

Session 5: Who Is Jesus Really?

Revised 5.17.10

Introduction

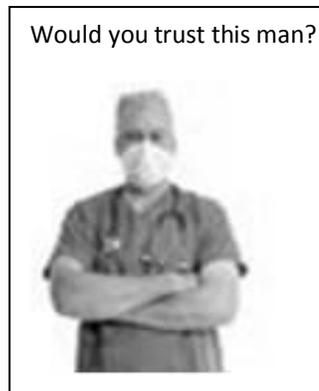
Who is Jesus really? Who did he claim to be, and how did he back up his claims? Is there a “Real Jesus” with his own true identity regardless of our opinions? Or can we define him however we want?

Why does he produce such awe and love in some people while many others just plain ignore him or even hate him? If there truly is a “Real Jesus”, what kind of response does he expect from me? What happens if I ignore him or define him in my own terms, if I see him as just another religious option?

Could I be missing the greatest treasure in the world if I do not really examine my sources of information about Jesus? Am I risking my eternity on mere opinions? And if I already believe Jesus is God, to what extent am I in awe of how amazing he really is?

In this session you will have a safe place to ask questions like these about Jesus Christ, who claimed to be God. Whether you are a skeptic or believer, you will be able to explore for yourself His amazing claims, His stunning credentials. You can discover for yourself why so many have such awe and reverence for him, and why they allow him to radically change their lives.

You may identify with Thomas, one of Jesus’ disciples. He **doubted, he questioned** until he saw and felt the wounds from his crucifixion, saw Jesus alive after his resurrection. He then declared that Jesus was “**My Lord and my God!**” He was **filled with awe and reverence** (John 20:24-28).



PREVIEW OF SESSION: CHART THE COURSE

Here is what to expect in this session:

1. **Connecting with others: Link up with a person and idea (pairs).**
2. **Reviewing past concepts: Where are we? (group)**
3. **Exploring the topic: Who Is Jesus Really? (group and pairs)**
4. **Teamwork/Prayer Partner: How can this topic affect your life this week? (group and pairs)**
5. **Assignment for next week: Be ready to report on this.**

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: LINK UP WITH A PERSON AND IDEA

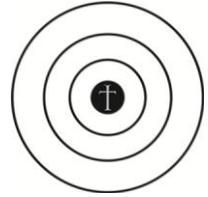
Before we begin, briefly discuss the following in pairs:

- Share one positive or negative experience from the past week (in any category).
- What was helpful from the last session?
- Any progress in understanding or applying it?

REVIEWING PAST CONCEPTS: WHERE ARE WE?

Session 1: *What Does It Take To Survive? Am I Ready?*

Success or survival in any difficult task requires a set of essentials—**core things** you must focus on (like a bull’s eye). Mountain climbers have **crucial skills** they learn before tackling the big climb. Doctors look for **vital signs** to assess someone’s health. It is foolish to start these things without testing to make sure you are ready. And it is equally foolish to focus on secondary issues (high cholesterol) when core issues are wrong (no pulse). *Life is the same—including the spiritual world.* We all need certain **spiritual essentials** to make it in life. **There are certain core questions we must focus on instead of other secondary things.** **We need to test ourselves, or be tested by others, in order to know for sure we are ready.** And if we care about someone else, we will ask if they are sure they have what they need too.



Session 2: *How Are My Foundations?*



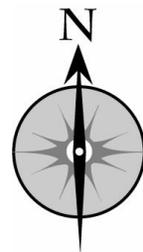
When a contractor begins a new home, the first things he builds are the **footings and foundations**. If footings are not in place and a solid foundation not established, everything above the surface (walls, ceilings, windows) will be thrown off. There will be cracks, and people could get hurt. *Life is the same way—including the spiritual world.* We tend to measure ourselves, and others, by what shows on the surface. Sometimes things look really good on the outside. Often we have no clue about unseen dangers. Other times we see that inside, cracks are beginning to form.

Or maybe even things on the surface are crumbling badly. We do not know why, or how to fix them. It seems so easy to assume, to simply gloss over these deeper issues, or give up too soon.

We saw that **our courage to explore our foundations will be rewarded, even if it is challenging.** **We must be willing to look at our footings and inspect our foundations,** and have someone help us look under the surface. **As we test our core convictions about God, the Bible, Jesus, etc., we can build in the order He has designed.** Seeing areas that need repair will motivate us to do whatever it takes to strengthen them. Answers are right around the corner. When we **build according to the Architect,** step by step, soon our foundations will be strong enough to withstand any storm.

Session 3: *Is God Really There?*

Have you ever wondered if God is really there? Perhaps on the surface you believe in God, or if someone asked, you would say God does exist. But deep down, if you are really honest, do you wonder if God is just an idea people have invented? Have you created God in your mind, or did God really create you? Many have wrestled with this question, even those who have made religious commitments. *However, from the very beginning, God has made it clear that He is eager to reveal Himself.* In fact, **he has revealed himself in five ways: Creation, the Bible, Fulfilled Prophecy, Jesus’ Claims, and Jesus’ Resurrection. (and more besides these five ways)** **As He reveals Himself, He does so in a very personal, powerful, and passionate way.** He declares to all people everywhere not only that He exists but also that **He is reliable and wants us to know Him.**



Session 4: Is the Bible Worthy of My Trust?



What can we know for sure about God without a reliable Bible? Can we really trust the Bible, or is it just a book of fables and myths? Last week we saw in John 6:61-68 that many turned away from Jesus' words because he didn't match their expectations. But Peter said, "To whom else shall we turn, for who else has the words of eternal life?" Many people today struggle to trust the Bible. They have never settled these questions once and for all.

We looked at many illustrations of reliable sources that are true whether we agree with them or not. (compasses, Xrays, ultrasound, anatomy books, contracts, electrical codes, manuals, and much more) All these illustrations point to something far more amazing: the Bible. We have ample **evidence** (UMAPS) that the Bible is far more reliable than any book written by man. It has been **reliably recorded, transmitted, and translated**. It genuinely **claims to be the words of God himself**.

Even though it is reliable, we still face two challenges:

1. Will you **trust it** when other "voices" disagree?
2. How can you **strengthen your confidence in it**? These are honest questions for many of us. It's like trusting your car manual because you know it came from the car manufacturer. Who else are you going to trust about details in your car? In a similar way, when we see that the Bible has God's fingerprints all over it, we can have confidence in the Bible. On the other hand we can be very clear and very certain about Who God really is, because the Bible is amazingly trustworthy.

EXPLORING THE TOPIC: WHO IS JESUS REALLY?

So, God is reliable and the Bible is truly trustworthy.

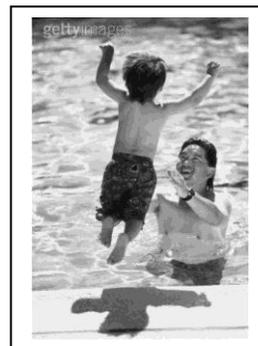
But who is Jesus? How can a human be God?

What does the Bible actually say about him?

Why should someone be in awe of Him and follow him?



Whom will I trust?
Who has made claims?
Who has credentials?



Exploring the Topic: Overview

In order to explore this concept we will look at six things:

Warm-Up Questions:

1. Are there examples in my experience or in the natural world of times when we trust someone's identity and credentials even though we don't know them firsthand?
2. Are some people authentic and qualified regardless of others' opinions, and could this be true of Jesus as well?
3. How confident am I that Jesus is who he says he is? How did I form my opinions? Am I willing to let God shape my view of Jesus?

Core Questions:

1. Who did Jesus claim to be and what were his credentials? Is he qualified to do what he intended and how did he validate his outrageous claims?
2. What kind of responses does he expect, and how will I respond to him?
3. What steps can I take to respond to Jesus more confidently?

For the rest of the session, you will explore the first 3 questions, then the next 3 questions in more depth.

Warm-Up #1: Examples From Our World: What Can We Learn Here?

Personal Experience: In your experience, where has it made sense to **trust someone's identity and credentials** without firsthand knowledge of their training or qualifications? Here are at least two examples. Discuss these with your teammate. And think of other examples from your own experience, which may help someone else understand the concept better.

1. **Medical Doctor:** When we have medical needs, we consult medical doctors. We trust they are qualified to practice medicine. But we seldom deeply examine their qualifications. We often willingly trust our lives to people like this.
2. **School Teacher:** When we send our children to school, we entrust their safety *and* education to people we hardly know. Here again, we trust their qualifications with very little personal examination.

Session Highlights

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1. **Key Questions:** Who is Jesus Really?
2. **Key Scripture:** John 14:6
3. **Key Illustration:** Doctor
4. **Key Faith Prayer:** "Lord, I choose today to believe that you are who you say you are regardless of how I feel."
5. **Key Faith Step:** Look for opportunities *to be in awe of Jesus' greatness, and to obey him with new confidence in his claims and credentials.*

The Natural World and Others' Experiences: Beyond your personal experience, where do people **trust the identity and credentials of others with limited firsthand knowledge of their training or qualifications**? Discuss this as a group. Your leader will help the group identify a few key examples.

1. Airline Pilot: Whenever people fly, they put their lives in the hands of the pilot. How do they know they are skilled enough to fly the plane safely? How do they know they are who they say they are? We all trust airline pilots without firsthand knowledge of their identity, training, or qualifications.
2. Hunting Guide: Hunters also put their lives in the hands of others when they rely upon a guide. How do they know the guide is really competent? Perhaps their friends have recommended him, but do they know his identity and qualifications firsthand? Or do we all trust others based on limited firsthand knowledge?

Warm-Up #2: Transition to the Spiritual World: Could this also be true of Jesus?

We have seen that it is reasonable to trust the identity and credentials of our doctors and teachers without firsthand verification. **Could it be that it is even more reasonable to trust Jesus' claims and credentials? Could he be even more worthy of trust than anyone in the world?** Does it *really* depend on emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends, or can we trust that he actually is who he claims to be?

You may be wondering, *Is it okay to question Jesus like this? Aren't we just supposed to have faith?* You may be surprised to know that **Jesus pressed his own disciples on this very issue. He didn't just tolerate their questions. He invited them to ask. He challenged them to be crystal clear on who he is. He made it clear that *this was the most important question they could ever ask.***

Recall Session One where you explored Matthew 16:13-17. In that conversation, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They discussed the various popular views in their culture. Then Jesus pressed in by asking, "Who do you say I am?"

Today, in this session, **Jesus is asking you that same critical question:**

***"Who do you say I am? Am I just a moral teacher? Just a good man?
Am I God? Am I relevant at all? How have you formed your opinion about me
(e.g., family, teachers, culture/society)? Were they reliable sources of spiritual insight?
And are you willing to allow me to reshape your view? Even if you think your opinions of me are
accurate, do you have a sense of awe about My greatness?"***

Core #1: Input From God's Word: Investigating Jesus' Actual Claims and Credentials

Whether we believe in Jesus or not, we tend to make him and his claims small in our minds. We easily forget how astonishing he is. In this section, you will have a safe place to ask your deepest questions about Jesus. You might be amazed at what you discover.

In the first column, describe your current view. In the other columns, explore Jesus claims, credentials, and his promises that continue today. Every time you have a question or an objection, write it in the left column. Underline the statements that seem important to you.

My Current Beliefs

What do you think about the Jesus? Is he really God? Can he really give us life?

How have you formed your opinion (e.g., family, teachers, circumstances)?

Were they reliable sources of spiritual insight?

Jesus' Claims, His own words

I came to save the lost (Luke 19:10).
 I came to suffer, die, and rise from the dead to pay for your sins and bring forgiveness and new life (John 10:11, Mark 8:31).
 Belief in me brings eternal life (John 3:15-16).
 I am the light of the world (John 8:12, 9:5).
 I am the resurrection, the life (John 11:25).
 I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

I am sending my Spirit to live in you and transform you from the inside out (John 4:10, 13; 7:37-38; 14:16-17,20).
 I want to transform your relationships so they reflect my love (John 17:22-23).
 I have initiated an invisible Kingdom that is greater than and supersedes every other kingdom. It is ruled not by power and force but by love and kindness (John 18:36-37).
 I have authority over all heaven and earth. And I send my people to reach others in every nation (Matthew 28:18-20).

I am God. The Father and I are one. I have always existed (John 10:30, 33, John 8:58).

Jesus' Credentials

"Jesus" means "the Lord saves" (Matt. 1:21).
 He was mocked, beaten and crucified without cause; Came back to life three days later (John 18:28-20:31, 1 Cor. 15:3-7)
 John the Baptist testified to this (John 3:36).
 He gave a blind man sight (John 9:6-7).
 He raised a man from the dead (John 11:43-44).
 The Father raised him from the dead as proof of his position and power (Acts 17:31).

He gave his disciples the Holy Spirit and transformed their lives (Acts 2:1-4, 42-37, 9:1-14).
 Early Christians were characterized by their deep love for each other (Col. 1:8, 2 Th. 1:3).
 He healed the sick, had authority over demons, and changed the lives of people who took him as their new king (Matthew 8:16, Acts 17:7, Col. 1:13, 1 Tim. 1:12-17).
 He demonstrated authority over nature and demons; he sent his followers to do miracles and spread the message (Matthew 8:16, 23-27, Acts 3:1-10; 9:1-19).

His name "Immanuel" means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Promises Continuing Today For Those Who Have Received Christ

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

I want to give sight and understanding to those who are blind to spiritual things (Psalm 119:130, John 9:39, 2 Cor. 4: 4, 6).

I want my new life to flow through you (Romans 6:8, 8:11, Ephesians 2:4-5).

I want to transform your life through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts. 1:8).

As you obey, the Holy Spirit will produce in your lives "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

I have delivered you from darkness and transferred you to my kingdom (Col. 1:13).

You are fighting against evil, spiritual forces, but I want to give you my armor and my power which will sustain you (Eph. 6:11-12).

"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Remember the odds of one person fulfilling just seven of those prophecies about the Messiah? 1 X 10 to the 17th; Silver dollars two feet deep, covering Texas. Find a specific one, blindfolded. **Is there anyone like Him, anywhere?** Has anyone ever claimed and promised and done such thing?

Core #2: What kind of response does he expect, and how will I respond to him?

So it's clear that Jesus made many outrageous claims. These were validated by stunning events and confirmations. But some people were not convinced. Some were opposed, and others needed more evidence. But Jesus welcomed their scrutiny. **Now He asks you, "Who do you say that I am?"**

The most important thing to Jesus was that people knew who he was. It wasn't just a word game, an intellectual argument about his "deity." It was more than just trying to get them to follow his example. He wanted them to respond with awe, surrender, belief, and trust. *He wanted them to allow Him to come inside and live his life out through them.* He deserves the same from us.

Different people have different responses. Which one of these best describes you?

1. "I'm not willing to believe this yet."
2. "I'm curious about this but not convinced."
3. "I want to believe this, but I need some more information."
4. "I believe this in my head, but it doesn't touch my heart at all."
5. "I believe this in my head, it touches my heart, and it leaves me with a sense of awe at how amazing Jesus is."
6. "Same as #5. And I am able to enthusiastically share with others about who Jesus is."

Recall the Reality Principle: *"Biblical faith is choosing to live according to the reality of God's word, not according to my emotions, circumstances, or cultural trends."*

Here is a life changing opportunity to apply this principle. What do your emotions, circumstances, and culture (the left hand) say about Jesus? Compare that with what you have learned here (the right hand).

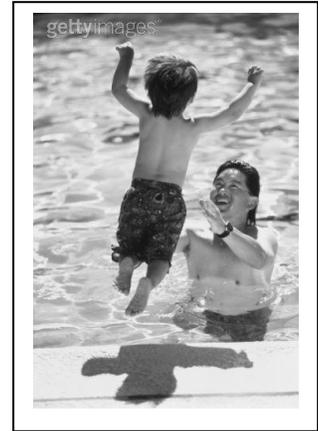
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|---|---|
| <p><u>What do your emotions, circumstances, and culture say about Jesus?</u></p> <p><i>For example: "There is no way a man can be God."</i></p> <p><i>"It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere."</i></p> <p><i>"I believe this in my head, but it doesn't really make any difference."</i></p> <p><i>(Go back to your notes in the left column above, and the responses listed above.)</i></p> | <p><u>What does the Bible say about Jesus?</u></p> <p><i>See Jesus' claims and credentials above.</i></p> |
|---|---|

Core #3: What steps can I take to respond to Jesus more confidently?

Wherever you are right now, Jesus is eager to reveal himself to you far more. His wants you to be able to say what the disciples said in Acts 4:20, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” He understands if you are not there yet. Jesus wants you to take simple steps of faith and obedience in his direction. As you do, He promises to make himself known to you more and more.

This promise is found in John 14:21:

*“Whoever has my commands and obeys them,
he is the one who loves me.
He who loves me will be loved by my Father,
and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*



So, Jesus is asking you right now, “What will you do with the information and promises in this session?” He eagerly awaits your next steps in response to him. Here are some possible next steps you can take. These will lead to Jesus revealing himself to you more:

1. **If you need more information or you are stuck, ask for help. Start first by asking God Himself.** God loves to answer prayers like this: *“God, I have a lot of questions, maybe even some difficult emotions, when I think about you. I don’t want to just let my circumstances, emotions or cultural trends block me from knowing you for who you really are. I am open to you revealing yourself to me.”* You can also ask another person to explain why they believe God is worthy of trust. You can ask someone to pray for you, that God would open the eyes of your heart, to see God for who he really is. Meet with your prayer partner or someone who can help you, and ask your most pressing questions about Jesus. *Look for answers that have the kind of real substance only a living God would give.*
2. **Read the scriptures listed under Jesus’ claims and credentials.** Ask Jesus to make his identity clear to you and to give you a sense of awe about his greatness.
3. **Go beyond just intellectually agreeing that Jesus is God.** Jesus promised life, forgiveness, to live inside of us, to change us from the inside out. Choose to believe that Jesus is who he says he is, that he will actually do these things in and through you. Then choose to live like you believe it.
4. **If you already believe in Jesus, ask Him to increase your sense of awe about Him and willingness to obey.** Ask Him to empower you to **communicate with others** about His greatness, and **help them experience the awe** that comes from truly understanding and trusting Him.

TEAMWORK/PRAYER PARTNER: HOW CAN THIS TOPIC AFFECT YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK?

Discuss the following with your partner. Start now, and check in with each other through the week.

1. *General:* What is most helpful from this session? What is difficult? How clear am I?
2. *Specific:* How does this affect specific areas of my life?
3. *Faith steps:* How much do I live as though this is true? What practical steps do I need to take in order to live according to reality? Who else can I communicate this to? This week, pray and live like you believe what you just learned, and tell your prayer partner how God works.



ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: BE READY TO REPORT ON THIS.

Before next week's meeting, do the following to help you further understand and apply this session.

1. *Keep Your Eyes Open:* Watch for two things. First, **watch for examples** where people trust others with little verification, but are less willing to trust Jesus who has massive proof of his credentials. Second, **watch for how Jesus reveals Himself to you as you take steps of faith.**
2. *Reinforce Your Learning:* Review Jesus' claims and credentials. **Take time to be amazed at His greatness.** Tell Him why you are impressed with Him. You know you understand them if you can explain them to a 10 year old. Can you?
3. **Communicate with others about Him:** If you are convinced about Jesus, ask others who they think he is. This may open doors for great conversations about his claims and credentials. If you are not convinced about Jesus, ask others what they think. Ask someone else who is convinced and who is seeing changes in his life, and ask someone who is also skeptical. Compare their answers, their reasons, and the results they are seeing. Who would you rather be?

Forecasting Session 6: Lost? Saved? Why Should I Have a Relationship With God?

What does "Savior" mean, and why do I need one? Why does the Bible make such a big deal about being "lost" or "saved"? What do these words mean?

In session 6, we will explore why it is so important to truly understand Jesus' claims and credentials.

What is the difference between actually being saved versus mistakenly assuming you are saved? This question means the difference between life and death, now, and for eternity.

To Prepare:

Bring examples which convey **needing to be rescued**, if they are not used, someone will perish...

Also consider these questions:

1. Why is Jesus so often described as "Savior"? What does it mean to be "lost" or "saved"?
2. How did you form your beliefs?
3. Do your actions reflect these beliefs?