



JESUS-CENTERED

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES

*7 Sessions for Discovering Jesus
in the Old and New Testaments*



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*7 Sessions for Discovering Jesus
in the Old and New Testaments*

Loveland, CO

Group
Real. Bold. Love.



Group resources really work!

This Group resource incorporates our R.E.A.L. approach to ministry. It reinforces a growing friendship with Jesus, encourages long-term learning, and results in life transformation, because it's:

Relational—Learner-to-learner interaction enhances learning and builds Christian friendships.

Experiential—What learners experience through discussion and action sticks with them up to 9 times longer than what they simply hear or read.

Applicable—The aim of Christian education is to equip learners to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.

Learner-based—Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.

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LEADER GUIDE

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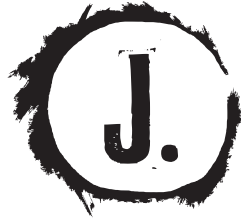
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INTRODUCTION

We're delighted that you want to grow closer to Jesus and experience the unique features of your *Jesus-Centered Bible* by using these seven 1-hour studies.

Your Bible uses blue letters to identify references to Jesus in the Old Testament, so you'll easily discover how Jesus has been present and active throughout all of history. You'll encounter Jesus in every session, again and again, in fresh ways.

Use these studies in a small group, a Sunday school class, or anywhere you gather with friends who want to know Jesus better.

These studies are engaging, active, and ready for your use—so dive in!

TIPS FOR LEADING JESUS-CENTERED BIBLE STUDIES

Each session aims to have you do two things: (1) discover some aspect(s) of Jesus' identity as revealed or foreshadowed in the Old Testament sources, and (2) explore and reflect on your identity in Christ. "The closer we get to Jesus, the more we discover our true identity and purpose in life" (*Jesus-Centered Bible*, page A6).

Because Jesus wants to be in relationship with us, these Bible studies are highly relational. Much of the time, participants will meet in small groups of two or four people. These groups serve as natural incubators for personal sharing and expression, self-discovery, and relationship building—all while maximizing participation.

These Bible studies are also fun and interactive, so people fully engage with each other and with the Bible. This ensures that your study group members will not only learn and retain information about Jesus, but they will also know and experience Jesus on a personal level that results in lasting transformation.

Living out our Jesus-shaped identity can be done only through our real-life thoughts and actions. So we've included some practical ways of staying connected to Jesus after each session is complete. Make copies of the **Abiding in Jesus** activities at the end of each session's instructions. Encourage participants to try the ideas on these take-home pages, and ask follow-up questions when you gather again.

USING YOUR JESUS-CENTERED BIBLE

Here are short descriptions of the unique features of the *Jesus-Centered Bible* that you'll be using while leading these Bible studies. Your time together will be more fun and productive if you take a few minutes up front to familiarize yourself and your study group with these features. (You can find even more details and tips on pages A6-A13 of the *Jesus-Centered Bible* itself.)

BLUE-LETTER TEXT

The *Jesus-Centered Bible* uses blue-letter print to highlight Old Testament passages that refer to Jesus, such as prophecies, themes, and verses that Jesus quoted.

BLUE EXPLANATION BOXES

Accompanying each blue-letter passage in the Old Testament is a blue box at the bottom of the page. These boxes make explicit the connections between the passage and Jesus, including links to relevant New Testament passages.

“JESUS IN EVERY BOOK” ESSAYS

Each book of the *Jesus-Centered Bible* features an introduction that gives a surprising, profound, and personal perspective on Jesus’ story in that book—a story that weaves like a golden thread through the tapestry of the entire Bible.

“REFRAMING JESUS” SIDEBARS

Scattered throughout the Old and New Testaments, these short pieces offer interesting context, surprising backstories, and penetrating theological insights that highlight the beauty of Jesus in that particular section of Scripture.

JESUS QUESTIONS

Just as Jesus used surprising and personal questions to prompt deeper reflection, the *Jesus-Centered Bible* scatters throughout the New Testament more than 100 questions about Jesus and our relationship with him.

RED-LETTER NAMES OF JESUS

The words of Jesus spoken in the four New Testament gospels are printed in red, just as in many other Bibles. However, the *Jesus-Centered Bible* goes a step further by printing in red *any* name, nickname, or title that clearly refers to Jesus in the New Testament writings.

LIFE’S ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Nine of life’s biggest, most significant questions are raised several times in the New Testament gospels. The *Jesus-Centered Bible* highlights those questions, as well as Jesus’ penetrating responses to them.

To lead these studies, you need only this leader guide and the *Jesus-Centered Bible*, along with a few simple supplies. Each participant will also need a copy of the *Jesus-Centered Bible*. Journals are available and make a great optional companion piece for participants who want to dig deeper throughout the week.

- *Jesus-Centered Bible*, available in hardcover and imitation leather
- *Jesus-Centered Journal*, available in turquoise, charcoal, saddle, and cranberry

May we also suggest...

- *The Jesus-Centered Life* by Rick Lawrence

These resources can be purchased at group.com or from your favorite Christian retailer.

SESSION 1:

CREATOR JESUS

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session you'll encounter Jesus as Creator and discover you're among his loved and valued creations. Not only are you created in his image, but you've been given the opportunity to help care for some of his creation.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- A copy of the *Jesus-Centered Bible* for each person
- Blank sheet of paper and a pencil for each person
- A photocopy of the “Abiding in Jesus” take-home page for each person

1. GATHERING

(60 MINUTES REMAIN; USE 8 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Greet participants and welcome them warmly. Give everyone a blank sheet of paper and a pencil.

Say: **Picture for a moment a favorite place in nature. Perhaps you love walking along an ocean beach or hiking in the mountains. Or maybe you're fascinated by watching the tigers at the zoo or snorkeling with colorful fish along a coral reef. Take a few minutes to draw a quick sketch of a favorite spot in nature.**

Don't worry if your drawing doesn't fully capture the beauty of the spot you have in mind; you'll get a chance to describe it.

After several minutes, ask participants to form small groups of four persons each.

Say: **It's time for show and tell! Show the others in your small group what you drew and tell them what makes that spot in nature special to you.**

Allow several minutes for conversation; give a one-minute warning to wrap up conversation by saying: **Take another minute to talk in your small group.**

When a minute has passed, say: **Thanks for sharing your sketches and your stories. Hang onto your sketch and pencil; you'll need them again.**

You know, lots of people find a spiritual connection with God through nature. Here's something else for you to talk about in your group of four:

❓ What, if anything, does your special spot in nature tell you about God?

Allow several minutes for small groups to talk, and then give a one-minute warning to wrap up conversation.

2. NOTICING JESUS

(52 MINUTES REMAIN; USE 10 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Ask participants to turn to Genesis 1:1-2 (p. 5) in their copies of the *Jesus-Centered Bible* and follow along as a volunteer reads aloud both Genesis 1:1-2 and the Blue Explanation Box at the bottom of page 5. (All page numbers refer to the *Jesus-Centered Bible*.)

Then ask for a volunteer to read aloud John 1:1-5 (p. 1107).

Say: **Christians often focus on Jesus as Savior...but he's more. He's also Creator.**

Creator of that spot in nature you talked about and Creator of the cosmos. And, more to the point, Creator of us—of you and me.

If we're going to notice Jesus for who he is, in the Bible and in life, we have to notice him as Creator.

A question for you in your small group:

- ?** **How well did Jesus do as Creator, would you say? If you were giving Creator Jesus a grade for the work he did—in the universe and in you—what grade would you give him, and why?**

Allow several minutes for small groups to talk, and then give a one-minute warning to wrap up conversation.

Ask: **Where did you land with grades? Anyone willing to share with the whole group what you discussed in your small group of four?**

Allow time for reporting back from the smaller groups.

3. CREATOR JESUS

(42 MINUTES REMAIN, USE 5 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Say: **Thanks for sharing your insights.**

Maybe you haven't thought much about Jesus as Creator.

Many Christians have Jesus in a box that opens on Christmas morning in Bethlehem and closes as Jesus rises back to heaven after his resurrection. They know they'll

see him again at the great Resurrection when he returns, but they haven't thought much about what he did before the manger and what he's up to now...

Which includes, according to the Bible, creating. Jesus is identified as Creator in both the Old and New Testaments—as demonstrated in the passages we just read.

A question for us as a whole group:

❓ In what way, if any, does your image of Jesus change when you think of him as creator of the universe?

Allow time for whole group discussion.

4. JESUS IN JOHN

(37 MINUTES REMAIN, USE 8 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Ask participants to turn to page 1106 of their *Jesus-Centered Bibles* and to follow along as a volunteer reads aloud the “Jesus in John” essay.

After the volunteer finishes, read aloud again the fourth paragraph—the one beginning with “Matthew begins with a genealogy from Abraham...”

Say: We sometimes picture a creator as a solitary sculptor working in a studio, or a painter sitting alone trying to capture a landscape on canvas.

That's not how Jesus creates. According to the Bible, Jesus is part of a relationship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and he's a co-creator of all we see and experience.

Jesus is all about relationships—with God, the Holy Spirit, and with us. He’s still shaping us as we grow, and stands ready to collaborate with us as we express our God-given creativity.

Our creativity might be expressed in the arts...or the kitchen...in parenting...or as we reach a solution to a problem at work. Jesus’ work in and through us isn’t yet done.

Ask participants to huddle up with their groups of four again and to discuss this:

- ? Tell about a time you’ve experienced Jesus creating something in or through you. What happened—and how did it feel?**

5. ANIMAL IMPROVEMENTS

(29 MINUTES REMAIN; USE 10 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Thank participants for sharing their stories, and then ask them to turn over their papers so they can draw on the back side.

Ask everyone to draw an animal improvement they’d consider making.

For instance, they might draw a dog who can drive—so road trips with the family Fido are easier. Or a cat with opposable thumbs—so it can open its own food tins. Or a kangaroo big enough to carry them in its pouch.

Tell participants they can improve on any animal they want, and they can make as many improvements as they wish... but they have just three minutes to sketch.

After three minutes have passed, invite participants to share with their small groups what they drew—and why. Allow up to two minutes for this.

6. PRAYER

(19 MINUTES REMAIN; USE 4 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Say: **Jesus is a Creator—and he has the power to improve on his designs in nature (though he might not necessarily sign off on our suggestions!).**

But he very much wants to hear your ideas about making changes for a particular spot in nature...and he's very willing to engage with you in making them. That spot is your own life.

Let's pause for a moment to tell Jesus where we could use his help making changes in our lives.

Perhaps it's letting go of a past hurt. Or you need help with a physical condition. Maybe you know you're not faithfully following him in some area of your life.

Whatever it is, silently tell Jesus about it as we sit quietly for several minutes. Be honest and open—this is your chance to invite the Creator of the universe into your life in a fresh way to continue in you the good work he's started.

I'll close our time of prayer after two minutes of silence.

After two minutes, say: **Thank you for your love and power, Jesus. Thank you for hearing us. Amen.**

7. HOW'S IT FEEL?

(15 MINUTES REMAIN; USE 4 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Say: **Thank you. I won't ask you to share what you and Jesus talked about; that's between the two of you.**

But in your small group, please talk about this:

- ? How much hope do you have that Jesus will somehow help you deal with what you discussed? Why do you answer as you do?**

8. REFLECTING JESUS

(11 MINUTES REMAIN; USE 8 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Say: **Creator Jesus has given us an opportunity to help manage what he's created. Let's pause to consider how well we're handling the honor.**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:26-31 (p. 6). Then ask the whole group this question:

- ? Overall, how's humanity doing taking care of this planet? Why do you answer as you do?**

After several responses, ask each person to find a partner and discuss this question:

- ? Forget humanity. How are *you* doing caring for *your* corner of the planet? What's something you're doing well, and what's something you'd consider changing so you could do an even better job?**

After three minutes, ask for volunteers to share with the larger group what they discussed with their partners. After several people have shared, move to section 9.

9. CROWNED WITH GLORY

(3 MINUTES REMAIN; USE 3 MINUTES IN THIS SECTION)

Thanks for considering how you're reflecting Creator Jesus—and how you can stay connected to him both *as his creation* and as someone serving him in *managing his creation*.

By the way, you're quite the creation! Let's celebrate that by grabbing our *Jesus-Centered Bibles* and reading together Psalm 8 (p. 564).

Ask participants to take turns reading verses until you've finished all nine verses of the psalm.

ABIDING IN JESUS

Want to interact more with Creator Jesus? Try this activity.

Spend 30 minutes outdoors in some natural setting: park, garden, forest, wildlife preserve. Use the first 15 minutes for silent observation, simply writing notes just as a naturalist would: describe plants, wildlife, sights and sounds, and so on.

Next, take another 15 minutes to read two passages from the *Jesus-Centered Bible*: Colossians 1:15-17 (pp. 1241-1242) and Hebrews 1:1-3 (p. 1277) and then reflect on these four questions, either in silent reflection or by writing down your thoughts and impressions:

❓ What meaning do these verses give to the observations of nature you just wrote?

❓ In these Scriptures, what is the relationship between creation, Jesus, and God?

❓ What do these passages say to you about God's heart for people and creation?

❓ How will your reflections affect *your* relationship with God, with others, and with creation?
