

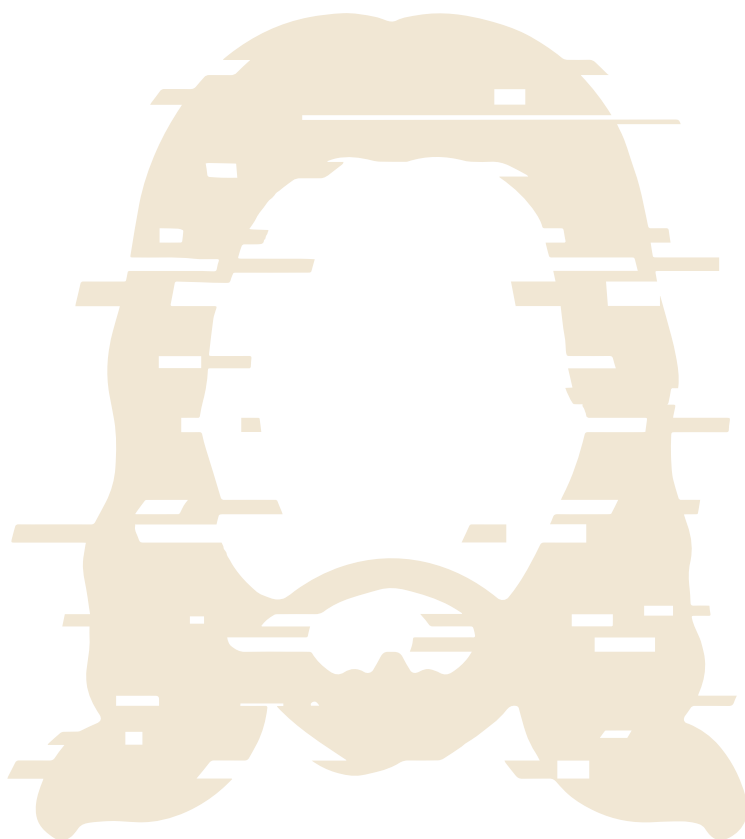
8-SESSION BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS
WITH VIDEO ACCESS



NOT MY JESUS

Reclaiming the Truth, Rejecting the Idols

SHANE PRUITT



NOT MY JESUS

Rejecting Idols, Reclaiming Truth

SHANE PRUITT

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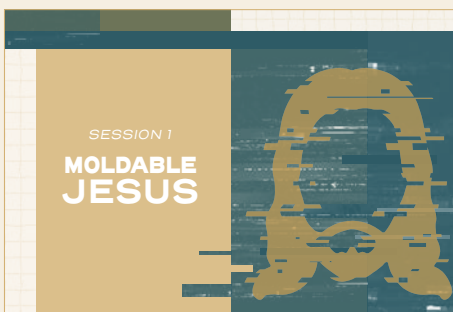


ABOUT THE AUTHOR SHANE PRUITT

Shane serves as the National Next Gen Director for the North American Mission Board (NAMB). He and his wife Kasi reside in Texas with their five children. He has been in ministry for over twenty years as a church planter, lead pastor, and student pastor. Shane is also a traveling communicator, evangelist, and Bible teacher. Every year, he speaks to over a hundred thousand people about the good news of Jesus Christ. He is the author of two books and a Bible study: *9 Common Lies Christians Believe: And Why God's Truth Is Infinitely Better*; *Calling Out the Called: Discipling Those Called to Ministry Leadership*; and *Revival Generation: Awakening to a Movement of God*. Shane is also one of the hosts of *The Gensend Podcast*.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study provides a guided process to help individuals and small groups look beyond their cultural assumptions about Jesus and find the real Jesus of Scripture. Eight weeks of study give participants the tools and space to reflect on the Jesus of Scripture and see why He is infinitely better than any look-alike. Through the study, we will deconstruct the false versions of Jesus our culture promotes and reaffirm a biblical understanding of Christ and His mission.



GROUP STUDY

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each session of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction around God's Word.



START

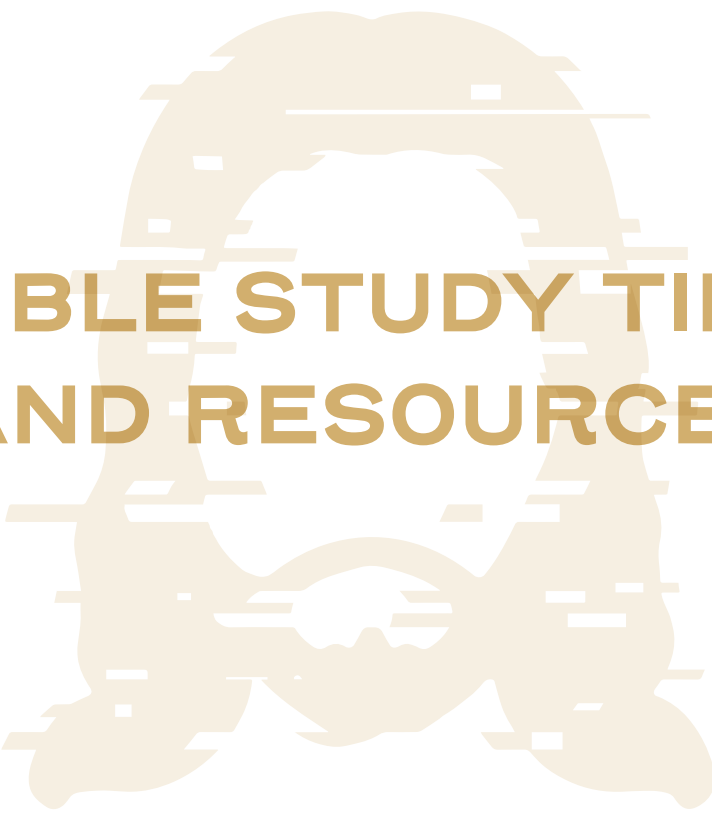
The group session will begin with a few questions designed to help you introduce the session's topic of study and encourage everyone to engage with the study.

This page provides space to take notes on the video teaching. Codes to access the videos are included with your purchase of this book and can be found on the insert located at the back of this book.

This section is the main component of the group session. The questions provided are designed to facilitate group discussion on the session's topic. The goal is to help you better understand the Jesus we find in Scripture

Three days of personal study are provided after each group session. With biblical teaching and introspective questions, these lessons challenge individuals to grow in their understanding of God's Word and respond in faith and obedience.

[illegible]



BIBLE STUDY TIPS AND RESOURCES

TIPS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Follow the provided weekly study plan. This will help maximize your comprehension of the material.

- Use a good study Bible for reference as you work through the content.
- Watch the weekly video teaching in a small group or with at least one other person. Then, discuss the questions in the corresponding section provided for Group Study together.
- Each week presents a cultural version of Jesus that contrasts with the Jesus we find in the Bible. Each week, try to describe the false version of Jesus in one sentence. Write another sentence that describes why the real Jesus is different and better.
- Share what you learn with others. As you progress in your knowledge and personally apply the material, you will be able to encourage others with the truth of Jesus.

TIPS FOR GROUPS & THEIR LEADERS

- Come to the meeting prepared. Your group discussion will be more impactful if you've read the Scripture, familiarized yourselves with the content, and completed the weekly personal study.
- Spend most of your discussion time in the Group Study section and work through the questions together. Take liberties to emphasize a particular question or two if it lends itself to greater discussion in the group.
- Utilize the Personal Response section to share prayer requests with the group. As you do, commit to praying for one another throughout the week.
- Ask your pastor or another church leader for insight when needed. Difficult questions or themes will arise during the study. Determine to seek out answers.
- Each week presents a false cultural version of Jesus. Before beginning the study, look through all of them so that you get an understanding of where you're going as a group. Doing so will help you focus the weekly group meeting on the topic of the week without drifting into other topics that will be covered later.
- The study also works to contrast these culturally assumed versions of Jesus with the Jesus we find in Scripture. Reading the words of Scripture will be the most important thing you do each week. Therefore, establish good Bible-reading habits. Reinforce the basic pattern of "read, understand, and apply" with each biblical passage in the Personal Study. These three elements should be present to some degree any time we engage with the Bible.
- Know your context. Consider the needs of your group and time constraints as you build out your weekly meeting plan.
- Along with knowing your group context, be aware of which cultural versions of Jesus are more present in your community.
- Determine your aim. Will you place a higher value on relationship-building and accountability or biblical study and education? While this study guide is designed to foster both, determining your focus from the outset will help with time allotment and group expectations.
- Maintain a degree of balance. For groups that emphasize relationship, be careful not to neglect study of the text. For those emphasizing study, be careful to incorporate heart-level response and prayer. We need both.



WHY YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE as the Authoritative Word Of God

The question of why we can trust the Bible as the authoritative Word of God is foundational for every Christian. In a world where truth is often seen as personal to your preferences and opinions, the Bible claims to be from God and authoritative, regardless of your preferences and opinions. The Scriptures are the divinely inspired revelation of God to His creation: humanity. This claim carries weight because the Bible speaks not only about history and morality but also about the nature of God, humanity, salvation, and eternity.

In order to understand and trust the Bible's authority, we must explore its inspiration, inerrancy, historical reliability, and transformative power.

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

One of the most fundamental reasons we can trust the Bible as the authoritative Word of God is because of its divine inspiration. The doctrine of inspiration teaches that the Bible is "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). This means that while human authors wrote the individual books of the Bible, they were guided by the Holy Spirit to record God's Word without error.

Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus, elaborates on this concept: "Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21). This passage underscores the belief that Scripture is not the product of human imagination or effort but the direct result of God's communication through the Holy Spirit.

R. C. Sproul defines biblical inspiration as the process by which “God superintended the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, styles, and cultural contexts, they composed and recorded without error His message to humanity.”¹ This divine inspiration ensures that the Bible contains God’s perfect and complete revelation.

Furthermore, Jesus Himself affirmed the authority of Scripture. In Matthew 5:17-18, He said, “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished.” Jesus affirmed the Scriptures were authoritative and unchanging, validating the Old Testament as the Word of God. His teaching, life, and death also fulfill the promises and prophecies within Scripture, further affirming its divine nature.

THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

In addition to its divine inspiration, the Bible’s inerrancy is crucial to understanding its authority. Inerrancy means that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is without error in all that it affirms, whether in matters of faith, history, or morality. If the Bible is truly God’s Word, then it must be free from error because God Himself is perfect and incapable of lying (Titus 1:2).

In John 17:17, Jesus prays to the Father, saying, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” This statement reveals that the Bible is not only true in the sense that it contains truth but that it is truth itself. The Bible does not merely conform to a standard of truth outside of itself; it is the very standard of truth because it is the Word of God.

Norman Geisler explains that “since God is the ultimate author of Scripture and God cannot err, it follows that Scripture cannot err.”² This reasoning is foundational to our trust in the Bible. If the Bible contained errors, it would cast doubt on its claim to be the authoritative Word of God. However, the consistent testimony of Scripture is that it is trustworthy in all it teaches.

THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible’s trustworthiness is also based on its historical reliability. The Bible records real historical events and people, many of which have been confirmed by archaeological discoveries and external historical sources. The historical accuracy of the Bible lends credibility to its claims of divine origin.

For example, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 provided substantial evidence for the accuracy of the Old Testament text. These ancient manuscripts, dating back to the second century BC, closely match the Hebrew text we have today, demonstrating the careful transmission of Scripture over the centuries.

Additionally, numerous historical figures and events recorded in the Bible, such as King David, Pontius Pilate, and the destruction of Jerusalem, have been corroborated by external sources. Archaeologist Nelson Glueck stated, “No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”³ While archaeology cannot prove the divine inspiration of the Bible, it does confirm the Bible’s reliability as a historical document, which strengthens our confidence in its truth claims.

The New Testament, particularly the Gospels, also stands up to historical scrutiny. The Gospels were written within a few decades of Jesus’s life, which is an extremely short time frame for ancient documents. The authors of the New Testament, many of whom were eyewitnesses to the events they recorded, had firsthand knowledge of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. The apostle Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, recounts the appearances of the risen Christ to over five hundred people, many of whom were still alive at the time of his writing, encouraging readers to verify the truth of the resurrection for themselves.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SCRIPTURE

Finally, the Bible’s authority is confirmed by its transformative power. The Bible is not just a collection of ancient writings; it is the living Word of God that changes lives. The writer of Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Through the Bible, God speaks directly to His people, convicting them of sin, comforting them in suffering, and guiding them in truth.

The Bible’s power to transform lives is evident throughout history. Countless individuals, from Augustine to Martin Luther to modern-day believers, have testified to the life-changing impact of God’s Word. Charles Spurgeon once remarked, “The Word of God is like a lion. You don’t have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself.”⁴ This analogy highlights the Bible’s power to defend itself by its transformative effect on those who read it.

Scripture has also played a central role in shaping cultures and societies. The principles of justice, human dignity, and morality found in the Bible have influenced legal systems, governments, and social movements throughout history. From the abolition of slavery to the civil rights movement, the Bible’s teachings have inspired transformative social change, testifying to its authority as a guide for living.

THE BIBLE CAN BE TRUSTED

In conclusion, we can trust the Bible as the authoritative Word of God because it is divinely inspired, inerrant, historically reliable, and transformative. The Bible stands apart from all other books because it is not merely the product of human effort but the very Word of God, breathed out by Him and preserved for us. Its teachings are true, its historical claims are reliable, and its impact on individual lives and society is undeniable. Jen Wilkin writes, “We need historical narrative, poetry, wisdom literature, law, prophecy, and parables all showing us the character of God from different angles. And we need to see the gospel story from Genesis to Revelation. A well-rounded approach to Bible study challenges us to learn the full counsel of God’s Word.”⁵

As Christians, our faith is built on the solid foundation of God’s Word. In a world of shifting opinions and unreliable sources of truth, the Bible remains the unchanging, authoritative guide for our lives. As we study Scripture, we can be confident that we are hearing the voice of God, who has revealed Himself to us through His Word. When the Bible speaks, God speaks.

It is through this Word that we come to know the real Jesus and understand what He calls us to be and do!



*“There is compelling evidence that
Jesus Christ was who He claimed to be –
the one and only Son of God.
The atheism that I had embraced
for so long buckled under
the weight of historical truth.”*

Lee Strobel⁶

1. R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 35.
2. Norman Geisler, *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 15.
3. Nelson Glueck, quoted in Paul L. Maier, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 71.
4. Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Greatest Fight in the World* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 12.
5. Jen Wilkin, *Women of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 46.
6. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), 269.

SESSION 1

MOLDABLE JESUS



GROUP SESSION 1

START

Welcome to session 1, “Moldable Jesus.”

Use pages 16–19 to facilitate the group discussion.

How would you finish this statement: My Jesus is: _____?

What has led you to make that conclusion?

Why do different people have different opinions about who Jesus is?

What leads them to form those opinions?

One of the reasons we all liked Play-Doh as children (some of us still do) was because we believed we could create anything we wanted. We’d mold, shape, and bend it to become something that matched our imagination. However, if we didn’t like how it was turning out, we could pick everything up, roll it in a ball, and start over.

Sadly, that is how many people today approach Jesus. Many people claim to love Jesus even if they don’t like the Bible, because the Jesus they claim to love and follow is not the Jesus of the Bible. The Jesus they love is a Jesus they’ve created by their own imagination. When you see Jesus as moldable, you shape and create Him to be what you want Him to be. You may believe things like, “My Jesus cares about what I care about, my Jesus gets angry about what I get angry about, my Jesus tolerates the lifestyles that I tolerate,” and so on.

How would you know if you were worshiping a Play-Doh Jesus?

If the Jesus you sing to, serve, tell others about, and worship is a Jesus you’ve created according to your own opinions, preferences, and tolerances, all you’ve done is create an idol named Jesus. But idols can’t do anything helpful. Your made-up Jesus will never bring you real freedom, power, or joy, because He is not the real Jesus. Only the real Jesus of the Bible can save and transform you. He is the real Savior and Lord.



PRAY BEFORE WATCHING THE VIDEO TEACHING.

WATCH

Watch the session 1 video and use the space below to take additional notes.

When we shape Jesus into who we want Him to be, all we've done is create an idol named Jesus. There is no power in idols.

Isaiah 64:8

"Who do you say that Jesus is?" is a question we each must answer for ourselves.

Matthew 16:13-15

Our opinions about Jesus don't change who He is, but our faith in the real Jesus will absolutely change who we are. Real faith in the real Jesus brings real power—the power of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 16:16-18

Do you have a personal relationship with the real Jesus, or have you been worshiping an idol named Jesus?

DISCUSS

Look to the Scriptures and reclaim the truth of who Jesus is.

READ MATTHEW 16:13–20.

In a city known for its idolatry, Jesus asked His disciples what people were saying and believing about who He is. The disciples told Him some of the opinions they'd heard.

What four false beliefs did people have about Jesus (v. 14)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Some thought Jesus was a herald of national repentance, like John the Baptist. Some thought Jesus was a famous worker of miracles, like Elijah. Some thought Jesus was someone who spoke the words of God, like Jeremiah and the prophets. Nothing has changed about this today. People still maintain many false beliefs and opinions about who Jesus is.

What are some of the false views about Jesus that you hear floating around today? Where do these false views of Jesus come from?

After hearing the false beliefs about Himself, Jesus turned the question to His disciples and asked them the most important question any of us will ever have to answer: “Who you do say that I am?” (v. 15).

How does the way we live every day reflect how we answer this question about Jesus?

How we live reveals what we believe to be true about Jesus. But to get objective truth about Jesus, we need to look to the Bible. Our opinions and needs don't change who Jesus is. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). However, your faith in the real Jesus will absolutely transform the way you live.

Peter responded by confessing the truth of who Jesus is (v. 16).

What do each of these titles of Jesus mean?

“You are the Messiah”:

“The Son of the living God”:

The real Jesus is the Messiah—the promised One of the Old Testament and the Son of the living God. He is more than a national reformer, more than a miracle worker, more than a prophet—He is the Son of God. This makes Him equivalent in stature and power to God. Jesus is not just sent from God, He is God. The church is built on this definition of Jesus. This confession is the key to faith in Christ.

Why is this Jesus, defined by the Bible, better than a Jesus of our own making?

Why is it important to evaluate our beliefs about Jesus with the Jesus described in the Bible? Share about a time when you've done this.

A creation made of clay can be changed any time we don't like it. The real Jesus never changes. Why is this good news for us?

Shane explained, “Our opinions about Jesus don't change who He is, but our faith in the real Jesus will absolutely change who we are.” Have you seen this truth in your own life? Explain.



CLOSE YOUR TIME IN PRAYER.



Personal Study 1

The Real Jesus Is FULLY GOD

Each session in *Not My Jesus* presents a made-up Jesus that has been created by culture. Throughout the personal studies, we're going to look into the Bible day by day to meet the Jesus of the Bible and see how the real Jesus is better than any imitation.

READ JOHN 1:1–4.

When was Jesus born?

The easy answer would be two thousand years ago. After all, that's why we celebrate Christmas. While it's true that at that time the Son of God became a human to rescue humanity, it's also true that the Son of God existed long before He was born to Mary in a little town called Bethlehem. Jesus—the Word made flesh—is eternal. In other words, there was never a time when He didn't exist. While all of us are created beings who exist in time, Jesus is the uncreated Creator who stands outside of time.

How should the reality that Jesus is eternal shape the way we think about Him?

What we believe about Jesus shapes how we relate to Jesus. For example, some false religions teach that Jesus was only a man or was the first created being. These are lies that don't align with the teaching of the Bible. Jesus is not just sent from God—Jesus is God. He isn't mostly God, He is fully God. (See Colossians 1:15-20.)

In John 1, Jesus is referred to as “the Word”—He was in the beginning with God, and He is God Himself. John 1 also says Jesus was present and active at the creation of the universe (v. 3). You can see this confirmed in Genesis 1.

Fill in the blanks from Genesis 1:26 (CSB):

Then God said, "Let _____ make man in _____ image, according to _____ likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."

The “us” and “our” of Genesis 1 refer to the triune God. The God of the Bible is one God who has eternally existed in three separate but coequal Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus was there at the beginning. We received life from Him and find our life in Him (John 1:4). Because Jesus is eternal, He doesn’t change to fit our needs. We change to align with Him.

Why is an eternal Jesus who created you better than a moldable Jesus shaped by you?

Created beings (like us) are shaped by time and circumstance. We are moldable. But because Jesus is fully God and eternal, He doesn’t change. He isn’t moldable like we are. This is great news because when we enter into a relationship with the real Jesus, we are shaped and changed by the One who never changes. A God like this, a Jesus like we find in the Bible, is truly worth worshipping.

What is the Lord revealing to you through His Word today?

PRAY

Spend time telling Jesus how awesome He is—not because He needs to hear it, but because you need to be reminded. Trust in the truth of who He is today, knowing He is worth following.



Personal Study 2

The Real Jesus Had a HEAVENLY FATHER & EARTHLY PARENTS

READ MATTHEW 1:18–25.

The virgin birth is one of the things about Jesus we tend to take for granted. We acknowledge it and move on. Why does it matter that Jesus was born to a virgin?

Jesus is different than every person who ever lived because He is the only person who was born to a virgin mother. Through an incredible act of God, a young woman named Mary became pregnant through the Holy Spirit (v. 20). What we assume about Jesus today was surely the talk of the town in their day because Jesus's earthly parents—Mary and Joseph weren't married.

Matthew 1 gives us at least two reasons that Jesus was born to a virgin. Look at the following verses and identify the reasons:

Verse 21:

Verses 22-23:

Jesus was born to a virgin so that He could save us from our sins (v. 21) and to fulfill a prophecy that God made long ago through His prophet Isaiah (vv. 22-23). In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned, all of humanity inherited a sinful nature. That means that every person ever born is sinful by nature. We sin because we are, in a sense, born to. This is true of every person but one. Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He

did not inherit the sinful nature of His earthly mother. He is unique. Because He had no sin of His own, He was equipped to save us from our sin.

What are some ways you have been molded by your sinful nature?

Why should we not want to worship a Jesus who can be shaped by outside influence?

Jesus had a heavenly Father and earthly parents. He is totally different from every other person who has ever lived. One of the ways you and I are formed in this world is through the poor decisions we make. We innately desire to sin. We make choices we wouldn't make if we didn't have a sinful nature. Jesus isn't like us in this way. He always did what His heavenly Father required. He served God perfectly, and because of that, He is the only One qualified to save us. Instead of a Jesus who can be shaped into who we want Him to be, shouldn't we want the Jesus who is sinless and able to save?

Journal: What is the Lord revealing to you through His Word today?

PRAY

Spend time asking the Lord to show you the ways you have tried to mold Jesus into who you want Him to be. Ask Him to help you see clearly the only Jesus who is able to save.



Personal Study 3

The Real Jesus Is FULLY HUMAN

READ LUKE 2:4–7 AND 41–52.

What do you imagine it was like to interact with Jesus when He was a child?

How does it make you feel to see that Jesus grew and learned like we do?

Each of us excel in different areas of learning. I have to be honest—I'm not good at all when it comes to math. Now, I can do the simple math, like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and even division. But when you start adding letters to the equation, I am out!

However, the math of who Jesus is, if you will, is simple, though paradoxical. Jesus is one hundred percent God and, at the same time, one-hundred percent human. The theological term for this is the *hypostatic union of Christ*. Jesus is truly God and, at the same time, truly human. In one person, God and humanity have come together perfectly.

What about this is difficult, or easy, for you to understand or believe?

The Son of God came to earth over two thousand years ago to become a human and die as a human for all humankind—but He also never stopped being God. Fully God and fully human. He did this by being born through a human mother. Though Jesus was perfect, He also had to learn how to walk, talk, write, and even had to grow and mature like the rest of us. By taking on human form and going through every stage of human development, He truly humbled Himself. Because of this, He knows what it is like to be you. Read that again: God knows what it is like to be you.

A God who knows what it's like to be us is better than a God who is shaped by us. Instead of going to a Play-doh Jesus who we can make into whatever we want, let's continue to look to the God who chose to become like us so that He could save us from our sin and ourselves.

Fill in the blanks from Luke 2:52 (CSB):

*And _____ increased in _____
and _____, and in _____ with
_____ and with _____.*

Why is it comforting to know that you follow a God who knows what it's like to be human?

Why should the real Jesus being fully God and fully man make us want to worship Him fully?

Journal: What is the Lord revealing to you through His Word today?

PRAY

Read Philippians 2:5-11. Spend time today thanking the Lord for humbling Himself on your behalf. Ask Him to give you the same attitude of humility towards others.

WRAP UP

As we wrap up the week, we want to think back on who Jesus is and who Jesus isn't. In the spaces below, compare the real Jesus of the Bible with the fake Jesus from our imagination, culture, or preferences.

Moldable Jesus is:

The real Jesus is:

Only the real Jesus can truly save and transform lives.

While it is true that Jesus meets us where we are, He doesn't change who He is. When we meet the real Jesus, we are the ones who must change.



But have you met the real Jesus? Or do you worship a version of Jesus that fits your pre-conceived notions, your parents' description, or the culture's wish list? Through this 8-session Bible study, it is our hope that you will:

- Cultivate a proper view of the authority of Scripture
- Get to know who the real Jesus is
- Learn to spot false versions of Jesus
- Introduce friends and neighbors to the biblical Jesus

STUDYING ON YOUR OWN?

To enrich your study experience, be sure to access the videos available through a redemption code printed in this *Bible Study Book*.

LEADING A GROUP?

Each group member will need a *Not My Jesus Bible Study Book*, which includes video access. Because all participants will have access to the video content, you can choose to watch the videos outside of your group meeting if desired. Or, if you're watching together and someone misses a group meeting, they'll have the flexibility to catch up.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

eBook with Video Access

This eBook includes the content of this printed book but offers the convenience and flexibility that comes with digital technology.

005852056 **\$19.99**

DVD Set

005852057 **\$29.99**

More resources can be found online at lifeway.com/notmyjesus

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WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING?

To know the real Jesus, we must see Him through the pages of the Bible. This Jesus doesn't change based on our feelings or opinions; He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Only this Jesus can save and transform our lives. In this 8-session Bible study, you will identify ways that many misunderstand Jesus by comparing the Jesus of Scripture to counterfeit versions shaped by preferences, opinions, and culture.

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