

Jesus is _____ .

A handful of studies are being produced to coincide with the “Jesus is...” mission. The real aim of these studies is to help us *listen* to the point of view of other people and learn how to share the good news and truth about Jesus into other people’s lives. Each study will have the following four components.

- 1) **A Story.** We’ll introduce the theme of the study with a short story to explore one true or false perspective of Jesus.
- 2) **Listen.** Proverbs 18:13 says, *“To answer before listening - that is folly and shame.”* We want to step into the shoes of the other person before launching back with an answer. We will take a moment to consider how real their perspective is and why it sounds good to them.
- 3) **Test It.** Proverbs 18:17 says, *“In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines.”* How true is that! It may only take one or two questions to highlight pitfalls in a person’s worldview.
- 4) **Gospel Solution.** Psalm 119:105 says, *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”* We want to land on what the bible says about this topic. Jesus is at the centre of everything and so we need to know what difference a right and true understanding of Jesus and his work makes to every and any worldview.
- 5) **Pray.** Some points will be offered to assist us in bringing our concerns to God about his mission.

These studies will be published separately as they are finalised. The topics will cover Jesus is: ‘one way among many’; ‘irrelevant’; ‘trustworthy’; and ‘alive and risen’.

Study 1 - Jesus is... one way among many

A Story

A group of friends were driving home after going to see the band U2 perform in concert. They were all still energised by the show and each of them was discussing their favourite songs and moments.

"I know it's not everyone's cup-of-tea," said Sarah "but, I like it when Bono gets political. When he pulled down his headband over his eyes to reveal the COEXIST symbol printed across it. That was brilliant!"

Sitting in the backseat was one of Sarah's best friends, Jenny.

Jenny is a Christian but knows that Sarah is not. "What did you like about it?", Jenny asks.

"Well, it's just true, isn't it? There is too much fighting between religions. They really should all just get along and coexist together. They're all worshiping the same God anyway. Just in different ways."



LISTEN

1) What would you regard to be the major religions of the world?

2) What similarities do you see between these religions of the world?

3) Do they all basically want the same thing?

Note: We have no need to explore in depth all the religions of the world in order to conclude that they are incompatible with one another and, most importantly, with Christianity. We'll test the principle of Sarah's statement by looking at the core of the Christian faith.

TEST IT

- 4) Read the following bible verses. Is there any wiggle room to believe there are many ways to worship the same God? Is there another way to come to know God and gain eternal life other than through the person of Jesus Christ?

1 Timothy 2:1-6

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

Acts 4:12

¹¹ Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'^k ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

- 5) Discuss what some of the mainstream religions believe about who Jesus is.

THE GOSPEL SOLUTION

John 14:1-11

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

6) Who does Jesus ask his followers to believe in?

7) How are Thomas' response to Jesus and Sarah's comments in the car virtually the same?

8) According to Jesus, how many paths are there to God?

9) By what authority can Jesus claim that he is the only way to God?

John 20:19-29

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

10) How would Thomas fill in the blank? Jesus is _____ .

11) How would you answer people's objections that Christianity, claiming to be the only way, is arrogant, narrow-minded, intolerant and unloving? (See John 3:16; Romans 3:22-24; 1 John 4:9-11 and 2 Peter 3:9 for some help).

12) If you were Jenny, how would you respond to Sarah?

Pray

- Thank God for the one clear path to salvation which is not through our efforts but through Jesus of Nazareth.
- Pray for the clarity of the gospel to go out from the Christian denominations.
- Ask God to help people see the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the foolishness of asserting that all religions are the same.
- Pray for people you know who do not see Jesus as Lord and Saviour yet.
- Pray for opportunities to hear who people think Jesus is.

Study 2 - Jesus is... irrelevant

A Story

Josh, was a university student who thought Jesus was a great leader in the past, but was not relevant for our lives today. To him, Jesus came to take the fun out of life by giving his followers impossible rules to live by.

One day Josh sat down at a student union lunch table. Next to him was sitting Jenny, a vibrant young student with a radiant smile. Intrigued, he asked her why she was so happy.

Her immediate reply was, "Jesus Christ!"

"Jesus Christ?" Josh said, firing back.

I'm fed up with religion; I'm fed up with the church; I'm fed up with the Bible.

Don't give me that garbage about religion."

Unfazed, Jenny calmly leaned forward and opened her mouth to politely speak...

LISTEN

- 1) In the story above, Josh declared religion to be garbage and he thought that Jesus was irrelevant. Stepping into Josh's shoes for a minute, what do you think is his perception of Jesus and religion?

2) In Australia, the *Christian tradition* has weakened as the *progressive morality* movement has risen. A prominent worldview of our nation now is humanism: a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and *progress* without religious or superstitious beliefs. Does this observation fit with Josh's perspective?

3) What do you think Josh is reacting to?

TEST IT

4) Progress sounds good doesn't it? But the issue, really is about what we are trying to progress away from? If it is religious dogma (being told what to think and how to live) or superstition (beliefs not grounded in evidence or reality), that is good right?

5) But does Jesus fit this description? Is Jesus someone our world ought to progress away from? Is he really irrelevant? How do you know? I wonder what Josh knows about Jesus?

THE GOSPEL SOLUTION

John 8:48-59

⁴⁸ *The Jews answered [Jesus], "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"*

⁴⁹ *"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death."*

⁵² *At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"*

⁵⁴ *Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵ Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."*

⁵⁷ *"You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"*

⁵⁸ *"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

- 5) What type of people are speaking to Jesus and challenging him?
What do they think of Jesus?

6) In verses 49-51, how does Jesus describe his relationship with God?

7) Perhaps Jesus is coming across as progressive (greater than Abraham) to the Jewish religious folk - the children of Abraham. But what is Jesus' really saying about himself? See especially Verse 58.

8) Does Jesus portray himself as a passing trend, a guru of his time, or a new visionary? According to this passage, Jesus is_____?

Matthew 10:32-33

³² "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

9) What is at stake when someone wishes to regard Jesus as irrelevant?

Revisit the Story

Let's go back to our scenario with Josh and Jenny.

Jenny's reply to why she was so happy was, "Jesus Christ!"

Josh as we saw said: Don't give me that garbage about religion."

Unfazed, Jenny calmly leaned forward and informed him,

"Mister, I didn't say religion, I said Jesus Christ!"

Josh McDowell was stunned. He had never considered Jesus more than a religious figure, yet here was this joyful Christian woman talking about Jesus as someone who brought meaning to her life. Josh McDowell would later try to disprove the resurrection of Jesus only to become convinced of it and write the classic Christian book "More than a Carpenter".

Pray

- Thank God for sending his eternal Son to save us.
- Pray for our church to communicate who Jesus is clearly.
- Ask God to help people see the urgency of knowing Jesus Christ and for us to have the same sense of urgency to speak about Jesus to others.
- Come to God in repentance, if you need to, for living as though Jesus is irrelevant even if you know that he is not!
- Pray for people you know who do not see Jesus as Lord and Saviour yet.
- Pray for opportunities to hear who people think Jesus is.

Study 3 - Jesus is... trustworthy

A Story

Susan is a single Mum with three kids, all in Primary school.

"The only person I can trust, is myself" said Susan at the school gate looking agitated.

Listening to the morning news tipped her over the edge.

"You can't trust what any politician says. I'm sick and tired of the lies". Susan began to cry.

"I didn't know you cared that much about politics?" I asked.

"I don't...it's just..." Susan took a breath and composed herself. It had been a difficult month.

As we spoke over the coming 20 minutes Susan shared some of her struggles. Her son had been lying to her for months now about his use of the internet. Her colleague at work was always dropping the ball, saying he'd "get around to it" but in the end did nothing and left everything for her to do.

Her sister's husband last week decided he wanted a divorce and the little money Susan had invested following the advice of a financial planner had been lost.

"I'm just done with people!" Susan said under her breath, "The only person I can trust, is myself!"

LISTEN

- 1) Can you empathise with Susan? In what ways has she experienced people letting her down?

- 2) How would you summarise Susan's frustration in a brief statement? It sounds like Susan is....

TEST IT

- 3) Who of us has not let others down at some point?

- 4) Is it possible to live life without trusting anybody?

- 5) What kind of a world do we live in? If it's true that the only certainties in life are death and taxes, what kind of a life can we hope to have?

THE GOSPEL SOLUTION

John 18:28-40

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. ³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

6) Caiaphas was the High Priest and Pilate was the Roman governor over Jerusalem. How exactly did they serve justice in this account of Jesus' trial?

7) Read Verse 37 again and discuss what Jesus means.

8) Jesus claimed to be trustworthy - on the side of truth. How did Jesus make good on his word? Read the following passages from Matthew to help with this question.

Matthew 12:39-40

³⁹ [Jesus] answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Matthew 16:21

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Matthew 27:62-64

⁶² The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³ "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

- 9) Compare the trustworthiness of Jesus with that of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders.

- 10) Although the world is full of people and plans that are untrustworthy, the Lord Jesus Christ can be trusted all the way. Finish by reading Luke 6:46-49 and praying that we would be people who put our trust in Jesus because he is trustworthy.

Luke 6:46-49

⁴⁶ “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷ As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. ⁴⁸ They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Pray

- Thank God that Jesus came into this world to testify to the truth.
- Pray for one another that you would build your life on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to help us demonstrate living faithfully so that those who know us will know that we trust him.
- Pray for the people who you have shared with your group that they may hear the good news of Jesus and have life in his name.
- Pray for people you know who struggle with life. Ask for the Spirit of God to show them how to trust God.
- Pray for opportunities to hear who people think Jesus is.

Study 4 - Jesus is... alive!

A Story

"If you want me to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, then why didn't He appear before a high court judge or someone important?"

This was the objection that Bob blurted out during a Christianity Explored course.

At one level this skeptic has a point. Why are the key moments of Jesus' life observed by relative nobodies, especially as far as the first century is concerned?

Shepherds at Jesus' birth – seasonal workers employed for the spring lambing season, like modern day backpackers or gypsies who move around following the work.

Women at the empty tomb – Far from objective and astute detectives. In this era, the testimony of women were of little value and had ambiguous legal status.

Neither women nor shepherds were permitted to give evidence in a first century court. If God had been planning on the resurrection, why not plan on revealing the evidence to important people?

LISTEN

- 1) Do you sometimes wish the Bible's evidence was more convincing? What would you wish to be better?

2) In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that if the resurrection was phoney, then we're all fools for following Jesus. Why do you think Jesus didn't appear risen before Pontius Pilate, Herod or Caiaphas the High Priest? Would you wish that he did?

3) What other explanations have you heard to explain the absence of a corpse of Jesus?

TEST IT

4) If the disciples were to invent the resurrection story then why would they record women as the first witnesses to the event? This evidence is referred to as the 'criterion of embarrassment' where embarrassing inclusions in historic records add to their validity.

5) Many religious leaders have come and gone in the history of the world but none has had the same universal and long running impact as Jesus. Is it reasonable to conceive such a multicultural and multigenerational conspiracy?

6) John Dickson lists 4 pieces of historical evidence that, combined together, produce very strong evidence for the resurrection:

a) **Jesus' tomb was corpse-less.** The resurrection was proclaimed in the very city where the tomb was known to be. Anyone who wanted to shoot down this propaganda could produce a corpse. The tomb of Jesus did not become a holy site in the years immediately after his death while other religious leaders had tombs active with religious homage. Even the Jewish leaders came up with a different explanation for the empty tomb rather than showing that the tomb was not empty. See Matthew 28:11-15.

b) **Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.** The historian, Josephus, wrote of certain requirements in court and especially demands the absence of female testimony. As previously mentioned, this fact is too embarrassing to be invented. It's makes sense that it was not invented but what actually happened.

c) **Similarities and dissimilarities in the accounts.** The different accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) agree in profound ways. The day, the women as first witnesses, about confusion and doubt among the disciples. The differences in the reports highlight the uniqueness of their reports. If they were identical, you could conclude that they collaborated on their story. If they were radically different then you could conclude they were not trustworthy. But neither is true.

d) **Transformation of the disciples.** What caused a group of uneducated Jews to become so passionate about their leader after his death that produced a world-wide following despite heavy persecution and martyrdom? They were Jews who were raised to believe the descendants of Abraham were the blessed race and that worshiping someone as God was absolute blasphemy? But in the weeks and months following the death of Jesus, they preached, proclaimed, exhorted and debated people into belief that Jesus had risen from the dead and He is the LORD! And that He is LORD of all the nations. They travelled abroad to take the gospel to all nations. You can follow each one of their stories to see how their lives were transformed by the belief of the resurrection.

THE GOSPEL SOLUTION

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the

tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

7) Look at each of the reactions to the empty tomb from the passage and discuss how each person responded. Do they seem like credible reactions?

8) John was the unnamed disciple in this passage. While Jesus did not appear to great leaders of the world to prove the resurrection, he appeared to entrusted men and women who would spread the good news. Notice in the following passage how John emphasises the eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and resurrection (eternal life).

1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete

9) Remember the wisdom of Jesus on this topic when he said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ” (Luke 16:31)

On the topic of this final study, no matter what a person concludes, everyone ought to consider how, “historically speaking, it looks as though a man who said he would rise from the dead, did.” (John Dickson, Simply Christianity)

Pray

- Praise God for the resurrection which testifies to the completed work of Christ on the cross, provides a historic account to be tested, and speaks to us of eternal life and our own resurrection from the dead.
- Ask God to help you to understand clearer any areas of faith that you find hard to believe or hard to grasp.
- Ask God to help you live this life in response to the resurrection and not just believe it in theory.
- Pray for people in your life that need to know the great hope of the resurrection.
- Pray for those preaching on Sunday.
- Pray for opportunities to hear who people think Jesus is.