



FOREWORD BY JOHN PIPER

N O T B Y

S I G H T

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A FRESH LOOK AT OLD STORIES
OF WALKING BY FAITH

J O N B L O O M

“Vivid, nourishing sketches of Bible characters learning to live with their sometimes startling Lord.”

J. I. Packer, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology, Regent College

“To live by faith is no small thing. Jon Bloom’s *Not by Sight* provides brief readings—one per day would be ideal—to help us rethink our lives in the light of Christ’s faithfulness. The audacity of this book is that it simply but thoughtfully takes Christ at his word. How rare, how powerful.”

Ray Ortlund, Immanuel Church, Nashville

“Spurgeon said, ‘My books are my tools.’ And the book you hold in your hands is one wise match for the journey. Bloom’s stories and insights ignite—ignite fire in bones, and ignite the old and best paths, and ignite glimpses of God’s glory that make us want to run this walk of faith!”

Ann Voskamp, author, *New York Times* bestseller, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*

“Jon Bloom is a Christ-centered, God-worshiping, kingdom-oriented guy. And since not all writers are, those are good reasons to read this book! But it’s more than that. Jon is a gifted writer of something we need more of—truth-telling nonfiction that’s full of imagination. For years I have read Jon’s *Desiring God* blogs and pondered them, saving some of them to quote from in future books. I love how Jon repeatedly takes me back to Scripture. God says his words won’t return to him empty without accomplishing his purpose. He never says that about our words. That’s why *Not by Sight* will endure beyond this world—it is infused with the life-giving Word of God that will never die.”

Randy Alcorn, Eternal Perspective Ministries

“*Not by Sight* creatively and winsomely invites readers into the realities of the Gospel accounts, enabling us to hear the rocks of the adulterous woman’s accusers fall to the ground, feel the tingle of health rushing through the leper’s body, see the panic in Peter’s eyes as he begins to sink, smell the fragrance that has been poured on Jesus’s feet, and taste the fish Jesus serves to the disciples for breakfast.”

Nancy Guthrie, author of *Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow* and the Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament series

“Forgetfulness and familiarity. Faith is often plagued by these twin faults. We easily forget what we know about who God is and what he’s done for us in Jesus Christ. When we turn to Scripture for help, our familiarity dulls the wonder in the splendid story of God’s mercy to mere men. We need to be reminded of the old stories of Scripture, that they might irrigate our parched souls and ignite our faith. In *Not by Sight*, my friend Jon Bloom shatters our familiarity with the Bible by helping us see afresh how the drama of Scripture unfolds in

the gritty reality of human experience and how those stories are infused with grace as they fit into the greatest story: God's plan to save sinners by his Son. Do you need to be reminded of what you already know? Do you need to be shaken from your familiarity? Jon's fresh tellings of the old tales will help you recover surprise and delight in the stories of Scripture."

C. J. Mahaney, Sovereign Grace Ministries; author, *Living the Cross Centered Life*

"There is nothing quite like the gritty, grace-filled stories of Scripture to awaken our hearts to the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. And there is hardly anyone I know more gifted or capable of bringing them to life and making poignant, and often painful, application of them than my good friend, Jon Bloom. This is a wonderfully insightful, powerfully edifying, and above all Christ-exalting book that I cannot recommend too highly."

Sam Storms, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

"Do you, like me, feel the futility of straining to get hope from the things you can see? Using the voices of those who have gone before us, Jon Bloom describes the better way—walking by faith with Jesus, our blessed hope. *Not by Sight* takes you on a walk through the cloud of witnesses whose testimony of God's always sufficient grace echoes through the ages. I'm grateful for this meditation on the precious promise of God's provision to enable us to put one foot in front of the other by faith."

Gloria Furman, author, *Glimpses of Grace*

"What happens when we humbly and expectantly meditate on the stories of the Scriptures while wearing the lens of the gospel? Ask Jon Bloom, or better still, buy his new book, *Not by Sight*, and discover for yourself. This treasury of short devotionals is the nourishing fruit of a man smitten with Jesus and hungry for grace—a brother whose words make the gospel beautiful and believable, to believers and nonbelievers alike. This is a book you're going to want to give to a whole lot of friends, no matter where they are in their faith story."

Scotty Smith, Founding Pastor, Christ Community Church, Franklin, Tennessee; author, *The Reign of Grace*, *Restoring Broken Things*, and *Everyday Prayers: 365 Days to a Gospel-Centered Faith*

"There are probably only two books I've read with a depth of discipleship untouched by the church at large in America. *Not by Sight* by Jon Bloom is one of those. More than once, I found myself unable to continue reading as tears filled my eyes, my heart being so deeply moved and encouraged by Jon's soothing words about the surprising but always trustworthy ways of God. More Christians need to understand these truths if they are to walk firmly into every good work God has prepared for them. If you read only one book this year, I strongly recommend it be this one."

Matt Brown, Evangelist; author; Founder, Think Eternity

Not by Sight: A Fresh Look at Old Stories of Walking by Faith

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FOREWORD

JOHN PIPER

WITH THE APOSTLE JOHN I say, *I am writing these things to you so that my joy may be complete* (1 John 1:4). My joy. Yes, yours too. But that's not my point yet.

To write on behalf of Jon Bloom and his book is a joy. So indulge me for a moment, if you are willing.

First, I love Jon Bloom. I want to praise the man. He is worthy of your attention.

Jon is a man of worship. He lives under the sovereign grace of God with a happy sense of submission and praise. In fact, he is a worship leader at his church.

Jon is a lover of the gospel of Jesus. He is manifestly glad that his sins are forgiven because of Christ, and his works are the fruit of his justification, not the root.

Jon is humble and ready to confess his sin and heal relationships.

Jon is strong in the Scriptures. He has a backbone and is not easily duped.

Jon is a man of vision—a vision for his life and family, and a vision for Desiring God. He has overseen this ministry since the beginning with far-seeing dreams.

Jon is reliable. I would trust him with my life. Indeed, I have trusted him with the ministry—which is a huge part of my life.

Jon is wise. Though he is a generation younger than I am, I would turn to him before most older men. There is a gift of wisdom. Jon has it. He is my counselor.

Not surprisingly, then, this book is also worthy of your attention. All that Jon is as a person is poured out here. And his gifts.

Jon is creative. These meditations are not your ordinary exposition. These are stories. Really good stories. They are rooted in what the Bible says. The creative additions never go beyond what really *could* have happened. The truths that Jon sees for our lives are based not on what might have been but on what was. The might-have-beens give added flesh to the bones of truth. They are touchable.

Jon is persuaded that if you know the truth, the truth will make you free. And truths about the greatness of Christ are the best ones for freeing us from unbelief. And to be freed from unbelief is to be freed from fear and greed and pride and anger and lust and despair and a hundred other permutations of life-ruining sins.

New Christians or old Christians, what we need in order to walk by faith and not by sight is glimpses. I know that sounds contradictory. *We need sight not to walk by sight?* But it's not contradictory, because the sight we need is not a sight of what the day holds, but a sight of who holds the day.

And even that sight happens by looking through the window of the *word*. Which means we see with our ears. Yes, it sounds strange. But listen: "The LORD *revealed himself* to Samuel at Shiloh by the *word* of the LORD" (1 Sam. 3:21). So we "look" through the window of the word with our ears, and what we hear is a sight of God!

If that makes no sense to you, here's a suggestion. Pick a chapter in this book whose title looks relevant for you. Listen as you read. *Look* through what you *hear*. And see if Jesus

does not show himself to you in such a way that you trust him more.

That is what Jon Bloom desires. That is what we both are praying for—your joy of faith. So yes, I wrote this for *my* joy. And mine will be full if I hear that my happy commendations and Jon's beautiful narrations awaken in *you* the gladness of walking by faith, *Not by Sight*.

John Piper
Founder and Teacher, Desiring God
Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves,
and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them,
“Where is your faith?” And they were afraid.

LUKE 8:24-25

“WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?”

JAMES ZEBEDEE AND FEAR

Luke 8:22-25

THE SEA WAS QUIET now. And there was just breeze enough to push the boat along.

The disciples were quiet too. Andrew was steering. He had taken over for Peter, who sat wrapped in a cloak, exhausted and lost in thought. He had been soaked to the skin. A few others were bailing out the remaining water.

Jesus was sleeping again.

James leaned on the bow gunwale watching reflections dance on gentle waves.

James knew this sea. He and John had spent most of their lives on or in it. His father was a fisherman. So were most of his male kin and friends. His memory flashed the faces of some of them who had drowned in unpredictable Galilean windstorms like the one that had pummeled them barely a half hour ago.

A seasoned boatman, James was not alarmed easily. But he knew a man-eater when he saw it. This storm had opened its mouth to swallow them all into the abyss.

Terror had been in John's eyes when he grabbed James and yelled, “We have to tell the Master!” They stumbled to the stern. How Jesus had remained sleeping while the furious surf tossed the boat around was itself a wonder. They woke him screaming, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” (v. 24).

James would never forget the way Jesus looked at him. His eyes were at once potent and tranquil. No trace of fear. Laying aside the blanket, Jesus rose to full height on the rear deck. James, fearing Jesus was about to be pitched overboard, reached to grab him just as Jesus shouted, "Peace! Be still!" (Mark 4:39).

No sooner had those words left his mouth and the wind was completely gone! The sudden hush of the howling was otherworldly. The waves immediately began to abate. Each disciple stood where he was, looking dumbfounded at the water and sky and each other.

Jesus's gaze lingered for a moment on the steep hills along the western shore. Then he looked around at the Twelve and said, "Where is your faith?" (v. 25).

He had looked right at James when he said "faith."

Now, as James leaned on the bow, he turned Jesus's question over and over in his mind.

"Where is your *faith*?" When Jesus first said it, James felt its intended rebuke. Didn't he trust God? He thought he had. But the storm proved that all the confidence he felt when the pressure was off was fair-weather faith. The Galilean westerlies had swept it away. He felt chastened and humbled.

But the more James thought about the question, the deeper it dug into him. "*Where* is your faith?" Where? My faith is in what I see. My faith is in what I feel. When the storm hit, I trusted what my eyes saw. I trusted what my skin felt. I trusted the violent force that was tossing the boat like a toy. I trusted the stories told by my father. I trusted the tragedies I remember. I trusted the power of the storm because storms kill people.

Is that wrong? Up until a few minutes before, this would have merely seemed like common sense. But Jesus had changed everything.

James looked back to the sleeping Jesus. He looked almost the same as when the storm was raging. But which had *looked*

more powerful then? What his eyes saw. But which really was more powerful? Jesus had killed the killer storm with a word.

James felt fear wash over him again. But it was a very different kind of fear. He thought, "Who then is this?" (v. 25).

As James looked back down at the water, the psalmist's words came to mind:

For I know that the LORD is great,
and that our Lord is above all gods.
Whatever the LORD pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.
He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
who makes lightnings for the rain
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.
(Ps. 135:5–7)

James trembled.



What Jesus did for James and the other disciples when he quieted the storm was a fear-transfer. One moment they feared the storm and the next moment they feared Jesus, with a holy, reverent fear. This storm was a gift from God to them because it taught them just how powerful Jesus was and deepened their faith in him. And it prepared them to weather other, even more deadly kinds of storms that lay ahead of them.

When the storms of life hit, they almost always appear stronger to us than God's Word. It is crucial for us to remember that our perceptions can be deceptive. When circumstances strike fear into our hearts, the question we must ask ourselves is, where is your faith?

What God wants is for you to trust what he says over what you see.

Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

JOHN 21:3

WHEN YOU AREN'T SURE WHAT TO DO NEXT

PETER AND WAITING

John 21:1-14

“I AM GOING FISHING.”

Peter didn't know what else to do. The past few weeks had been indescribably intense with the nightmare of Jesus's crucifixion and the ineffable wonder of his resurrection.

Now he was sitting with Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two others. They were just waiting. It was disorienting. Jesus wasn't there and he hadn't told them what to do next.

Peter used to know just what to do: prepare the nets and boat, go fishing, take what he caught and sell it in the market. Fishing was hard and sometimes dangerous work. But Peter knew what was expected of him. The memory of the familiar was comforting.

So as long as he didn't know what else to do, he figured he might as well do something productive. The others replied, “We will go with you.” Peter wasn't the only restless one.

All night they fished. Cast and pull. Nothing. Cast and pull. Nothing. Try the other side of the boat. Nothing. Move the boat. Nothing. A little deeper. Nothing. A little shallower. Nothing. Where are the fish? Nothing. Whose idea was this? There may have been a sharp word or two.

Just as day was breaking, they heard a voice from the shore. “Children, do you have any fish?” James’s exasperated response was, “No!” “Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”

Ordinarily this would have been irritating. They didn’t recognize the speaker, but his instructions were familiar. This had happened before (Luke 5:1–11). Peter and John glanced at one another and then tossed the net. The sudden weight almost pulled them overboard. It couldn’t be! It was! Fish! And they were huge! They couldn’t even get the net into the boat.

John’s eyes were as big as the fish when he looked at Peter and said, “It is the Lord!” Peter handed the net to Nathanael, threw on his outer garment, and dove into the sea, leaving the others to drag the bulging net.

When they got to shore, they found Jesus preparing breakfast for them. He already had fish! Graciously, and perhaps with an affectionate tease, he said, “Bring some of the fish that *you* have just caught.” Then he served them breakfast.

And *then* Jesus gave Peter the next instructions.



This is vintage Jesus, always graciously leading and serving his bewildered disciples. And since we twenty-first-century disciples are just as easily bewildered, it’s good for us to remember some helpful principles from this story.

First, waiting on Jesus is a common experience for disciples. Sometimes we wait for direction. Sometimes we’re stuck in a very hard place and wait for release. Sometimes we wait to understand his purposes. Sometimes we wait for his provision. Jesus’s timing and purposes are not always clear to us, though they are always best for us. So he wants our faith resting on the rock of his Word and not on the sand of our circumstance.

Second, when we're not sure what to do next, as Elisabeth Elliot says, "do the next thing."¹ No doubt the disciples had prayed for guidance during those days but no clear instructions had come yet. Fishing just seemed like a good idea. As it turned out, it was exactly what the Lord wanted them to do. Jesus *was* leading them, just differently. As they did the next thing, Jesus met them and directed them.

Third, Jesus is in complete control. Peter and his friends were experienced fishermen. They did their best, yet caught nothing. But that morning they discovered (again) that Jesus was sovereign over their decisions, the boat, the sea, the fish, and time.

Fourth, Jesus is always serving us, even when we can't see it. He serves us in every conceivable way: from paying for our sins (Heb. 2:17), to calling us as disciples (John 15:16), to ordering the fish we catch (Matt. 4:19), to serving us breakfast on the beach (Phil. 4:19), and bringing us to our eternal home (2 Tim. 4:18). Jesus loves to work for those who wait for him (Isa. 64:4).

In following Jesus there are seasons of bewildering intensity and seasons of bewildering waiting. He does not want us to panic during either. He is in control of both. When you don't understand his ways, trust his Word.

And when you're not sure what to do next, do the next thing.

¹Elisabeth Elliot spoke and wrote on this topic in numerous places, but a helpful summary of her thoughts can be found at Back to the Bible, "Do the Next Thing," <http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Gateway-to-Joy/Do-the-Next-Thing.html>.

TRUSTING JESUS IS HARD. It requires following the unseen into an unknown, and believing Jesus's words over and against the threats we see or the fears we feel. Through the imaginative retelling of 35 Bible stories, *Not by Sight* gives us glimpses of what it means to walk by faith, counsel for how to trust God's promises more than our perceptions, and the way to find rest in the faithfulness of God.

"These meditations are not your ordinary exposition. These are stories. Really good stories." **JOHN PIPER**

"Truth-telling nonfiction that's full of imagination—it is infused with the life-giving Word of God that will never die." **RANDY ALCORN**

"Creatively and winsomely invites us into the realities of the Gospel accounts—to hear, feel, see, smell, and taste." **NANCY GUTHRIE**

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"Bloom's stories and insights ignite—ignite fire in bones, the old and best paths, and glimpses of glory that make us want to run this walk of faith!" **ANN VOSKAMP**

"A wonderfully insightful, powerfully edifying, and above all Christ-exalting book that I cannot recommend too highly." **SAM STORMS**

JON BLOOM is cofounder and president of Desiring God, and finds great joy in helping others believe and delight in Jesus Christ. Bloom and his wife, Pam, live in Minneapolis with their five children.

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