

STUDY GUIDE
GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

FIVE SESSIONS



WHO IS JESUS?

LOUIE GIGLIO

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WITH DUDLEY DELFFS

Who Is Jesus?

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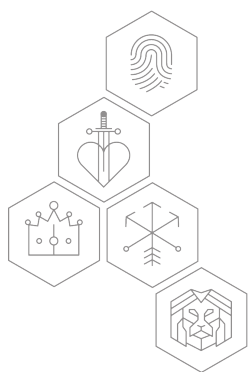
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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 7 |
| How to Use This Guide | 9 |
| | |
| SESSION 1: Good or God? | 11 |
| SESSION 2: Friend or Foe? | 29 |
| SESSION 3: King or Pawn? | 47 |
| SESSION 4: A Way or the Way? | 65 |
| SESSION 5: The Lion or the Lamb? | 83 |
| | |
| Leader's Guide | 101 |



INTRODUCTION

Have you ever seen someone famous while you were shopping, traveling, or eating out? Have you ever had the person you thought was a celebrity end up just being someone who *resembled* that individual? Or maybe you've experienced the opposite—seeing a star or celebrity and thinking he or she didn't look like the person you're used to seeing on TV or in the movies.

Public figures are used to people recognizing them on the street. Some even seem to thrive on the attention, while others go out of their way to avoid the public eye. Either way, they come to accept that because of their visibility in popular culture, people will generally form some opinion of them based on hearsay, gossip, and secondhand sources.

Jesus faced the same kind of challenge in his day. When people heard his teachings and saw his works, they formed all kinds of conclusions about him. Some, like the people in his hometown, asked, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? . . . Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:55–56). Others, like the Jewish leaders, said, "It is only by . . . the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons" (12:24). But many, like the disciple Peter, said of him, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16).

In their own way, people were all asking, "Who is Jesus?" And we're still asking the same question today. And it's an important question to ask—perhaps the *most important* one we'll ever ask—because how we answer it influences all areas of our lives. *Is Jesus really the Son of God? Is he truly our friend? Was he a king or just a pawn*

in the power struggles of his day? Is he really the way to God, as he claimed, or just a way? Did he actually suffer and die to pay the penalty for our sins?

Regardless of what you think about Jesus, his identity demands exploration and resolution. His presence emerges in history, literature, science, theology—and every major area of human endeavor. But who is Jesus, *really*? And does the answer to this question really make a difference in how we live our lives? Does it impact our existence after our lives on earth have ended?

Over the next five sessions, this study will help you explore these questions and encourage you to encounter the truth about Jesus for yourself. *Who is Jesus?* It's time to find out.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Have you or someone you know ever wondered about whether Jesus was truly who he claimed to be in the Bible? Is he truly God or just a good teacher? Is he truly a friend to us or just a judgmental foe? Is he the King of kings as he claimed or just a pawn in the power struggles of his time? Is he *the way* to God or just *a way* among the myriad of other paths to eternal life? Is he the all-powerful Lion of Judah or the sacrificial Lamb of God for humanity's sins?

During the upcoming five weeks in this study, you and your group will dive into these questions—and others—as they relate to *who Jesus is*. You can use this material in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group. Each session begins with one to two questions to get you and your group thinking about the topic and a reading from the Bible. You will then watch a video with Louie Giglio and jump into some directed small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of prayer.

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of Louie's message, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, remember that the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a "safe place." This means being honest about your thoughts and

feelings and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to “fix” a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that's not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

In between your group times, you can maximize the impact of the course by completing the *Connect* and *Reflect* personal studies. This individual study will help you respond to each lesson by connecting with others during the week, acting on the content, spending some time in worship, and considering what it all means to you. You may wish to complete this personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half hour a day on four different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even start!) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your “homework” done.

Keep in mind this study is an opportunity for you to train in a new way of understanding what the Bible says about Jesus and your walk with him. The videos, discussions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply it to your life. As you go through this study, be watching for what God is saying as it relates to experiencing his goodness, love, mercy, and grace, as well as how he is leading you to understand his sovereignty, divinity, wisdom, and power.



SESSION 1

GOOD OR GOD?

Is Jesus really who he says he is? Is he really the most important person in history? Someone who deserves our respect and admiration—or is he more than that? Is he someone who deserves our worship? Who is Jesus?

LOUIE GIGLIO



WELCOME

There was a time when identity theft was something to worry about only if you had your purse or wallet stolen. Now, in our online world, it's a constant threat as hackers devise new ways of stealing vital details about our lives. It could be someone next door or on the other side of the world accessing information about our home, work, or financial accounts. As a result, we rely on trustworthy servers, established websites, and well-known online merchants, hoping their encryption defenses can prevent thieves from using our information for illegal gain. We want to be in control of all the pieces that form the basis of who we are, what we do, and how much we're worth.

Our personal identities are even more complex—the result of countless variables reflecting biology and genetics as well as our temperaments and experiences. Even when we think we have a handle on who we are, it becomes more challenging to know the true identity of the people around us. It doesn't take long for us to learn we can't judge a book by its cover. But at the same time, we often find that people are exactly whom they appear to be. Loved ones we've known all our lives can still surprise us, while new acquaintances prove the accuracy of our first impressions.

Trying to understand the identity of a person from the past can prove even more difficult. Filtered through the perceptions, memories, and written accounts of others over centuries of time, it can be tough for us to find a focused portrait. We're left to wonder what great historical figures such as Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Queen Victoria, and even Elvis Presley were really like. With Jesus, it's even more complicated. His presence emerges in history, literature, theology—every major area of thought and human endeavor. But *who is Jesus*, really? Even during his life on earth, people couldn't agree on who they thought he was. And we're still wrestling with this question today, aren't we?

During the course of our lives, each of us makes certain assumptions and reaches specific conclusions about who we think Jesus is. We listen to what others say, peruse passages in the Bible, consider our own personal encounters, and synthesize various pieces of information and experiences. Then we formulate our opinion, usually as a work in progress.

Right now, today, who do *you* consider Jesus to be? Who is Jesus? What's the basis for your answer?



SHARE

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- What are some of the common questions you have heard people ask about Jesus?

or

- What are some of your expectations for this study? What do you want to better understand about Jesus during the next five weeks?



READ

Have someone read aloud Matthew 16:13–20. As you listen to this exchange Jesus had with his disciples, try to imagine you're right there as part of their conversation.

¹³ *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*

¹⁴ *They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

¹⁵ *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”*

¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*

¹⁷ *Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”* ¹⁸ *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.* ¹⁹ *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”* ²⁰ *Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

What stands out to you from this dialogue Jesus had with his disciples? Why?

Why do you think Jesus asked his disciples what other people were saying about him?

Why would Jesus then order his disciples not to tell anyone yet that he was the Messiah?



WATCH

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any key points that stand out to you.

Notes

Jesus' exchange with his disciples in Matthew 16:13–20 reveals the central question all people must answer for themselves: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

We have to begin by asking this question from a historical point of view: *Was Jesus a real person, or was he just a fable created by people?*

A survey of some of the commentators in Jesus' day can help us answer this question. History gives us the testimony of:

Tacitus, a Roman senator (c. AD 56–120)

Suetonius, overseer of the libraries of Rome (c. AD 69–122)

Pliny the Younger, a Roman legate (c. AD 61–113)

Flavius Josephus, best-known Jewish historian in the time of Christ (c. AD 37–100)

Jesus was clearly a real historical person. This brings us to a second question: *Was Jesus who he claimed to be?* For this question, we turn to eyewitnesses recorded primarily in the Gospels.

Jesus clearly claimed to be God. In John 10:28–33, a group of Jews were eager to charge Jesus with blasphemy, the sin of a mortal claiming to be God, and to stone him to death.

Jesus' assertion that he is the Son of God leaves us with three directions for assessing this claim: he was either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.

These options do not allow for the claim that Jesus was just a “great moral teacher.” Jesus consistently claimed to be sent by his Father . . . even up to his death.

We each have to wrestle with Jesus' claims—for he left us no other choice. We can't assume a simple, regurgitated, my-grandmother-told-me-so answer: we must each formulate our own response.



DISCUSS

Take a few minutes within your group to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being *rarely* and 10 being *daily*, how often do you wrestle with the question at the center of this study: *Who is Jesus?*
2. How important is this question to your ability to trust God along with the credibility and relevancy of the Bible?
3. How do you feel about the amount of historical evidence for the life and death of Jesus by noted historians? How does this affect your personal faith?
4. Do you agree that Jesus' claims leave us with only three conclusions about his identity—liar, lunatic, or Lord? Do you think Jesus can be good without being God? Explain.

5. Prior to this group, how much personal time have you invested in studying the identity of Jesus? What evidence have you found most influential or persuasive?

6. How would you respond if a friend asked you, “Who do you *really* think Jesus is?” Why would you answer this way?



RESPOND

Close out today's session by briefly reviewing the outline for the video teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session.



PRAY

End the gathering by partnering with one or two people from your group and praying for one another. Feel free to write down specific requests in the space below so you can remember to continue praying throughout the week.



BETWEEN SESSIONS

PERSONAL STUDY

We hope this week's group study was helpful and encouraging to you. But really, it's just the start, and we want you to keep digging into who Jesus is both together and personally. With this in mind, we've created *Connect* and *Reflect* sections as a guide for your personal study time and ongoing discussion with your group.



CONNECT

Check in with your group members during the upcoming week and continue the discussion you had with them at your last gathering. Grab coffee or dinner, or reach out by text and share what's going on in your heart. You can use the following questions to help guide your conversation about who Jesus is and how you're experiencing him in your life right now.

What aspect of Jesus' identity intrigues you the most? Why?

What's the biggest misperception you think most people have about Jesus? How can you help them see him more accurately?

How can you encourage one another in the group to grow closer to Jesus throughout this study?



REFLECT

Act

Make a list of all the names you can think of that refer to Jesus (such as Messiah, Lord, Savior, or Prince of Peace). If none come to mind or you can't think of more than a couple, look in your Bible or online. After you're satisfied with your list, choose one of these attributes of Jesus to focus on as you answer these questions.

Why is this aspect of Jesus' identity significant to you right now? What draws you to knowing him based on this part of who he is?

How can you experience more of this attribute or aspect of Jesus in your life? Do any habits or patterns in your life need to change in order to know Jesus more fully? If so, which ones?

How would you describe the difference between a role someone plays (such as a friend or spouse) and a core dimension of his or her identity (such as compassionate or loving)? Reviewing your entire list, which attributes of Jesus reflect the role that he plays in your life, and which describe who he is? Or are they one and the same? Explain.

Worship

Although the psalms in the Bible were written centuries before the birth of Jesus, scholars have noted how they contain numerous descriptions and references to Christ. Today, reflect on the following passage from Psalm 1. As you read, underline words or phrases that make you think about who Jesus is.

¹ *Blessed is the one*

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,*

² *but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

³ *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

⁴ *Not so the wicked!*

*They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.*

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

⁶ *For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*

This psalm tells us about the two paths we can take: the path that leads to righteousness and life, or the path that leads to wickedness and destruction. Even more, this psalm tells us about the character of Jesus—“the one who does not walk in step with the wicked” (verse 1). Jesus was not just a good teacher who *instructed* people

how to be righteous, but he also *showed* how much God loved them and how they could respond to his love. In the space below, write down what the words of this psalm mean to you personally and how Jesus has *shown* you what it means to delight in the Lord and experience his goodness.

In Philippians 2:8, Paul writes that Jesus, “being found in appearance as a man . . . humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Jesus, though he was God, chose to come to this earth and lead a sinless life so he could pay the penalty for our sins. Write out a prayer to God in response as you reflect on Jesus’ sacrifice for you.



DEEPER

The Word of God

From the very beginning of creation, God has been making himself known to people by his revealed word. In Genesis 1 we read the account of God speaking the world into existence, then speaking relationally to Adam (see 1:27–30). In Exodus 3, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush, calling him to be his agent to liberate Israel from slavery in Egypt. Throughout the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), God gave instructions to his chosen people so that they would know the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love.

God taught his people how to worship through the words of the psalmists, and he reminded them of their coming hope through the words of the prophets. But God gave his greatest revelation when Jesus, the Son and the very “Word” of God, came to earth. The author of Hebrews explains this well (see Hebrews 1:1–3).

From the beginning, Jesus, the Word, was with God and was God (see John 1:1). In this verse, John is making a very important Trinitarian statement: Jesus is not just like God; rather, Jesus actually is God. But Jesus is also with God, meaning that Jesus is separate from God. This mystery is explained through the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This biblical doctrine explains that God exists in three persons, being of one substance, power, and eternity. This doctrine is clear in Scripture, and without it, the message of the gospel falls apart. For example, in delivering the Great Commission, Jesus commands his church to baptize his disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), the three members of the Trinity. This doctrine has been affirmed throughout church history.

Jesus is the eternal “Word of the Father.” Therefore, we understand his powerful role in creation, for “through him all things were

made” (John 1:3). But the great mystery of the gospel is that Jesus came to live with us; he left his position as creator and ruler of the universe to become human and endure all of the miseries of this life. He came to earth to completely identify with us in order that we might in turn identify with him and receive him as our Savior and Lord. And to those who receive him, he gives the amazing promise that they will be the very children of God (see verse 12), not simply permitted into the presence of God as servants or guests. Rather, they are eternally welcomed into the house of God as his own sons and daughters, heirs of all of God’s promised blessings (see Galatians 4:4–7).

—Excerpted from *The Jesus Bible*, commentary on John 1:1–5

