

JESUS-CENTERED LIFE

Week 1: Who Do You Say I Am?

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this six-week pursuit, you and your students will be diving into a central, riveting question Jesus asks his disciples, and now asks us: "Who do you say I am?" Jesus asks his disciples this question just after he feeds thousands with a few loaves and fishes. When it's evening and time for everyone to return home, Jesus gathers his disciples away from the crowds to debrief the experience with them. First, he asks them what people are saying about him. The disciples tell him that, basically, the people think he's a prophet. Then Jesus gets more personal. He asks the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter, with characteristic passion and courage, answers, "The Christ of God."

Even if your students have read this story before, maybe they haven't paid much attention to the way *they'd* answer Jesus' question. It's such a basic question—maybe they think they know everything they need to know about Jesus already. But in our complacency about this question, we've missed who Jesus really is. It's best to start over again, to assume what we think we know about Jesus is tainted and even inaccurate. It's time to invite Jesus to reintroduce himself.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: We must begin to ask ourselves, honestly, what we think and believe about Jesus.
2. WHY: Much of what we think about Jesus just isn't true—or fully true—and that keeps us from growing deeper in our relationship with him.
3. HOW: Your students will be challenged to consider what they *really* know about Jesus, experience what it's like to get closer to him, and begin to develop a new and deeper understanding of who he is.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Luke 9:12-20

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Jeremiah 29:13 and John 14:4-9

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead.

Read Luke 9:12-20.

In a survey several years ago, Christian pollster George Barna proclaimed that many Christian teenagers are ignorant about basic faith beliefs. GROUP Magazine replicated Barna's study by asking more than 10,000 Christian teenagers participating in a summer workcamp program essentially the same questions, plus a few more. After compiling the results, GROUP editors found a brighter picture than Barna painted, but still confirmed many

of his core findings. Here's how these Christian kids answered two key questions:

- *About four out of 10 (38 percent) say a good person can earn eternal salvation through good deeds.* This is a commonly held belief that negates the very nature and mission of Christ—it makes his sacrifice on the cross just another irrelevant blip in a history book. The fact that so many Christian kids believe *their goodness* will save them reveals how little they understand Jesus for who he really is.
- *Almost a quarter of Christian teenagers (22 percent) say Jesus committed sins while he lived on earth.* Of course, if Jesus committed sins—any sin—our salvation is a vapor. Students live in a culture that is perpetually trying to convince them that sinning is a given—no one can escape its pull. In teen logic, that means even Jesus was susceptible to sin.

How could so many churchgoing teenagers miss the basic truths of Christianity? How could they not understand that Jesus is God incarnate and therefore sinless in the totality of his life on earth and beyond? Could it be these kids never learned some of these important truths at church? Well, GROUP's survey results found that the number of students who say they've learned "Jesus is God" at church is an overwhelming 87 percent. The truth between the lines here is a mixture of three problems:

1. A lot of teenagers are learning the "right answers" about Jesus at church and home, but they're barely getting a whiff of who he *really* is at church and at home.
2. The few kids who are getting a healthy exposure to the true Jesus are subjugating him to their preconceived, mistaken notions—"When Jesus cleared the temple of the moneychangers, that must have been a nice thing because Jesus is nice."
3. They see pretty clearly that *we think* Jesus is God, but they're not experiencing how "saturating" our relationship with him is—how he spills into every aspect of our lives, how he's no declawed Aslan or boring partner in a too-comfortable marriage.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Is it possible that everything you think you know about Jesus is wrong? Come to small group to find out why.
- Think you know Jesus? Think again... Come to small group to get reacquainted.

Parent Email

We've provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

Our small groups have launched a new six-week study that's focused on answering the question Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" The first lesson challenged students to consider what they *really* know about Jesus, experience what it's like to get closer to him, and begin to develop a new and deeper understanding of who he is.

As you go throughout the week, help reinforce this lesson in your teenager's life by asking the following questions as you have the opportunity:

- What are some things Jesus said and did that are unlike any person who has ever walked the earth?
- If you think about the people Jesus interacted with, what sort of impact did he often have on the people he encountered?
- Jesus said he is the very definition of "good"—in what ways was he good?

Thanks for all your prayers for our small group ministry. Have an awesome week!

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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then jump into today's lesson.

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS

The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen are (1) It's easy to miss the "real" Jesus, (2) How well do we know Jesus?, and (3) Getting closer to Jesus.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Luke 9:12-20 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so everyone has a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *In this six-week pursuit, we'll be diving into a central, riveting question Jesus asked his disciples and now asks us: "Who do you say I am?" Jesus asked his disciples this question just after he'd fed the 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes. When it was evening and time for everyone to return home, Jesus gathered the disciples away from the crowds to debrief the experience with them. First, Jesus asked them what people were saying about him. He wanted to know who they said he was. The disciples told him that, basically, the people thought he was a prophet. Then Jesus got more personal. He asked the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered by saying, "The Christ of God."*

Even if we've read this story before, maybe we haven't paid much attention to the way we'd answer Jesus' question. It's such a basic question—maybe we think we know everything we need to know about Jesus. But in our complacency about this question, we've missed who Jesus really is. In fact, when it comes to our views on Jesus, we might have more in common with that fictional newscaster Ron Burgundy than we'd like to believe. This is Ron Burgundy, played by comedian Will Ferrell, doing an interview with Jim Caviezel as a goofy opening to the 2005 MTV Movie Awards [you can find this short clip on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAAcA108HfU>, or simply search on YouTube for "Ron Burgundy Interviews Jesus"—please note that there is one minor word near the end of the clip that some people will find offensive]. Jim Caviezel played Jesus in Mel Gibson's film The Passion of the Christ. Let's watch...

ASK:

- *Sure, this is over-the-top, but how is Ron Burgundy like or unlike the average Christian?*
- *Obviously, we don't act like a doofus with Jesus—but what did you see in this interview that revealed common misunderstandings about Jesus?*

1. It's easy to miss the "real" Jesus

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Sometimes, as hard as it is to believe, we act a lot like Ron Burgundy. We don't know Jesus all that well, but we think we do. We relate to Jesus like he's a magician or a celebrity or some kind of mythical figure. Honestly, we're not unlike Jesus' original disciples. They often had a hard time understanding who Jesus really is, even though they hung out with him and experienced so much. Jesus often said something like "You still don't understand me" to his disciples. For example, listen to this story about Thomas and Philip and Jesus, from John 14:4-9:*

"You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 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."

ASK:

- *Were the disciples stupid or thick or slow or...what? Why did they have such a hard time understanding Jesus?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *In a way, we're all like Philip. We've spent a lot of time with Jesus, but we don't seem to "get" him very well. We go through life trying to build a relationship with a Jesus we only think we know. In this series, we're taking Jesus' big question—Who do you say I am?—as a big, plump challenge.*

2. How well do we know Jesus?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Listen to this quote from Wild at Heart, written by John Eldredge: "I am convinced beyond a doubt of this: God wants to be loved. He wants to be a priority to someone. How could we have missed this? From cover to cover, from beginning to end, the cry of God's heart is, 'Why won't you choose me?' It is amazing to me how humble, how vulnerable God is on this point. 'You will find me,' says the Lord, 'when you seek me with all your heart' (Jeremiah 29:13). In other words, 'Look for me, pursue me—I want you to pursue me.' Amazing. As [A.W.] Tozer says, 'God waits to be wanted.'"*

Even though God invites us into intimacy, our everyday lives often funnel our passions into other pursuits—relationships, school, family. Whatever captures our passions has the power to shape us. In my life, one way my understanding of who Jesus is has changed and grown over the years is... [Share a personal example of how your experience of Jesus has changed over the years].

ASK:

- *What are some words that describe the way you see Jesus? Don't offer canned phrases from the Bible or other words you think you should say—instead, be brutally honest: What do you really think of Jesus?*
- *What's something about Jesus that doesn't seem to "fit" your general view of him—a story about something he said or did that seems confusing or at odds with the way you see him?*

3. Getting closer to Jesus

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Tom Melton, an author, speaker, and pastor of a Denver church, says: "We don't really believe Jesus is beautiful, because we wouldn't describe our relationship with him as so much work if we did." This is a great example of how our view of Jesus shapes our relationship with him. Maybe we "work" at our relationship with Jesus because we make faith a big "supposed to" in our lives. What if, instead, we understood firsthand how awesome Jesus is? How would that affect the way we describe our relationship with him?*

EXPERIENCE: Make sure each person has something to write on and something to write with. Divide the group in half, and tell half the people to stand at one end of your meeting area and the other half to stand at the other end. Instruct each person to choose someone from the other side of the room (if you have a mixed-gender group, try to pair girls with girls and guys with guys) and to stand directly across from that person.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Take two minutes to write as many descriptive words as you can about your partner at the other end of the room. Challenge yourself! Use any descriptive words you want, including impressions you have of that person—no negative words, though! By the way, no talking during this experience. [You may have to remind them of this rule. After two minutes, instruct partners to move very close to each other, within 12 inches of each other's faces.] I know this invades your space a little, but just pretend it's OK to be so close. Now take another two minutes to write descriptive words you missed before. Remember, no talking, and no negative words. [After two minutes, tell students to return to their seats.]*

ASK:

- *What changed in your descriptive words when you got closer?*
- *What's something you liked and didn't like about getting closer?*
- *How might getting closer to Jesus change your perspective of him?*
- *What's good about getting closer to Jesus, and what's hard about getting closer to him?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Here is the truth about our life with Christ: Get to know Jesus well, because the more you know him, the more you'll love him, and the more you love him, the more you'll want to follow him, and the more you follow him, the more you'll become like him, and the more you become like him, the more you become yourself.*

ASK:

- *What do you think that last statement means—"the more you become like him, the more you become yourself"?*

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Sometimes we read the Bible like a fairy tale rather than a life story. We treat the stories of Jesus in the Bible kind of like we do nursery rhymes. We know they contain truths, but we don't think of the characters as really real. But what if the whole of the Bible was really an invitation to experience how great and awesome Jesus is? And what if the Bible's stories about Jesus were intended to draw us to him—to bring us closer to him? And what if, as we grow closer to him, we discover the person inside he's always*

intended us to be?

ASK:

- *What are some things Jesus said and did that are unlike any person who has ever walked the earth?*
- *If you think about the people Jesus interacted with, what sort of impact did he often have on the people he encountered?*
- *Jesus said he is the very definition of "good"—in what ways was he good?*

SUMMARY

End your lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

"You will find me," says the Lord, "when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).