquiring faith style is one that is vital, but often discouraged. In this style of faith we look at beliefs that have been handed to us and inquire into their authenticity for each of us. Without inquiring, these beliefs are only someone else's convictions that we accept without authenticating them. Inquiring is the key to spiritual

growth, and Jesus gave his followers ample opportunity to inquire into the beliefs and religious regulations of the day. It would be interesting to be a “mouse in the corner” during the maturing years of Jesus and John.

 Both boys would have been studying the scriptures. Remember that John’s father was also a high priest. Write down some questions and discussions that these young boys may have had together on the occasion of these visits. Read the following scripture for some ideas: Matthew 5:27-48; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:37-42; Luke 13:10-17.

 What might have caused John to leave what was expected of him (to follow in the lineage of priesthood) and go into the wilderness?

 Jesus did not leave his father’s profession until later (Matthew 3:13-17). What are some of the human struggles that Jesus might have felt as he made choices between carpentry and itinerate ministry?

 What struggles are you going through (have you gone through) that parallel some of Jesus’ struggles? How does it help to know that “God with skin on” (Jesus) has gone through similar struggles?

## Lesson Two

### Human Emotions: Temptation & Fear


**Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13; John 2:13-22**


**and additional passages**

If Jesus was fully human, then we must recognize that he had human emotions, much the same as ours. Too often we think of our human emotions as sinful. We've been taught to hide our emotions, or at least to show them in moderation.

The Gospels were each written for a specific purpose. That purpose was not as a biography in the manner of our biographies today. The Gospels were written to put across a message. When we read them, expecting to become acquainted with the person who was Jesus, we may miss the emotions that he must certainly have had. However, there are clues we might use to help us understand Jesus' emotions, and there are certainly times when we can assume he had specific emotions.

No matter how divine we see Jesus, we must deal with the scriptures that tell of his temptations in the wilderness. If we only look at these scriptures from the divine aspect of Jesus, then they hold little meaning for our own temptations. When we look at them, however, from the human aspect we will appreciate Jesus even more. He was able to deal with the temptations as a human, using divine help – the divine help that God offers to all humans.


 When have you had to deal with a strong temptation to do something you knew you shouldn't? Write adjectives describing your frustration.

 Read about Jesus' forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22) and write thoughts that you have about this time of temptation.


Perhaps rather than a "time of testing" this was a time when Jesus was struggling with just how he should carry out God's plan for his life, just as we all struggle with our vocation decisions. 1) Jesus was hungry from fasting, and there were many hungry


people in the world. He could use his divine powers and provide food to feed the world. 2) He could throw himself down from the top of the Temple, and the angels would rescue him. Surely this would get the attention of the masses! 3) Or he could take the world by force, conquering anyone who disagreed with him with the same methods as the military rulers of the day.

He rejected all of these schemes and turned his direction to developing a small group of disciples whom he could teach, and through them the world could be transformed, one person at a time.


 Reflect on these thoughts as you reread about the time of temptation.

References to Jesus' fear are scarce in the Bible, but if he had the full gamut of human emotions, he must have felt fear. The important thing to remember is that Jesus dealt with the fear and relied on God to support him. (Note: Where the word "fear" is used in the Bible in connection with God, it most often means "awe" of God.)

 What is your earliest recollection of a really fearful moment?

 What times of fear might Jesus have had growing up? How would this have shaped his ability to deal with fear?

The emotion of fear can actually be beneficial to us. It can alert us to situations that may be harmful. It helps us prepare for a situation that may arise so that we can respond without thought. However, when we dwell on fear instead of facing it and moving forward, then it turns inward and consumes us. Once again, the emotion is neither good nor bad, but the way we use it makes the difference.

 As you read the passages below, reflect on what fear Jesus may have had in those situations and how he dealt with it.

Matthew 8:28-34

Matthew 14:3-12


Mark 3:20-30

Luke 4:16-30

John 10:22-42

Any fear that Jesus might have initially felt when he was about to face his death was changed to courage through his trust in God. Jesus had learned to live with fear and release that fear to God. Read Luke 9:51 to recognize that Jesus made the decision to go to Jerusalem, although he knew what was ahead of him. Then read Matthew 26:36-46.

 How did Jesus deal with the dreaded future that he faced?

 What fearful things are looming in your future, and how can you deal with them?


## Lesson Three


### Human Emotions: Rejection & Anger

**Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22**

**and additional passages**

The emotions that most often cause us trouble are those that happen when we feel we are rejected or when we feel anger for some reason or another. Jesus saw rejection everywhere he went. It's likely that even the people of Nazareth rejected him as he was growing up. His birth had hidden circumstances. His mother became pregnant before her formal marriage to Joseph. He was born while his parents were away, and they disappeared in Egypt for a period of time. These circumstances would have caused whispers in any community, and consequently the child in question would have felt the rejection.

 What are some of the questions he might have asked his parents as he faced these childhood rejections? Reflect on how Mary and Joseph might have answered in order to help him deal with the rejections.

 Read of other rejections in his life in the following scriptures. How did he deal with these rejections?


Mark 6:1-6

John 7:45-52


John 10:22-42


Luke 22:1-34; 54-71


Read Matthew 27:46. The gospel writer reports a time when Jesus must have felt very rejected while he was on the cross. There has been much debate over the years about the exact meaning of this statement. The words are the same as those in Psalm 22:1, and some biblical scholars feel that Jesus was repeating the psalm, knowing that it ends in triumph. Others feel that Jesus actually experienced a rejection of God. No one can know exactly what was going on in the human side of Jesus at the time, but we can be sure that through this experience God understands the ultimate of any emotions of rejection that we can ever feel.


 What are some feelings of rejection that you have experienced? How does it help for you to realize that God truly understands?


Anger is a natural emotion that grows out of rejection. Anger can flare up without any warning. Consequently we must be prepared to deal with it spontaneously. Recall the last time you became angry. Consider these questions about that event:

 What caused you to become angry?

 Was it something that you could have avoided?

 Would you have had to compromise your convictions to avoid the anger?


 How did you handle it?

 How might you have handled it differently?

Consider anger as an emotion, neither good nor bad. It is not the anger that gives us problems, but rather the way that we channel that anger. Anger can be turned inward and cause us physical harm, or anger can move us to action. It may be positive action or negative action, that is our choice.

Read Mark 3:1-6. Jesus healed the man with a crippled hand. The religious leaders of the day questioned him about his actions on the Sabbath. The other gospels do not mention anger in this story (Matthew 12:9-14 and Luke 6:6-11), but Mark specifically says it angered Jesus. However, Jesus also had compassion for those who upset him. He made his statement and then moved on, not holding a grudge but offering compassion.

Jesus rose to the occasion when he was questioned by the religious rulers. Read the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Matthew. You will find here the teachings that came about because of Jesus' anger for those questioning him. (This is also found in Mark 12:38-40 and Luke 11:37-52; 20:45-47) Jesus turned his anger into teaching opportunities. And again, Jesus had compassion, lamenting over Jerusalem and the people's lack of caring for each other.

 How can we turn our anger into opportunities for positive actions?

The most documented case of Jesus' anger is found in the scriptures where he drove the money changers out of the Temple. (Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22) To best understand the background for this anger, we must realize that the act was not against the religious establishment, but against those who exploited the worshipers, and did it in the name of religion. The court where the sales were happening was the only place that the Gentiles might come to worship. The money changers and sales of animals were keeping others from worshiping God in the Temple.

✍ Although we seldom physically prevent persons from worshiping, what happens in our churches that sometimes causes us to be unable to truly worship? What sort of disputes and grudges hold us back from a real experience of worship?

✍ How can we overcome anger in our relationships within the church and turn it into understanding and forgiveness?


## Lesson Four

### Human Emotions: Love & Compassion

#### Matthew 15:21-28 (and additional passages)

In parables, in every case of healing, and in every acceptance of people whom society rejected, we see the love and compassion of Jesus. Even when the world rejected him, Jesus turned the hatred into love and compassion.

In the Gospels alone, the word “love” is used 51 times, and most of the time it is spoken by Jesus. In English we have one word for love, but in Greek (the language of the New Testament) there are four.

 Write a brief statement about an experience you have had with each of the four types of love from the Greek language and the “libido” love from the Latin language:


*Eros* – A love that involves physical attraction between two people. (This is the stem word for “erotic”.)

*Philos* – A friendship or community type love. (The city of Philadelphia, City of Brotherly Love, comes from this word.)

*Charis* (kah-ris) – A concerned love, giving to those in need. (The word “charity” comes from this word.) This is also sometimes translated “grace” – the undeserving love that God gives us. Grace is a “love-you-anyway” type love.

*Agape* – An all-giving love, as we would respond to God’s undeserving love that we receive. This is a surrendering love.

*Libido* – This Latin term for love is a self-fulfillment love of an object or person. The person feels incomplete without the person or object.


 Read the following passages where Jesus taught of love and reflect on occasions in his childhood when he might have learned of the love that he taught about in these passages.

Luke 6:27-36

Luke 15:3-7

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus not only verbally taught about love, but his very life taught of love. Love is much more tangible when we see it in action.

 Read the following passages and write words from the verses that describe Jesus' love.

Matthew 19:13-15

Matthew 23:37-39

Mark 8:1-10


Luke 5:27-32


Luke 7:11-17

Luke 7:36-50

John 8:1-11

Read Matthew 15:21-28, the story of Jesus' conversation with a Canaanite woman. A little background will add light to the encounter of Jesus in this passage. He and his disciples had gone outside Palestine, seeking privacy and seclusion. This is the only reference to Jesus leaving the country. The Canaanite woman was not only a Gentile, but she was of the ancestral enemies of the Jews. After leaving their bondage in Egypt, the Jews had invaded the land of the Canaanites and taken over the country. The Canaanites who were not killed were driven out, and there was no association between the Jews and the Canaanites. Yet this woman was firm enough in her faith and conviction to question Jesus' statement.


 Reread Matthew 15:21-28 and record the difference in the Disciples' attitude toward healing the woman's daughter of demons and the way that Jesus moved to compassion. The woman was determined, and we can see Jesus' appreciation for her faith as his compassion moves him to action.

 Read the following records of healings and note the compassion expressed by Jesus.

Luke 17:11-19

Mark 1:40-45 (some translations use “pity” and some use “anger”)


Matthew 9:18-26

 Read the following parables that Jesus told and reflect on the attitude of compassion that you see in them.

Luke 15:1-10

Luke 15:11-32

Luke 10:29-37

 Read the following stories and record your thoughts about how Jesus acted with compassion. Recognize that in Jesus’ day women were given no worth. In fact, women were seldom spoken to by any other men than those in her immediate family, and even those men seldom discussed religion with the women.

Matthew 18:21-22


Matthew 23:37-39

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 10:38-42

Luke 18:15-17

John 8:1-11

 Where in your life do you find it important to know that Jesus had human emotions just as you do?


## **Lesson Five**

### **Relationships**


#### **Matthew 9:9-13**

**(and additional scriptures)**

In Jesus' Hebrew community of faith, when someone invited you into the home to eat a meal you were being invited into a personal relationship. This was a more intimate relationship than our social get-together meals. Consequently, it was not acceptable for you to eat with "sinners" or those shunned by the religious community. This included tax collectors and others who catered to the Roman government. Read Matthew 9:9-13. Jesus not only accepted an invitation to eat with Matthew, but he invited the tax collector to be a part of his inner circle of friends.

 In Luke 19:1-10 read about another time that Jesus ate with someone not accepted by the community. In fact, he invited himself to the meal! Write thoughts about Jesus that might have entered Zacchaeus' mind as he took Jesus home for the meal.

Our first introductions to relationships as infants begin with our caregivers, usually our parents. The simple acts of rocking and feeding an infant lay the foundations for healthy relationships with other people and with God. Mary and Joseph must have laid a firm foundation as parents. In addition to a trusting relationship with parents, Jesus certainly experienced community relationships.

 Read the following passages and reflect on community experiences that might have helped to form Jesus' attitude about these relationships.


Matthew 18:21-22

Luke 10: 29-37


Luke 18:9-14

Sometimes we feel that the New Testament does not give equal treatment to women. However, when we recognize the status of women in that society, we recognize

that Jesus actually stepped far beyond the comfort zone in dealing with women. In his society it was considered insulting to mention a woman as the main character in story, yet Jesus did not hesitate to do this. Read Matthew 13:33 and 16:5-12 to see how Jesus used yeast (strictly a woman's area) as an example. Read Luke 15: 8-10 as an example of when Jesus used a woman as the main character in the story.

 A proper Jewish man never spoke to a woman on the street, especially a woman he did not know. Read John 4:3-42. This was not only a Samaritan and a woman whom Jesus did not know, but it was a woman who went to the well at the noon hour, when all of the other women would have been at home. Obviously she was avoiding the rejection of other women because of her sinfulness. Write some thoughts that the disciples might have had when they returned and found Jesus talking to this woman.

Another evidence of Jesus' attitude toward women is found in Luke 10:38-42. This is the occasion of Jesus' visit to Mary and Martha. Jesus did not reject the hospitality that Martha offered; in fact it is apparent that he had spend time in this home. But he pointed out to Martha that Mary was taking advantage of the opportunity for theological conversation, which was rarely available to women. Most men would have reprimanded Mary, as Martha asked, and told her to go to her place in the kitchen. Read this scripture again, considering this interpretation of Jesus' statement.

 What opportunities for spiritual growth are you ignoring because of the busyness of life?


## Lesson Six


### Teacher

#### Matthew 5:1-12

#### (and additional scriptures)

Jesus was certainly a teacher. In fact, he was often referred to as a teacher, or *Rabboni*, which is Aramaic for teacher. (John 20:16) The sermons that are most effective are teaching sermons. Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount" was certainly a teaching sermon. His "beatitudes" in that sermon are a familiar method of teaching, where one word is used over and over, with additional information added to the word each time. This repetition is helpful in the world of oral tradition, where people learn by rote.

 Read Matthew 5:1-12 and paraphrase the beatitudes. You might use the words special, holy, happy, or joyful for the word "blessed".

 Jesus was a teacher in many other ways. Read the following passages and note the incidents when Jesus acted as a teacher in the nine ways listed below.

Matthew 12:9-14

Matthew 15:21-28

Matthew 25:1-13

Matthew 28:16-20

Mark 1:21-29

Mark 2:23-28

Mark 12:13-17

Luke 6:12-16

Luke 6:46-49

1. Jesus knew his students and listened to them.

2. Jesus used what was at hand to teach.
3. Jesus storytelling as a teaching method.
4. Jesus used his own experiences in teaching.
5. Jesus asked the right questions, often answering a question with another question in order to stimulate the student's inquiring mind.
6. Jesus used scriptures in teaching.
7. Jesus taught with authority.
8. Jesus encouraged commitment.
9. Jesus was in tune with God.

## **Lesson Seven**

### **Physical Characteristics**

#### **Mark 6:3**


#### **(and additional scriptures)**

When the Gospels were written, there was little need to explain the physical characteristics of Jesus. Anyone would have known his physical stamina by the simple statement (Mark 6:3) that he was a carpenter. In that day the carpenter's job was multi-faceted. Our vision of a carpenter is one who takes prepared boards and fashions them into cabinets or trim for houses. When we think of the carpenters who build the framework for our houses, we still don't begin to grasp the physical stamina required for carpentry work in that era. The pictures of the child Jesus playing with the shavings in his father's carpentry shop don't help our understanding either. And the many European paintings of a pale faced, "gentle" Jesus only take away from the physical characteristics that must have made up this man we so admire.


To understand this, we must first realize that the Greek word for carpenter not only means someone who works with wood, but it could also mean someone who works with stone or brick. There was no Home Depot in that day, and not even a chain saw. When a carpenter prepared to build a house, or even a bench, he had to actually go out into the country and fell the trees. This process developed strong muscles, as he chopped and sawed, lifting and moving the trees about. Then he had to prepare the wood, taking off the limbs and the bark, and cutting it into the proper lengths. The next problem would be transportation to the work place, either on the building site or to a shop. The carpenters very likely worked together as a team, but it was far different from throwing some sawn boards into the back of a pick-up or having a load of lumber delivered and placed on site.

We also know that Jesus must have been in good physical condition to have endured forty days in the wilderness. The location referred to here (Luke 4:1-13) is an area thirty-five by fifteen miles between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, made up of crumbling limestone with ridges that twist and turn in all directions. The hills are dust

heaps and rocks are bare and jagged. The limestone is blistered and peeling, and the footfall on the ground gives a hollow sound. The very heat of the ground shimmers and glows like a furnace. This is a land avoided, and Jesus went there to find solitude. But being alone in this type land requires a strong physical stature.


 Imagine spending forty days in this sort of environment. Write some thoughts about the physical stamina this might require.

The simple fact that Jesus and his disciples were not wealthy enough to afford riding animals also speaks of a physically fit man. Their mode of transportation was their own feet, and according to the Gospels, they traveled many a mile.

 Recall a time in your life when you found yourself becoming sedentary and how it felt when you began to exercise again.

The final hours of Jesus' life bring even more light to his physical characteristics. When we read of Jesus' arrest (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:1-11) we often take his lack of resistance as an indication of a lack of physical stamina. But the scourging that followed proved different.

Records show that the Romans used a whip consisting of small pieces of bone and metal attached to a number of leather strands. The number of blows given to Jesus is not recorded; however, the number of blows in Jewish law was 39 (one less than the 40 called for in the Torah, to prevent a counting error). During the scourging, the skin was ripped from the back, exposing a bloody mass of tissue and bone. This caused extreme blood loss, often bringing about death, or at least unconsciousness. In addition to the flogging, Jesus faced severe beating and torment by the Roman soldiers, including the plucking of his beard and the piercing of his scalp with a crown of thorns. This scourging was expected and the privilege of the soldiers, who had no interest in the prisoners at all. They were only living out their assignment in a foreign country, and such treatment served as entertainment for them.

 Read the following passages about his trial and flogging and write down the physical demands that were placed on Jesus.

Matthew 26:57-75; 27:1-31

Mark 14:53-72; 15:1-20


Luke 22:63-71; 23:1-25

John 18:12-40; 19:1-16

The prisoners were such a bleeding mass by the time the flogging was over that often they could not even carry their cross-bar to the site of the crucifixion. Jesus, however stood up well enough to carry it part of the long round-about way that the soldiers led him. It is estimated that the route was at least as long as two football fields. The beam probably weighed 100 to 110 pounds. Made of rough wood, it would have gouged his lacerated skin and the muscles of his shoulders.

In these executions, the prisoner was forced to lie on the cross beam and spikes about seven inches long were driven into the wrists. (The wrists were used instead of the hands because the spikes would have torn through the skin between the fingers.) The spikes would have hit the median nerve, causing shocks of pain up the arms to the neck and shoulders. Once the cross beam was in place, the feet were nailed to the vertical post, placing the body in an awkward position even though there was usually a crude seat or support on the post. At this point the strain on the wrists, arms and shoulders usually caused a dislocation of the shoulder and elbow joints. Excruciating pain from the strain probably shot up Jesus' arms and felt like it was exploding in his brain. The position also held the rib cage in a fixed position, making it extremely difficult to exhale and take in a full breath. As time passed the loss of blood and lack of oxygen probably caused severe cramps and spasmodic contractions, knotting his muscles in deep, throbbing pain.

Because of shallow breathing, Jesus' lungs must have collapsed, and the loss of blood would have caused strain on the heart as it beat faster to try to compensate. Fluid would also have built up in the lungs. Whether Jesus died from the strain on the heart to pump blood in those conditions or cardiac arrest or heart failure from shock and exhaustion is uncertain. But it is evident that he had a strong physical stamina to live the six hours after being lifted on the cross.

 Read the accounts of the crucifixion and reflect on the above information as you consider the human suffering that Jesus endured.

Matthew 27:32-56

Mark 15:21-41

Luke 23:26-49

John 19:16-37

Yes, Jesus was unique, fully divine and fully human. Without the divine aspect of Jesus we would have no reason to celebrate his life beyond a “good person”. Without the human aspect of Jesus, Christianity would lack the divine connection with God. As a human, Jesus showed us how to develop that connection. As a human, Jesus showed us that God truly understands our human condition. Jesus chose actions that placed others above self and he looked to God for the courage to follow the will that he knew was his purpose.

We too must choose actions that place others above self. When we place God above all, we trust that God will pump up our courage and give us direction.