

The Person of Jesus Leader's Guide

Summary

This Leader's Guide will help you...

- Start a study with seekers.
- Handle difficult situations or questions in a study with seekers.
- Understand the concept behind *The Person of Jesus* study.

Not sure where to begin? The best way to become familiar with how to use this study with seekers is to read Point H, "Evangelism in a Changed World."

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A. The Idea Behind The Person of Jesus Study

The Gap

Non-Christians are increasingly distant from Christianity. They do not know the Bible, the gospel, or the church. (We live in very different cultures.) What they do not understand makes them nervous. Their nervousness is compounded by the generally negative portrayal of evangelical Christians in the media.

The effect of the Gap on witnessing

It is common to encounter cold shoulders and blank stares when we talk about how the gospel delivers from guilt. Non-Christians may want to be delivered from their husbands, their teenagers, or their loneliness—but not their guilt. The result is that Christians feel powerless in their evangelism. The more you get to know non-Christians, the more you are impressed with how far they are from Christianity. You may become overwhelmed with this distance and do not even bother sharing your faith.

An Opportunity

Nevertheless, non-Christians have pleasant ideas about Jesus; and, at the same time, modern secular religion (Oprah, Dear Abby) leaves their lives empty and their relationships in shambles. It makes sense that they might be open to a study of relationships by looking at the person of Jesus. Instead of inviting non-Christians to a Bible study, you invite them to study the person of Jesus, to see how he loves people.

Stop thinking “evangelism” and start thinking “How can I get this person to fall in love with Jesus?” If you are married, think of how you fell in love. It was, most likely, a process of building trust and learning to enjoy your future spouse. That is what non-Christians will have the opportunity to do with Jesus. The material builds slowly to give them time to feel safe with you, Jesus, and the Bible.

Each lesson gives participants practical concepts that will help them in their daily lives, even if they are not Christians. Jesus taught people even before they understood the gospel. When you teach someone to forgive, it is like healing a leper—it does not save his soul, but it is a step toward Jesus and greater sanity. The teaching approach to evangelism holds out the possibility of making stronger long-term disciples who know the Bible well and have thought thoroughly about obedience and faith. People cannot study Jesus very long before they realize that he is studying them.

Apply it to your life

Some Christians first go through this study with other Christians to be disciplined themselves. The watching world (and they are watching) is hunting for one thing: love. Nothing is more arresting than getting to know an authentic person who looks like Jesus. In this study, they meet Jesus at two levels: in the Word and in the lives of Christians in the group. More than anything else, Christian love for them will be what will win them to Jesus. Do not rush to win people with words; love them before you preach to them.

[For a more complete description of how *The Person of Jesus* study suits our culture, read Point H, “Evangelism in a Changed World.”]

B. Combining Evangelism and Discipleship

This approach combines evangelism and discipleship. For some people, this is a new idea. Here are some reflections on this idea:

Our group included a neighbor who was a graduate student in Catholic theology, a former neighbor who is Catholic and had never studied the Bible before, and also did not seem to know the Lord personally, a neighbor who had never seen a Bible before, a neighbor from a more liberal Presbyterian denomination, and two or three other evangelicals. We all learned, and we all learned together. I have been a Christian for over 30 years,

and consider myself to be pretty familiar with the Bible from attending and leading inductive discussion Bible studies, but I learned to see Jesus in a whole new way, noticing details about his loving ways that I had never seen in the Scriptures before.

Ruth Ann Irwin, participant in a Person of Jesus study

When we had our *Person of Jesus* study in New Jersey last year, most of the folks who participated were from our church but we sought both to disciple and to evangelize because not everyone there was a Christian, and even if they were, who doesn't need to be reminded of who Jesus is over and over again. We figured that if the focus was on Christ, then the study would undoubtedly build into the lives of both believer and not-yet-believer.

Greg Houck, Pastor, leader of a Person of Jesus study

The “evangelism-discipleship” tension is one of the abiding tensions because of our tendency to bifurcate unities and obsess on one half only. In fact, Jesus invites people, “Come follow me,” and Jesus says to those already following, “Keep coming and following me”. “Evangelism” and “discipleship” sound far apart to many people; but “Come on over and keep coming on over” aren't that far apart: Colossians 2:6 and Matthew 28:19f are just 2 of countless passages that have such “initial turning” and “keep on turning” implications simultaneously. You will continually be breaking down “hardening of the categories.”

David Powlison (PhD), Westminster Theological Seminary

It seems to me that the command in the Great Commission is laden with a command to action, and yet literally says make disciples. In the study we've had here, the Word is doing its work and the folks who are not coming to Christ are definitely disturbed, internally wrestling with what their view is of God. We have just told people we were going to study the Bible in order to learn more of who Jesus is. I guess God has just gone before us. It's a great study.

Melody Burke, church staff and co-leader of a Person of Jesus study

The fact that *Love Walked Among Us* and *The Person of Jesus* are useful to both evangelism and discipleship is indicative of the gospel's power to both evangelize non-Christian's and to edify Christians. This is an important truth that is often missing in our current debate over “seeker and non-seeker” services. It is true if you preach/teach in such a way to reach Christians you will lose non-Christians and if you preach/teach in such a way to reach non-Christians you will lose (bore) Christians. I think both approaches are wrong.... if we preach Christ we will reach both Christians and non-Christians for Jesus. Jesus said, “When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.” I think we make a BIG mistake when we think Christians need more than Jesus and non-Christians something less!

John Stringer, pastor, leader of Person of Jesus study

People want too sharply to divide the work of evangelism and discipleship. What they should be doing is seeing that everyone needs the gospel no matter where you are. Churches have groups that are segregated (believer groups and unbeliever groups) rather than letting folks care for and struggle with each other all in the same group. If they would have more full spectrum groups, then everyone would see their need and other's needs and use the gospel more effectively.

Your material seems to be meeting that need. That's why both believers and unbelievers are drawn to it. The gospel is for everyone and we can grow deeper and investigate the surface all in one study.

Drew Derreth, Pastor

The POJ study is a valuable tool for discipleship and evangelism. Is not that what the gospel is—both? After dinner, I like to have dessert. They each have a different purpose but I crave them both. The POJ is like the total meal.

Scott McBride, Person of Jesus study participant

C. Checklist: Starting a Home-Based Study with Seekers

Most *Person of Jesus* studies have been in homes. It is a natural, warm environment where people feel comfortable and relaxed. It requires relatively little preparation.

1. ____ Form a Team

- a. Find at least one partner and, if possible, two. (See “Reflections on Team Ministry” at the end of Point D, p. 390.)
- b. The value of the team is that one person might have the non-Christian contacts, another might be a good Bible teacher, and another might be a good host. Do not feel like you each have to be good at everything.
- c. If you are launching a *Person of Jesus* study as part of your ongoing small group, then the natural leadership structure can occur within your small group.

2. ____ Connect with your church leadership

From the very beginning, stay in contact with your church leadership. Inform them of your plans, ask for their input, and ask for prayer. Keep them informed of your progress and give them specific things to pray for. This can be done in the context of your small group or by reporting to an elder. Most pastors and elders are eager to see their church reach out and will be more than happy to pray for you. Your work is not separate from the church but an essential part of it.

3. ____ Pray by yourself and with your partners

- a. I cannot emphasize enough how important prayer is. If you want to see God do a supernatural work, you have to enlist supernatural means. If you want non-Christians to see the unseen world, you have to talk to God about their blindness. You are going into enemy territory, and you must not do it alone or without a cover of prayer.
- b. Write down the names of people you would like to invite and begin praying for them daily. Not only does God answer, but daily praying for people increases your love for them.
- c. Prayer is difficult because you will feel you are not accomplishing anything. You will be tempted not to take the time because there are more important things to do. Satan does not want you to pray so he will give you feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness when you slow down to pray. That is okay because you are powerless. But Jesus is not. That is why you are praying.

4. ____ Decide on date, time, and location

- a. The location can be in the homes of one of the team members or one of the people you invite. But it is typically in one of the Christians’ homes.
- b. Be creative about location.
 - i. One group was led by a doctor for his staff. He billed it as a course in relationships that will help to better deal with patients.
 - ii. Several groups have met at lunchtime to do it with co-workers.
 - iii. Three women had dinner together (at the home of one of the non-Christians) and then went through the study together.
- c. If you know the people who you’re inviting, then it is better not to specify time or place. It gives them less to say “no” to. You are asking them to consider the concept of getting together for a study. If they like the idea, then together you can come up with a date and time. That also increases their sense of ownership of the study.
- d. Frequency: Groups meet either weekly or every other week. Once a month is too infrequent in the beginning.

5. ____ **Decide on format**

- a. Some suggested formats:
 - i. Study followed by dessert. The value of having a dessert time is that it allows time for developing relationships and helping non-Christians to see that you are normal.
 1. 10 minutes: greeting
 2. 50 minutes: study
 3. 45 minutes: dessert/conversation
 4. 15 minutes: prayer (Optional. See FAQ about prayer.)
 - ii. Study followed by dinner. This is more work though.
- b. Ask the participants after your first time what format they would like. The more they participate in decisions, the more they will own the study. Also, encourage them to share in tasks such as making dessert.

6. ____ **Decide on an invitation**

- a. Use the stock invitations that seeJesus.net offers. Samples are available on our website. A professional invitation makes a study feel safe. If you have a specific date, time, and location, write them in the spaces on the invitation. If you do not have a specific time, then leave that blank but still give them an invitation. (See Point E, “Sample Invitation,” on pages 391-392.)
- b. We suggest a length of four to six lessons. You can make it any number you want. The study is 48 weeks long, but that is too large a commitment. Take the commitment incrementally.
- c. You do not have to use a written invitation. Probably half the groups that have done studies with non-Christians to date have invited people verbally. Here are some examples of verbal invitations:
 - **Married woman inviting another couple:** “My husband and I attended a study that looks at how to get along with people. We found it helpful in our own relationship. The study looks at the way Jesus related to people to better understand what compassion and honesty look like. We’re thinking of doing the study one evening a week for six weeks and were wondering if you’d like to join us.”
 - **Single inviting a single:** “I attended a study that looks at how to get along with people. I found it helpful. The study looks at the way Jesus related to people in order to understand what compassion and honesty look like. I am thinking of doing the study one evening a week for four weeks and was wondering if you would like to join us. I think you would enjoy it.”

7. ____ **Invite People**

- a. Inviting non-Christians is the most difficult part of this whole process. Do not underestimate your own fears of rejection and being stereotyped as a “born again” or a “religious fanatic.”
- b. The better you know people, the more likely they are to want to come to the study.
 - i. Friends and Immediate Neighbors: The best way to invite neighbors is to personally invite them and hand them an invitation.
 - ii. People you do not know: Drop off invitations at the fifty homes nearest you.
- c. If you do not have many non-Christian contacts, then try to find fellow believers who are better than you at inviting. Some people just naturally have many non-Christian friends. They might not be good teachers, so they will need to find someone who can teach. Think of combining gifts instead of trying to have everyone have the same gift. People often get frozen because they only look at what they cannot do. Others can do what you cannot.
- d. Invite the people to come to a study that lasts four or six sessions. (After a few weeks of meeting and getting to know each other, then you will ask them if they wish to continue the study beyond that.)

8. ____ **Begin the Study**

- a. Your first meeting will naturally involve introducing people and getting to know each other, in addition to doing the first lesson of the study. The initial meeting is also a good time to discuss with the participants where and how often they want to meet and what format best suits them (see #5 above).
- b. Toward the end of your four or six weeks, ask the participants: “Would you like to continue the study for six more times while we complete our study of compassion?”

D. Checklist: Starting a Church-Based Study with Seekers

Studies that meet in a church building are more work, but they have had excellent results with multiple non-Christians attending (7-10) and multiple conversions (2-3) within several months. Why?

- a. Many people feel safer coming to a church building than a home.
 - A church is a public setting that they have driven by. That makes it safe.
 - It is more anonymous. If people do not like the study, they can leave early. Or someone can leave right after the study is over and avoid talking to people, or get up and go to the bathroom without making a scene. Because it is more impersonal, it feels safer.
 - With a larger crowd, you can hide easier.
- b. The study progresses more rapidly.
 - The study leader has greater freedom to be bolder with the gospel and prayer because non-Christians are on your turf.
 - Because participants become familiar with your church building, it is less of a psychological jump for them to attend a service or Sunday School.
 - The more friendships that participants make with people in the church, the easier the transition to church attendance.

(Another option is a study in a public setting outside of a home or church. One study met in a coffee shop; another in a doughnut shop; another in a restaurant. Several studies have met in the conference room of a business.)

Getting Started...

1. ____ Form a team

- a. The team needs to be larger than a team for a home-based study because you will need at least one Christian for each visitor. You will likely need 6 to 12 people to eventually commit.
- b. Your team needs to do four things:
 - Pray
 - Invite
 - Attend
 - Befriend
- c. The best way to form a team is to have an 8-week Sunday School class using the training videotapes from *seeJesus.net*. It is ideal for the leader to teach some of the lessons “live” so the team understands what they are inviting people to and the leader can get some practice.
- d. It is ideal if the pastor, one of the staff, or an elder leads and organizes the study.
- e. One of the best ways to kick-start a study is to host a *Person of Jesus* seminar at your church.

2. ____ Pray

- a. Talk about the importance of prayer in the Sunday School class.
- b. Have participants write out names of non-Christians and begin praying daily for them.
- c. Take time in each class to pray for non-Christians to come. Pray with short “one-breath” prayers (if you use more than one-breath, then your prayer is too long) because when you have prayer times in your study you’ll want everyone to use short prayers.

3. ____ Decide on dates, time, location

- a. Set this ahead of time so it can be printed on the invitation.
- b. The invitation suggests six studies, one per week.

4. ____ Decide on format

- a. The simplest format is to have an hour-long study time followed by dessert. Example: Wednesday night, 7:30-8:30 p.m. followed by dessert.

- b. You can do either one large study with everyone participating in one group (15-40+), or you can break people into smaller groups of 10-12. In smaller groups, people have more of a chance to get to know one another, but you would need more teachers.

5. ____ **Decide your inviting strategy**

A church-based strategy permits multiple ways of inviting people.

- a. Have your Sunday school class invite friends.
- b. Have the whole congregation invite friends.
 - Make an announcement to the congregation on Sunday morning, asking every adult to give three invitations to people they know. The ushers can hand out our pre-printed invitations while you speak. Church members do not have to be part of the study to invite people.
 - At the same time, ask anyone in retail (either owners or workers) if they can display invitations at the counter. The invitations are designed not to look or feel religious by focusing on helping relationships.
- c. Invite the ZIP Code.
 - Purchase labels and send out a mailing to several ZIP codes in your immediate area. Call *seeJesus.net* if you need advice in purchasing labels. Most mail houses/label vendors will give you number counts ahead of time for particular zip codes so you know how many invitations to print.
 - Send out a mailing to your visitor lists, your nursery school, or clubs that use the building.

6. ____ **Decide on final invitation copy**

- a. Print your own invitation using the stock invitation that *seeJesus.net* provides. It can be downloaded from our website.
- b. Estimate the number of invitations your strategy calls for.

7. ____ **Set a budget**

- a. Costs:
 - Printing the invitations
 - Postage (if you do a mailing)
 - Address labels (if you do a mailing)
- b. This money will need to be raised or taken out of the church budget. It is a good use of mission funds.

8. ____ **Invite people**

- a. Implement the strategy in #5 above.
- b. Be cautious about offering a ride to someone you have invited who might be nervous. If you pick him up, he might feel trapped. If someone comes in his own car, then he can leave when he wants.

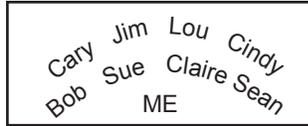
9. ____ **Final Preparations**

- a. If you have an outside sign, announce the study.
- b. Make sure outer doors are unlocked.
- c. Have signs on doors that clearly mark where the study is located in the building.
- d. Request a team member to provide refreshments.
- e. Set up chairs in a semi-circle in as friendly a setting as possible.
- f. Have Bibles available on or underneath the chairs.

10. ____ **The First Study**

- a. Welcome people at the door.
- b. When the study starts explain:
 - Where the bathrooms are.
 - How you will use the flipchart.
 - That Bibles are available but they are welcome to use their own.

- c. Ask people their names and write them on a piece of paper that shows you where they are sitting. Look down at this when they raise their hands so you can call each person by name. For example:



- d. Keep it light, funny, and fun. Learn to joke with them. Be “real.” Talk about your problems.
 e. End promptly.
 f. Write a prayer card with the names of each visitor and begin to pray for them.

11. **The Second Study**

- a. Once the study has begun, ask the participants to invite friends. They usually have far more contacts with non-Christians than churchgoers. Build on their natural enthusiasm for what they are learning.
 b. Have a “one-breath” prayer time for just a few minutes at the end of the lesson. Ask a Christian to begin it, and end it yourself.
 c. Be aware of visitors who have not been befriended by someone from church and ask team members to seek them out. You can also ask people who are not a part of the study to join at this point.

12. **5th or 6th Study**

- a. Mention the possibility of continuing beyond six weeks and see what the response is from the group.
 b. Be in contact with your team, either in an occasional meeting or one-on-one, to take the pulse of the non-Christians in the study.
 c. As much as possible, make the participants part of your decision-making once the group has begun. Ask their opinions on everything: “Do you want to keep meeting for the next couple of months while so-and-so is on vacation?” “Here are some different options on what lesson to go to next. What would you prefer to do?”

Reflections on Team Ministry

- a. **Team Composition and Size.** An ideal team has at least three members and is balanced between men and women (if the Bible study also has men and women). Paul the Apostle rarely went with just one person. He almost always had a group of three. In a remarkable description of his work in Troas, Paul found great opportunity but no partner so he walked away from the opportunity. “...The Lord had opened a door for me,” but “...I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-by to them...” (II Corinthians 2:12,13). The author of Ecclesiastes writes, “Two are better than one...though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,12). If we are going to reflect the living Jesus to unbelievers, then they need to see his body. That is harder to do with just one Christian. I really noticed the difference in my first study when there were three of us all on the same wavelength versus just two of us. It strengthens our prayer times and strengthens the course.
- b. **The Solo Option.** Sometimes the nature of relationships with non-Christians or just the simple logistics of getting together make a team impossible to gather. Some unbelievers would be overwhelmed if they had to deal with more than one person. Several of the case studies are examples of solo ministry. If you are solo, it is crucial that you have people praying for you. The Biblical model for solo ministry is demonstrated by Paul at Mars Hill, the work of the early deacons, and particularly Philip and Steven in their evangelism.

E. Sample Invitation

Comments from participants:

"Through this study, Jesus became a real person. I have learned more about his character, his heart, his will, his temptations, and his sufferings than I ever knew before. I'll never forget who he is."

*Karen Barnard, artist,
single mother of three*

"Seeing the true nature of love so perfectly in Jesus is valuable beyond words."

Steven Ritter, engineer

"Because of this study, I am learning to feel for, identify with, and bear the burdens of others. I am hungry to be able to love that way. I used to walk away from my wife whenever things were difficult between us. I would retreat into my office or go for a bike ride. Now, I stay and work it out with her. Often, we do not resolve our differences, but rather agree to talk again."

Jeffrey Salasin, counselor

People tell how their spouses have changed since this study:

"She's really forthright. Doesn't play quiet, snippy games; tells me what's on her mind. I really enjoy hearing about Bea's day. I don't react at Bea when she expresses her opinions."

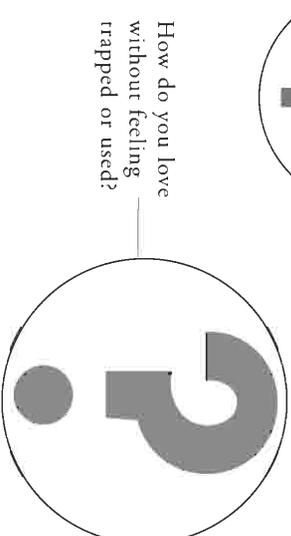
Bill Nace, office manager

"It has been a year since I attended the study, but I'm not sure how much I've changed. But Cindy, my wife, has really changed! I am often aware that she is consciously loving me."

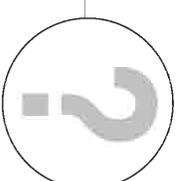
Dave Tate, youth worker



How do you love when you get no love in return?



How do you love without feeling trapped or used?



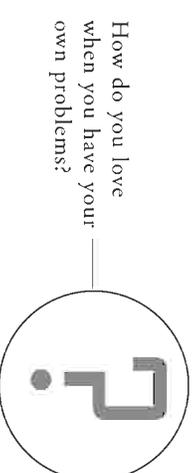
What is tougher to learn than love?



When do you take care of yourself?



How do you love someone who is mean to you?



How do you love when you have your own problems?

Many of us have lacked good models for love. We don't even know what is normal.

Why not study what Jesus was like as a person and see how he loved people when he walked the earth 2000 years ago?

How can it help us today?

Jesus is said to be the most loving person who ever existed. Einstein said about him:

"I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.... No man can read the gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life."

"Love Walked Among Us"

A six-week study of how Jesus related to people

Together, we will discover for ourselves what Jesus is like by looking at the four original documents that describe him (the gospels). We will not use second-hand sources of what people thought Jesus was like. Yet, we will look at the gospels in their original historical and cultural context. We will examine each of the following six topics using Jesus' life as a model.

Topics for Each Week:

- Compassion: A Mind Full of Someone Else
- Looking: Learning How to See People
- "I Know What's Best For You": How Judging Blocks Compassion
- "I'm Better than You": How Self-Righteousness Blocks Compassion
- "This Is What You Should Do": How Legalism Blocks Compassion
- The Golden Rule: How Understanding Leads to Compassion

Location:

Directions:

Dates:

Time:

Attend any session you want.

Feel free to come once and see if you like it.

Questions? Call

F. Trouble-Shooting an Evangelism/Discipleship Study

1. Problems with non-Christians' comments during a lesson

(See "Q. How do you answer hostile or difficult questions?" on p. 412 for a more in-depth analysis.)

- a. Someone asks a hard theological question that I do not know how to answer.
 - i. Pray silently to yourself. The Holy Spirit is the best teacher.
 - ii. Ask the person why he or she asked the question. This is important because for some people the question may stem from a deep heart issue, for some it may be something they heard, and others may just be testing you. When Pilate asks Jesus if he is a king, Jesus asks Pilate if he is asking the question on his own initiative or if it is hearsay from others. Jesus is probing Pilate to discern his motive.
 - iii. If you know a good answer, then share it. You do not have to share every nuance of Biblical truth.
- b. A non-Christian speaks a heresy or untruth.
 - i. Pray to know whether you should respond.
 - ii. Sometimes it is best to say nothing. Your goal is to have the non-Christian surrender his or her life to King Jesus and believe the gospel. Be careful not to be sidetracked on side issues, especially in the beginning of a relationship.
 - iii. Sometimes you should respond
 1. If you have gotten to know him or her and have built up some trust.
 2. If he or she has repeated the idea several times.
 3. If others in the group are being influenced by it.
 - iv. How to respond
 1. Throw the question out for others in the group in such a way that a Christian can respond. I.e., "Have any of you thought about this question?"
 2. Answer the question. Remember you do not have to share every angle on an answer. If you read the FAQs (in point K) ahead of time, you will be better prepared. An answer you might give in seminary might be different from an answer you would give to a seeker.
 3. Ask him or her if you can take time to research an answer and get back to it next week.

2. Problems with non-Christian attendance

- a. Someone comes and drops out. This is a frequent occurrence. First, follow up by telephone with a reminder. The person may be busy. If it is clear that he or she has dropped out, try to keep the door open so the person feels comfortable with the possibility of returning.
- b. Someone forgets. Sporadic attendance is common. The best solution is to remind people just before a meeting with a phone call. If your group is especially small, and you have only non-Christian in the group, then a reminder call or e-mail message is critical. If it is a church group, at the second meeting pass around a sheet for the participants' names and phone numbers so you can call them if there is a cancellation. The group member who knows this person the most should be the one to remind him or her. Be open to picking someone up once you have gotten to know him or her. Each lesson is designed as a stand-alone lesson so someone will not feel left out if he or she rejoins after being out for a few months.
- c. Someone promises to come but does not show up. This happens a lot. Do not worry about it. Jesus told the Parable of the Sower about that happening. A typical home-based study invites 18 people, 6 promise to come, 3 show up, and 1 or 2 stay for the long haul. It closely resembles the four kinds of responses that Jesus predicts in the Sower.
- d. Only one person in the group is a non-Christian. This is typical of many groups. Relax. Jesus told the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15) about this. One sinner is more important than 99 righteous people.

3. Problems with someone becoming a Christian

- a. You have been meeting for a year and your friend is still not a Christian. Relax. Billy Graham became a Christian after attending about 40 evangelistic meetings. (It was an 11-week crusade that met every night. He started at the end of the first month and became a Christian near the end.¹) He was sixteen

years old at the time so since age three he had already heard about 676 sermons, 676 Sunday School lessons, and about 4,700 daily family devotions. In other words, he had been to about 6,000 Bible studies before he became a believer. The lesson? Be patient!

- b. You are not sure if someone is a believer. That is typical. Some are believers but are just untaught and some are not believers. You cannot always tell. But the same gospel works for both Christians and non-Christians so do not worry about it. Give them both the gospel.

4. Problems with Christians

- a. Christian Language. If you've been a Christian for a while, you might pray and talk with a particular language. Christian language is not wrong, but it can get in the way of a seeker believing because to the listener it feels like he is "outside". Some examples of Christian language:
 - i. "We lift up our brother in prayer."
 - ii. "I accepted Jesus as my Savior."We need to be missionaries who stop talking our language and learn to speak their language. Talk to the Christians before hand about this problem (the 8 week video training deals with this) and if it comes up during the study, talk with the person afterwards. The problem comes up especially in prayer times. Having one sentence or one-breath prayers helps with this.
- b. Christians staying isolated. It is easy for Christian participants to think that they are not professionals, so they do not engage seekers in conversation or develop friendships with them. But their care for seekers is every bit as important as the teaching. I've found that I need to talk to individual Christians and ask them to seek out individual seekers.

G. Results to Expect From Your Study with Seekers

Based on the results of the initial group of 80 studies that were attempted with non-Christians (1995-2002), these are estimated results that may be expected from every 10 home-based studies started:

- 1 study: No interest. You are unable to get any seekers to come to the study
- 2 studies: Low Interest. You are able to get seekers to come but they don't stay beyond four studies.
- 5 studies: Sustained Interest. Seekers come for five or more times but there are no solid conversions.
- 2 studies: Conversions. Seekers come to faith in Christ.

Note: As of mid-2002, there had been only two church-based studies (of which we are aware), but they both had conversions.

Please let us know if you are starting a Person of Jesus study with seekers!

You can notify us via email (info@seejesus.net) or phone (toll free: 866-JesusNet [537-8763]). We'll pray for your group weekly in our home office. We have staff devoted to follow up so once you contact us, you'll hear from us every couple of months if we don't hear from you. We offer this support because you are doing a spiritual work and you need spiritual help. We also want to be able to help you solve any problems that you might be having with your study.

H. Evangelism in a Changed World

I want to first look at the church's current struggles in the area of evangelism, and then describe how *The Person of Jesus* study works and why it is timely for today's culture.

Evangelism Is Not What It Used to Be

A Campus Crusade worker reported that in the 70s, for every ten gospel presentations they would see one conversion; now it is twenty-five presentations for one conversion. Research by George Barna, George Gallup, and James Hunter confirm this anecdotal statistic. The average evangelical church introduces 1.7 people a year to Christ per 100 people who attend. According to Barna, we are only replacing the dead.²

This relatively bleak state is hidden by signs that many churches and denominations are growing. But even those numbers can be misleading because growing churches are often just re-arranging Christians. For instance, 57% of the congregations of one of the most rapidly growing evangelical denominations in America had, in 1995, no adult professions of faith—that comes to 650 churches out of 1133. You might think that was just the smaller, ingrown churches, but sixty-nine of its churches have membership of over 500, and 13 of those churches had no professions of faith.³

What is going on? The answer is that the world is changing. A whole generation has grown up without Sunday school and is ignorant of even the most basic claims of Christianity. The church is as foreign to them as the inside of a bar is to the typical evangelical—and as scary. William Leith, writing in the *Independent on Sunday* (A British newspaper), describes what it feels like for a non-Christian (which he is) to visit a church to witness an infant baptism:

Will anybody spot me? It's like when you are in a strip club: you think with relief, well, if they do spot me, they're in here too. Organized religion has sunk pretty low these days, at least among people I know; the feeling is that it's just third-raters who get involved, oily little tinpot careerists or neurotics, people afraid of the modern world. . . This is my local church, these mild-looking people must be my neighbors, but I have never seen any of them before; religious people and pagans live in completely different worlds these days. A ritual is being organized, quite a frightening one, with people standing in formation around the central focal point, the...altar, and my God! Someone's carrying a baby towards them! My tabloid-conditioned satanic abuse needle gives a jolt. . . At the end, I am bolting for the door, pushing a bit, unable to help myself.... Outside the church, the noisy, irreligious world looks great.⁴

The result is that methods of sharing the gospel that worked in a more Christianized world might not work as well in our day. For example, the Dr. Kennedy (Evangelism Explosion) question ("If you were to appear before God in heaven, and God were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' What would you answer God?") is a simple way to find out where people are in their understanding of the gospel. But for someone such as our reporter, who has little background in Christianity, it might not make a lot of sense. It works well where there are shared assumptions about God, heaven, and right and wrong, but that society is dying.

Increasingly, people no longer think in "church" categories. D.A. Carson of Trinity Seminary in Chicago compared Bill Hybel's well-known survey of Willow Creek, Illinois some twenty years ago with a more recent survey done by David Fisher, senior minister of Park Street Church in Boston. They arranged for a similar survey among their 50,000 closest neighbors. Many of those interviewed, when asked why they did not attend church, thought it surprising that anyone should think that they should! Music was not listed as a major factor in drawing people—why should they attend church to hear contemporary music when they had their own CDs?⁵

It is not surprising, then, that the Bible is a mere icon in most homes. Dave Barna, the pollster, shares these statistics: 80% of Americans have a Bible in their home but it just sits on the shelf: 80% of Americans believe that the Bible contains the statement "God helps those who help themselves." Furthermore, 65% of us do not know what "John 3:16" refers to, although signs are often displayed at sporting events. Only 50% of adults know that the Book of Jonah is in the Bible, while 10% believe that Joan of Arc was the wife of Noah.⁶

What has happened to our world?

Many thinkers call our world at the beginning of the 21st century "postmodern." Modernism was the confi-

dent world that our parents grew up in that believed in the idea of progress, the goodness of people, the power of education, the wisdom of science, and the blessings of technology. Modernism replaced the absolutes of Christianity with the absolutes of the power of the individual to master his or her world. But it did not work. Auschwitz, racism, pollution, and the breakdown of the home are just a few of the things that pulled the rug out from under modernism. This cultural shift is summarized in the chart below:⁷

MODERNISM	POST-MODERNISM
Me Institutions Propositional Truth Excellence Growth Lonely Success	We Relationships Relational Truth Authenticity Community Alone Wholeness

So we are in the midst of a rebellion against modernism. People no longer believe in progress—they think more in terms of relationships and “how am I feeling today”. People no longer believe in absolute truth—truth is what is true for you and your particular group. People no longer believe in mega-answers that define reality—there is only your particular story. Thus, God becomes just a matter of personal preference—true for you but not for me.

This would seem to mean tough times for Christianity because we believe in an overarching story that is “true for everyone”. Jesus is not an option. Consequently, a number of theologians are apprehensive about this shift from modernism to postmodernism. Bill Edgar of Westminster Seminary says that, “a postmodern atmosphere is one in which words often lose their authority and are replaced by images or feelings. Doing apologetics in these circumstances is particularly difficult. Few people are asking the ‘big questions’ today. Instead they settle for a grab bag of ideas and quasi-religious notions to be used at convenience.... I am not...optimistic....”⁸ Likewise, John Eui-whan Kim, President of Chongshin Seminary writes, “Regarding the finality of Jesus Christ, postmodernism with its pluralistic tendency (anyone believes what they want) reduces Christ to merely one of several religious founders. Jesus Christ can no longer be considered, the Truth (John 14:6) for all humankind.”⁹

You have probably experienced this attitude to Jesus in conversations with non-Christians. Recently a Michigan pastor announced to his congregation that Jesus is not the only way to salvation. His fellow pastors immediately denounced him, but most of his parishioners stood up for him.¹⁰

Opportunities for the Gospel

I agree with the caution of Edgar and Kim. The conceptual framework of postmodernism is mostly antithetical to Christianity. The move from modernism to postmodernism is just going from the frying pan into the fire.

But if you look at what it feels like to live in this new world, there is considerable reason for hope. Why is that? For one thing, the lack of any coherent direction—matched by the denial that any direction is even possible—makes “it feel as if our whole culture has the willies.”¹¹ That makes people more open. Not only is there a pervading anxiety and fear that lingers over our world, but the ideas of postmodernity are also wreaking havoc in relationships. The son-in-law of a friend of mine recently walked out on his wife and three children—one a newborn—for another relationship because he no longer felt “fulfilled”. He wasn’t being true to himself to stay committed to his wife and children.

This lawlessness of everyone “doing what is right in his own eyes” became so apparent that, beginning in the early 90s, you noticed a clear shift in casual, on-the-street conversations. Along with sports and the weather, you could talk about what was wrong with our world.

Postmodernism opens up a door for the gospel. In the world of modernity, Christianity did not even have a voice because we believed in “non-scientific” myths. Now our “myth” is accepted right along with everyone else’s myth. That is good news because the gospel does very well on a level playing field. Tim Keller notes that “unlike the older secularists, [people now] are not closed to the idea of the supernatural or of religious experience.”¹² Stan Grenz, Professor of Theology at Regent College, illustrates how postmodernism has let God back into the picture by noting the presence of the god-like character “Q” on the TV show *Star Trek: The Next*

Generation. Of course, “Q” is not the God of Christians, but at least spirituality is back in the picture.¹³

The havoc in society and relationships has wounded many of the players, leaving non-Christians and Christians alike often struggling just to get through the day. People who are weak are more open to hearing the gospel—when you are suffering you will try anything. Furthermore, the modern plagues of abortion, adultery, and abandoned families affect Christian homes as much as non-Christian ones, thus making us often as weak as the person we want to help. But that makes our message so much more authentic—the very thing that people are searching for in postmodernism. Paul, the Apostle’s own struggle with weakness put him in the place where he learned that “God’s strength is made perfect in weakness” (II Corinthians 12:9). In short, we can relate better when we ourselves have suffered.

To summarize: the playing field is leveled, we are no longer in the stands; the players are all wounded, including us; and the supernatural is back. Now, let’s look at a specific strategy.

A New Method for a Changed World

After discovering what Jesus was like as a person, I wondered if studying the person of Jesus might be a door to reaching non-Christians with the gospel, because the typical non-Christian might not like religion, the Bible, the church, or Christians, but tended to put Jesus in a special category—almost like a religious Santa Claus. So I decided to try it. My problem was that, because I lived and worked in a Christian ghetto, I did not know many non-Christians; so I asked around in my church if anyone would be willing to invite a group of their friends to a study. A house painter with a small business agreed to ask some of his employees—five said yes. Five years later two of the participants of the study became believers, an atheist and his wife, and the others have grown in their faith. Many others have led Person of Jesus studies with encouraging results in all kinds of racial settings.

Why did they come and why did they stay?

I am convinced that the person of Jesus is one of the best ways to share the gospel in the world that confronts us. James Sire, a senior editor with InterVarsity Press, writes this in an essay on how to reach the postmodern world:

I believe that the best reason for believing that Christianity is true is Jesus, and the best reason for Jesus is Jesus himself. The Gospels—the narrative of Jesus’ life, teaching, crucifixion and resurrection—are the best proof for the truth of the Christian faith. Most people who are not Christians do not have enough knowledge of Jesus to reject him or to declare that Christianity is false or not worth believing. If people will just look, just read and ponder Mark’s or Luke’s or Matthew’s or John’s account of Jesus, they will be struck by what they find. They will be brought into a direct encounter with Jesus, and they will be forced to make an existential decision about who Jesus was and is.... There is something inherently attractive about the story of Jesus.¹⁴

Again and again, you can see this fascination with the person of Jesus. In the eighties, Time magazine had a cover story on Jesus that they ran during a slow news week. It outsold every other issue of that year. I have noticed this same interest in Jesus in conversations I have with non-Christians. Recently, on a plane trip, I started chatting with my seatmate, a chemical engineer from Canada. I told her I did not have any money for focus groups, so would she answer me honestly about something I was working on? She was game, so I asked her if she would be interested in studying the person of Jesus as a way of understanding what love is. She said, “Yes, the person of Jesus is intriguing to most people.” Later I found out that she had no particular religious faith and her husband, a refugee from Eastern Europe, was an atheist. I asked her, “Why would you want to study about Jesus?” She said, “I make a distinction between faith and religion, and Jesus is outside of organized religion.”

Studying Jesus is one of the main reasons why people came to the studies, and just the sheer beauty of who he is as a person is why they stay. Einstein, without professing Christianity, articulates the attractiveness of Jesus as found in the gospels,

Q. To what extent are you influenced by Christianity?

A. As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.

Q. You accept the historical existence of Jesus?

A. Unquestionably. No man can read the gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.¹⁵

Each study begins with the leader reading this quote from Einstein and saying, “I want you to begin to see Jesus as Einstein did.”

The method of our study is not to convince someone by rational argument—although that might play a part—but to show them a person and let that person convince them, to tell them a story and let them be drawn into that story. Alistair McGrath, professor of Theology at Regent College and Oxford, notes, “Commercial advertising discovered many years ago that it was not closely reasoned and justified arguments that sold products—it was superbly crafted images, making a direct and powerful appeal to the human imagination.... We need to meditate on those remarkable words of some Greeks who came to Philip: ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’ (John 12:21). Here is our task: to help people see Jesus Christ with their own eyes.”¹⁶

A Relational Approach to Evangelism

It takes pressure off the study leader to simply have his or her task be presenting Jesus as a person. Carl George, a leading proponent of the cell group church, says, “When I was a child I heard a traveling evangelist say something I have never forgotten: If you can get a person to Jesus, that person will be all right.”¹⁷

This relational approach affects the way people are introduced to the study. When inviting someone I do not say to them, “Do you want to have a personal relationship with Jesus?” How can they relate to someone they don’t know? How can they repent of sins they don’t feel? Imagine that you were single and someone asked you, after a five-minute conversation, if you wanted to get married to them. You’d probably freak out no matter how attractive they were because we instinctively know that relationships take time. On the other hand, if someone asked you to dinner you might say “yes.”

Trust doesn’t build quickly, especially in a world where things like wedding vows don’t mean much. I honestly think that we forget that a relationship with Jesus is simply that—a relationship. And just like any other relationship it needs to grow over time. Trust is the bond of relationships, and most of us instinctively know that trust usually does not develop quickly.

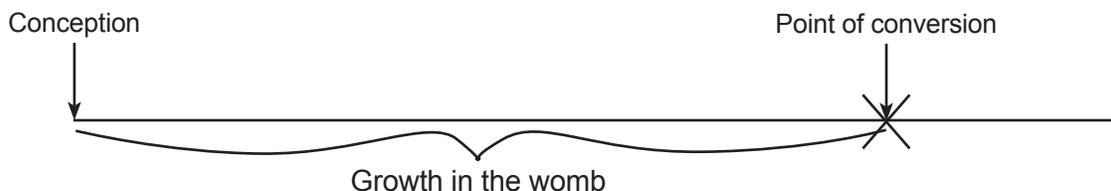
So when inviting people, ask them if they want to study the person of Jesus to see how he related to people as a way of helping them in their relationships. I don’t ask them to study the Bible because I want them to study Jesus—the Bible is the means. Now, of course, Bible study is exactly what we do, but the words “Bible study” are scary for many non-Christians. After inviting them and they say yes, then ask them to bring a Bible if they have one or have Bibles at your home to give out. But it is not a Bible study; it is a Jesus study.

The best way to think of this theoretically is as a time-line of someone becoming a Christian.¹⁸ We are mostly taught to evangelize by focusing on the Point of Conversion. We think that if people will just understand the gospel, then we can move them to that Point. (See the diagram at the bottom of this page.)

In a world heavily influenced by Christianity, as much of America once was, it makes sense to focus on the Point of Conversion. People already know the basics of Christianity and have some sense of sin, so it is just a matter of deepening that conviction of sin and explaining the gospel. Consequently, in the past many preachers thought of their preaching on Sunday morning as a principal means of evangelism in their communities. So Horatius Bonar calls the preacher to “save souls” during his Sunday morning sermon.¹⁹ That makes sense in Christendom, and it is still good advice because there is always someone in a congregation who is unsaved, but most of the souls that need to be saved in our day are not in front of the preacher; they are sleeping—literally.

A Process Approach to Evangelism

The need for process is implicit in Jesus’ telling Nicodemus that “he must be born again”. The crucial part of having a baby is not the actual birth, but the inception and growth in the womb. My wife and I have six children, and I testify that there wasn’t a whole lot my wife could do to start or stop the process of giving birth because birth is a natural by-product of a nine-month period of slow growth. The conception and growth in the womb are more crucial than labor.



This pattern is also reflected in the Biblical metaphor of the church as the bride, and Christ as the bridegroom. The crucial part of getting married is not the actual moment when the wife receives the engagement ring or when they exchange vows—those are important, but they are natural consequences of two people falling in love. In fact, a sure way to end a courting relationship is for one person to start talking about marriage too quickly. We instinctively suspect manipulation and wonder if someone really loves me or is just desperate to get married.

So the goal of our study is for the non-Christian to simply be with Jesus. It is hard to fall in love with Jesus if you aren't around him. But if someone can be exposed to the beauty of Christ in a setting where they also see Christians reflecting the beauty of Christ in their lives, then conversion is much more likely.

What we are describing is the Biblical teaching that God's Spirit is working in the life of the believer before their conversion, "calling" them. Most of us recall the working of the Spirit in our lives before conversion.²⁰ By studying the person of Jesus we provide fuel for the Spirit to draw them to Christ.

The process of falling in love with Jesus, the process of building trust, and the process of conversion are a series of mini-decisions or small steps.²¹ This fits in with the spirit of our age—the search for authentic relationships is one of the cries of postmodernism. People are thinking in terms of relationships more than ever before. The process implicit in *The Person of Jesus* is based on a relationship grid.

A word of caution: if you focus on process only, you just might end up with all process and no conversions. The New Testament is filled with both "process stories" (the disciples' slow movement to faith in Jesus) and "immediate conversion stories" (Phillip with the Ethiopian). Someone can believe in Jesus just by reading a tract or hearing a gospel presentation without any human preparation. The Spirit often prepares people without anything that we do. Don't make this approach into a rule that applies to all relationships. I am just suggesting that, for many people, conversion is a process. *The Person of Jesus* study allows us to put energy into a process that builds trust leading to conversion.

A Love Approach to Evangelism

Our culture is becoming increasingly sensitive to relationships, but, ironically, it is also becoming increasingly lawless or insensitive in relationships. Both are hallmarks of postmodernism with its conflicting emphases on relationships and "do your own thing." This means that the standards are higher as to how you should love me, but the standards are lower as to how I should love you. It institutionalizes hypocrisy and results in a chaos of hurt in relationships. Consequently people are constantly hunting for both healing and a formula to fix their relationships. Into this gap steps the therapist, the new priest of paganism, the new pastor of our souls.²² But this quest for relationship, this quest for love, has no power in it because it is separated from the source of all love, Jesus of Nazareth. So many are open for the next cure. So why not look to Jesus? People instinctively sense that Jesus is a model for love.

Unfortunately Christians are not always seen as models of love by our media. An example of this is an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* written by a non-Christian that describes the encounter of a young widow with a group of Christians trying to convert her. In the article evangelical Christians come across as plastic, unreal, and manipulative. At times that is an accurate description of Christians.²³ So in the study, Christians can learn to love while they are loving.

The most effective part of the study is that non-Christians are not only watching someone who loves but they are being loved by the Christians in the group. Time and time again non-Christians who've come to faith in *Person of Jesus* studies report that it was the love of Christians in the study that drew them to faith.

One of the hallmarks of love and, not surprisingly, one of the hallmarks of Jesus' ministry is that he loves people just where they are. So when a sick person is brought to him he heals him. When a greedy person comes to him, he teaches him. He heals not only through miracles, but also through his teaching. His teaching met people where they were, just as his miracles did. A heart gripped by bitterness that needs to learn to forgive is in as much bondage as a body with a withered hand. In other words, Jesus' moral teaching met felt needs as much as his miracles did. The gospel writers frequently describe Jesus' teaching and healing going on at the same time. It is his two-pronged assault on sin and death that anticipates his ultimate assault through the cross (sin) and his resurrection (death).

So, titles of the lessons of *The Person of Jesus* are directed to the felt needs of people just like Jesus' ministry was: Compassion, Honesty, Facing Sadness, Joy, etc. This fits in with the focus of each of the four gospels—each Gospel is "audience-focused." The four Gospels are written to outsiders to convince them of Jesus, so they

tailor their selection of events from Jesus' life to where their audience is. Matthew is written for a Jewish reader, John is written for the Greek mind, Mark is written for the Roman, almost as a fast-paced mystery novel with the question "Who is Jesus?" repeatedly raised, and Luke is written to the cosmopolitan Greek and Jew. John comes out and says that "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). But like the gospels, and particularly the gospel of John, *The Person of Jesus* moves from felt needs to real needs. A woman's need for physical water is a door to her receiving spiritual water; a man's need for sight becomes a way that he sees Jesus by faith. Felt needs are real and must be addressed if we are going to love people, but our hearts don't feel their greatest need—the need for repentance for being our own gods and the need to worship the living God.

A Personal Approach to Evangelism and Discipleship

Not only do the gospels speak to people's felt needs, but the gospels themselves are uniquely relational literature in that they describe literally hundreds of very real personal encounters that Jesus has with people. So, in *The Person of Jesus*, we study how Jesus loves people in those personal encounters and then tie that in with his teaching.

According to Dr. Clair Davis, Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary, the church has largely ignored any serious study of the person of Jesus.²⁴ He notes that in the last thousand years the only serious studies of the person of Jesus have been Calvin's insights into Jesus' three-fold office and Warfield's essay on the emotional life of Christ.²⁵ I agree with Hans Frei, the post-liberal Yale theologian, who critiques conservatives, saying that we are so propositionally oriented that we miss the story line of the Bible.²⁶ You can be so propositionally oriented that you miss the person.

The result is that we can present Jesus so artificially that he is almost unreal. For instance, I have often asked Christians, "When you get to heaven, what person in the Bible would you like to meet?" Only one person out of several hundred has mentioned Jesus. I think the word "person" throws them off. They are not used to thinking of Jesus as a person. A friend of mine said, "When I get to heaven I look forward to sitting down with the apostle Peter who was constantly messing up. I can relate to him and all his struggles. But I am not sure what it would be like to sit down with Jesus."

We tend to relegate the stories of Jesus to children's Sunday School and move on to the more "mature" letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John. So we move from story to philosophy, and therefore away from person. But the goal of *The Person of Jesus* is, in Luther's words, to "draw Christ as deep as possible into the flesh."²⁷

In the first century, Jesus was first experienced as man, and then, as people came to know him, as God. Now, we're so aware of his divinity, that we can miss his manhood with the result that he is more of a plastic person than a real flesh and blood friend. For example, I was telling a friend the story from John 21 when Jesus and Peter were taking a walk by the Sea of Galilee. During the walk, Jesus tells Peter that one day Peter will suffer and die for him. Peter interrupts Jesus and asks him what is going to happen to John, who is walking several paces behind them. Jesus snaps at Peter, "What is that to you?" In other words, "Peter, stay out of his life." Jesus gets irritated at Peter's intrusion into John's life. I told my friend that Jesus is modeling for us what good irritation is like. Her response was, "But Jesus is God, so he can do that." So you see the problem. Jesus is so "God" that we don't have much sense of what he is like as a person. (The other half of the problem is that she'd been taught in the church that irritation is always wrong.)

A Teaching Approach to Evangelism

We usually think in terms of someone first becoming a Christian and then teaching or discipling them. But *The Person of Jesus* approach involves a strong emphasis on teaching. This has the potential, over the long haul, of making stronger Christians who are trained in the Word as they come to faith. Ernie Reisinger notes that this was the model we see in the early church and Acts.²⁸ For instance, in Acts 5:21, "...they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught." Next, we find them standing in the temple evangelizing by "teaching the people" (Acts 5:25). In fact, the Sanhedrin accused them: "...you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." This is mirrored in Os Guinness' observation that the Great Commission is a command to win people to a whole discipleship—to "make disciples . . . teaching them" (Matthew 28:30).²⁹

The method for the Bible study is inductive, meaning that the study leader asks questions and lets the group discover on their own how Jesus loves people. All of us remember truth better if we discover it ourselves.

Coming to see the truths of the Bible on their own fits with the postmodern distrust of authority—it is difficult to come in and say “this is the Bible, so believe it.” Unbelievers need to develop a trust in the Bible as the Word of God in the same way they develop trust in any relationship.

A by-product of an inductive method is getting to know one another. While discussing a text together, they are also relating—which fits the relational bent of our age. In summary, the content of the course is about the person of Jesus and how he models *love* for us in his *relationships*, and the method of the course, inductive study, is a *relational method*.

A Missions Approach to Evangelism

The shift from a Christianized world to a post-Christian world means that we are now doing missions in our own culture; our evangelism is cross-cultural in a way that it hasn’t been since the Roman era. There is nothing more messy than missions—people start, then they stop, people believe, then they fall away, people love you, then they hate you—but there is also nothing more glorious than missions. Few things are more exciting than watching people open a Bible for the first time in their lives and see the beauty of our Savior, Jesus Christ, true Light of true Light, very God of very God.

In his last days, exiled on the island of Elba, Napoleon began to read the gospels and discovered who Jesus is. He said to General Bertrand, who was an atheist, “I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man.... Everything in him astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a Being by himself.”³⁰

1. Stories of Person of Jesus Studies

By mid-2002, there had been eighty *Person of Jesus* studies attempted with non-Christian participants in them. Here are just a few accounts of some of them.

Location: Northern Virginia

Leader: Julie Courtney

Participants: all women

By Julie Courtney

Did God really want me to do this? I asked myself that question many times before I actually started a *Person of Jesus* study. Paul Miller led a seminar at the home of one of our Elders in Reston, Virginia, in April 1998. Six people were at that seminar, but none of us were really sure about leading a study. I thought and prayed about it that spring and into the summer. Finally in September I decided that I would start my own group, so I put out a few flyers in stores around the neighborhood and advertised it in the church bulletin. It met at our church on a Tuesday night and only three other women came, all from the church. When we met the next week, there were again three women all from the church, but only one “repeat.” Following that meeting I mentioned that I wanted to do this as an evangelistic Bible study and asked the women to consider inviting neighbors or friends to come. Later in the week I got a call from Ruth Ann Irwin, who said that she would like to place flyers in her neighbors’ mailboxes advertising the study and asked if I had one already made up. Did I? Paul had included one in the front of the manual, so I copied that, wrote in the date, time and place of our next meeting and made about 100 copies for her. We had decided to hold the study at Nancy’s home (one of the three women in the group), because she lives in Ruth Ann’s neighborhood and we thought that it would create a more welcome atmosphere.

Ruth Ann put these flyers in about 60 homes near her, and we waited and prayed. The next time we met we had added three more women! One was a Christian, another was from Pakistan with a Muslim background, and the third was a Catholic. I decided to start again at the beginning of the manual (for the third time—I had the Widow of Nain down cold!), because I thought it best to begin at the beginning even if some had already heard it. Before we got into the study that first night, I asked each woman why she was there and what she hoped to get out of the study. Most answered that they wanted to meet with other women and learn more about Jesus. The woman from the Muslim background (Pryja) said that she had been depressed for awhile, she had

had some deaths in the family, and she hadn't been out of the house for quite a few months. She told us that she had prayed just three days before she got the flyer for something to relieve her depression. When she went to her mailbox and found what Ruth Ann had put there, her first thought was "I am going; I don't care what they are studying, I don't care if it is the Bible or not. This is the answer to my prayer." She came faithfully for the next year and a half.

During that time, the Lord was helping me through a very difficult personal relationship crisis, and there were many Monday nights when I thought, "I just can't teach tonight. I am not strong enough, or I don't have the stamina or energy to do this." I did go however, and those were usually the nights when the Lord spoke through me the most: When the lesson I had prepared was for me especially, and when I could come home and thank Jesus for being with me and speaking through me.

At the beginning, Pryja was perplexed about what she was learning. Her English is pretty good, but there were times I wasn't sure she was "getting it." As the months passed, she would ask more questions about sin, Jesus being God, and the Trinity—and I could see that the "light" was coming on for her.

Nearly a year later, Paul Miller was at our church for a missions conference, and Pryja "happened" to be in the nursery that night watching the children. (She periodically came to the church to babysit, but had never been to a Worship Service). When Paul learned that she was there, he asked to be introduced to her.

We went upstairs and I introduced Paul as the author of the material we had been studying. She thanked him for all that she had learned, and he asked her what she had learned the most from the study. Her response was that she knew who Jesus was and that she knew that he lived in her heart! What joy to hear that from her lips! That was the first time she actually admitted that she knew Jesus personally. With tears in my eyes, I quietly thanked God for using me to lead her into a relationship with Jesus.

We continued meeting for the next six months and I could tell that Pryja was growing. Her fears of being hurt were dissipating, and her openness to learn was apparent. She asked a lot of questions, had the group to her house a number of times for dinner, and openly talked about her faith in Jesus.

She continues to come to women's Bible studies at the church, periodically attends a Home Fellowship Group at Nancy's home, and seems much more content. Her life is by no means easy: Her husband doesn't approve of her reading the Bible, though he doesn't forbid her to go out. Her son has had some trouble with the law, and we continue to pray for him and her husband, that they would find Jesus to be their all in all.

By Ruth Ann Irwin

I saw a notice in the church bulletin that Julie Courtney had started an evangelistic Bible study for women. I had already missed the first two studies, but I felt that God wanted me to go and to invite friends. I invited a Catholic friend, Sally, who used to be a neighbor. I had talked to her about the Lord, and she and her husband had attended other Christian meetings with us, but I wasn't sure if she had a personal relationship with the Lord. It was a small group the first night I went: Nancy, Betty, Julie, Sally, and I.

Nancy, who was new to our neighborhood, was thinking of hosting the study. I was very excited because I'd lived in this area since 1983, and since 1992 had participated in a local prayer meeting, during which we regularly prayed for the neighborhood. I suspected that the Lord was up to something, so I offered to invite the whole neighborhood.

I am shy, so it was easier for me to write invitations than call each neighbor in person. I bought some pretty cards, wrote a note on each, and enclosed the pink flyers Julie had photocopied for me. On each invitation I wrote: "Please join us to meet neighbors, enjoy refreshments, and participate in a study and discussion group for women." I asked them to RSVP but added, "If you don't get a chance to RSVP, please feel free to come anyway."

I couldn't imagine that the Muslim neighbors would attend, but I felt the Lord wanted me to invite them, so I did. One Muslim family had a high-school-aged daughter, Abdulla, whom I knew. She had Christian friends and attended some Fellowship of Christian Athlete activities. I had been praying for her for a few years. I did not know her parents, but I wrote to her that she was welcome to invite her mother to the study. (I hoped that I wasn't getting her into trouble with her family by inviting her.)

I took my three-year-old out on some cold November afternoons to walk around the neighborhood and tape the envelopes to the backs of our neighbors' mailboxes, so they would be visible from the house. (I had heard

it was illegal to put them inside the mailbox.) We didn't get to all 134 houses in the development, but we did at least 60, starting with the neighbors I knew by name and the ones closest to Nancy's or my house.

The weather was very cold as I delivered invitations, so I found only one neighbor outside: Abdulla. She and her mother were doing yard work. I felt very tongue-tied, but I gathered up my courage and handed Abdulla the invitation. Abdulla is very friendly and outgoing, so it was easy to chat for a few minutes. Her mother smiled but said nothing.

To my amazement, Abdulla's mother, Pryja, decided to come to the study. Truly the Lord had prepared the ground. Pryja's parents were Muslim, but they'd had some contact with Christians: her mother had even helped missionaries in their native land to serve the poor. When Pryja's mother was dying, she told Pryja, "You will never be alone; God will send someone to you." It had been several years, and Pryja, who is extremely shy, was still feeling very alone, so she began praying that God would send someone to her. Not only did I come to her home right after she prayed, but she said my appearance and manner reminded her of her mother. She told me also that her daughter had been telling her about me, and from her description she could tell that I was a "good" person and that I cared about her daughter.

As we studied the Bible together, her wonder and amazement were priceless. I remember she asked at the end of the Widow of Nain study: "You mean Jesus raised her son from the dead!!?"

Julie always seemed pretty composed as she led the studies regardless of what was going on in her life. I would not have known anything was troubling her, except when she shared some things as prayer requests. Pryja was amazed that Julie had such peace.

In addition to the Bible study, we all spent time with Pryja. We played cards, went to a museum, drove her on errands, etc. I think that communicated love to her since she had been so isolated and lonely. Her husband worked very long hours, and there were many nights Pryja and I would walk or drive home from the study together and then spend an hour or two talking in the driveway at her home. We spent hours on the phone and visiting at my house or hers. She loved my children unreservedly and they love her like a second mother.

Soon after we met Pryja, Nancy found a Bible in her native tongue to go with the NIV she gave her the first night she came to the study. I noticed how she liked to read our children's Bible stories, so I gave her a children's Bible in an easy-to-read translation, too. Later she borrowed O'Hallesby's book on prayer and read it over and over. I am encouraged by how much she loves the Lord.

In addition to the changes I see in Pryja, I also see changes in my Catholic friend Sally. She has grown so much. After *The Person of Jesus* study was over, she wanted to continue to study the Bible, so she and her husband joined a Bible study which my husband and I lead. I also grew to know Jesus better through the study, and I would like to study it again with other Christian and non-Christian friends in the future.

Location: Near Philadelphia

Leader: Paul Miller

Participants: two couples and three men

By Paul Miller

April, 1998

I'd taught the material in *The Person of Jesus* study several times to Christians. I wanted to lead a study with non-Christians, but I was deep in the Christian community (kids at Christian school, an elder in my church, and working for a Christian organization), so I asked around to find out if anyone had non-Christian contacts and would be willing to invite them to a study. Paul Osborne had a small painting business so he told me he'd ask some of his former employees, his current ones, and a couple of friends. Here is one of his handwritten invitations:

Dear John and Joyce,

Last year I took something called The Love Course [same content as the Person of Jesus study] from my friend Paul Miller. It lasted 32 weeks, and it was so helpful that I asked him to boil it down to 4 to 5 weeks; and he has agreed. It will be a discussion format with 4 or 5 couples, and will be hosted by Martha, my secretary. Our purpose will be to see how Jesus loved people and how that might apply to us.

I can assure you that there will be no pressure. In fact I don't want you to feel any pressure about this invitation. But I do hope you will give it some thought. We'll all have a good time. Please take a look at the enclosed brochure.

We are thinking of starting the week of April 21st, meeting one night for 4 weeks, perhaps Tuesday or Thursday night—7:30 to 9 PM.

I hope you will come.

Sincerely,

Paul

Paul invited six couples and two said yes. They were a Catholic couple (Martha, the former secretary) and the couple mentioned above. John is an avowed atheist who doesn't like Christians. His wife Joyce does not attend church and does not have much contact with Christianity. John said "yes" because Joyce wanted to do it.

We met in Martha's home for the first time in early May 1996, the same month my father died. I had not met any of the people before the study. They all knew Paul O. pretty well. I went through the first lesson in the manual. The last 45 minutes we had dessert together prepared by Martha. We just had a lot of fun talking about everything under the sun. The only person who didn't return was Martha's daughter. John remarked later to his wife that it was the first time he read a Bible in 40 years.

We met for four times every other week. I didn't even mention the word God until the last week. At the fourth time I asked everybody if they wanted to go four more times. They all said "yes" and we've been meeting ever since.

After 8 months John dropped out, but right after that, we began to pray together as a group. At the 18-month mark, I was discouraged. We didn't seem to be going anywhere; Joyce seemed on the verge of becoming a Christian but then she hesitated. I called up Gary (another believer) who had come several times and asked him to commit himself to the study. I was feeling the need for a third person in the study who was a strong Christian. Gary added a third partner to our praying and added freshness to our Bible study.

Then when Martha and her husband went away to Florida this last winter, I asked Joyce if she wanted to keep meeting. She said "yes" and suggested her home. When we started meeting at her home again her husband joined us. We have had some amazing times together.

What is the fruit so far? Joyce is not yet a believer, but she is close. She has begun to pray regularly. John her husband seems to be softening in just the last couple of weeks. He's taken an interest in the Gaither's music and his wife has caught him listening to evangelists on the T.V. I told his wife that I thought the Holy Spirit was calling him. She passed that on to him and he agreed with her. The Catholic couple was not too familiar with the Bible before, but the wife displays a warm faith in Jesus and the husband confesses that Jesus is Lord, Son of God, and has made significant strides in understanding the Bible. The experience is a new one for all four of them.

May, 2002

John and Joyce have both become believers. God used suffering in John's life to draw John to himself.

Here are Gary's reflections:

I came to the study, first of all, because I wanted to see John and Joyce become believers. But I also enjoyed Paul's method of teaching where he gets us into the Bible by asking us questions and putting our answers down on blank chart paper. It is a much easier format than if I invited John to come to church with me. For one thing I don't think John would come, but even if he would come I know there would be something he would find to criticize in what the preacher said even if the sermons had just been great. If I take him to church, he would be talked to and here he does the talking. In church he would be the one listening and in the study we listen to him. Instead of preaching at them, they are being nudged gently in the right direction. In fact, they are almost nudging themselves. It is hard to be critical of something when you are part owner of it.

Here are Paul Osborne's reflections:

So much of evangelism today seems to be structured around a number of important but theologically loaded propositions in the space of five minutes to an hour. While it may be necessary in our time pressured culture to develop ways to succinctly explain the gospel, I'm afraid it may produce more often than not spiritual indigestion—too much too fast. Wouldn't it be great to present the themes of sin and grace over an extended period of time in such a way that these truths "fit" into the hearer's growing understanding of God and of themselves?

What is so beautiful about the way the material is presented via inductive Bible study is that it winsomely draws the hearer deeper and deeper into a knowledge of Christ. Since the approach is concrete and descriptive (who said and did what and how Jesus responded), the study participants are able to make sense of scriptural truths in a natural context. Paul and I have seen lights go on a number of times as participants have been moved by the love of Christ. They have seen how they fall short and why they need grace and, beyond that, why Jesus must be God. What a thrill! As Christ is elevated, human pretension is diminished. Hard and proud hearts are being softened and humbled.

Location: Northern Virginia

Leaders: Larry and Laurie Simpson

Participants: Larry—during lunch hour at work with men; Laurie—during the day with neighborhood women.

By Nance McCown

When Larry and Laurie Simpson of Herndon, VA., first saw *The Person of Jesus* material, it struck a chord with both of them. Working through the study in small groups at their church, Reston Presbyterian, each was drawn to the emphasis on love, and in particular, Jesus' love in dealing with others. Intrigued by the idea of focusing on love as a way to help others see Jesus, both Larry and Laurie quickly saw the possibilities of using *The Person of Jesus* material for evangelistic outreach.

Larry's Story

About a year and a half ago, Larry found himself in a difficult situation with two of his work colleagues. What began as conversation about a business deal and a particular customer led to a disagreement and heated discussion about ethics. Later, one of the business colleagues came into Larry's office, and much to Larry's surprise, said he appreciated the way Larry had handled the situation. They decided to chat further about the issue, and Larry sensed an opportunity. So he suggested getting together on a weekly basis to look at a *The Person of Jesus* study.

Now this particular business colleague was Jewish, but Larry felt he was quite open to all sorts of topics. And in fact, the man was so interested that he went back to the third colleague involved in the original ethics discussion and invited him to meet with Larry as well.

"They did all the recruiting!" Larry chuckles.

Beginning right before Christmas in 2000, the three men met over lunches. "We only had 15-20 minutes to really go over things," Larry recalls. "I got out the pertinent thoughts and used pictures from *The Person of Jesus* manual—or drew them myself—to open the discussions. We met once or twice and then stopped due to holiday schedules. And then I figured it was going to die."

He was wrong. The two colleagues came back after Christmas wanting to continue. After a couple of false starts, again mostly due to scheduling issues, the small group met a couple of times a week for about 10 weeks.

"It was the focus on honesty and dealing with anger that really hooked these guys," says Larry, "not so much Jesus himself. But then He can be drawn into the discussion from that. And I realized that to start with the 'golden nuggets' of truth Paul has included and to expand on them while keeping it simple—business people don't like long, complicated things—was the key."

The group got about two-thirds of the way through the material, and then the company was absorbed into a larger organization. The men went their separate ways, and though Larry still has contact with the others, it's limited due to their demanding work schedules. "I was disappointed about both the business being absorbed and the friendships I had formed being interrupted, and also that we didn't have the chance to go further with

the study. But I know I'd like to do this again."

For Larry, that means looking for more opportunities. "I look for relationships that are very open, and then I watch the timing. For me, it's not a matter of rejection fear—you get a lot of rejection in the sales part of business, so you learn to deal with it and move on. But I worry about professional relationships. I don't want to compromise my professional relationships with these guys, so I have to wait for the right timing."

Laurie's Story

Like Larry, Laurie looked for opportunities among those people she came in contact with the most. And as a homeschooling mom, she spent a lot of time in her neighborhood. But she didn't want to attempt a study alone. So she approached a few of her neighbors that she knew were already Christians.

"We got together and prayed about it, and then we did a prayer walk through the neighborhood," Laurie recalls. "Then I did up little flyers on my computer and hand-delivered them to the people living in houses right around mine and to other neighbors my Christian friends recommended."

The flyers contained a lot of the information Paul Miller had suggested including: the Einstein quote, some of the issues to be covered, Laurie's address, the date, time and location. But Laurie knew it wasn't really the flyers that would get people to come. So she kept praying.

And God answered, but not in the way she expected.

"I was thinking that the ones who would come were the neighbors who lived right around me," Laurie says. "And a number of them had said the study sounded good and that they might come." But in the end, not one of the three people who came was Laurie's immediate neighbor.

"Most of them I just knew as acquaintances," she says. One came only to the first meeting. The second, a Nigerian woman who attends an Episcopal church, came for quite a while and then got "too busy." But the third woman has been meeting with Laurie every other week for about two years.

"Kathy was involved in church a long time ago, but went through a tough marriage and a divorce," says Laurie. "She told me she'd been praying for something to get her back in with God."

Though Laurie was discouraged when only a few people came—and when the "group" suddenly dropped to just leader and one member—she has come to realize that this one woman is exactly who God wanted in the study. "Meeting one-on-one, Kathy can tell me where she's coming from," says Laurie. "She says it seems like whatever we talk about is speaking right to her."

Laurie's advice to anyone thinking of starting a study? "Bathe it in prayer first," she says firmly. "And then don't be discouraged when the people that you might have thought would be good don't come, or when the numbers are small—even just one other person. I've been in small groups before where people just don't show up even though we've been faithful. You have to learn not to be discouraged."

What about the risk of "ruining" relationships if people get uncomfortable being invited to a study on Jesus? "I think that you have to remember that God put those people in your path," Laurie says. "You might be afraid of the response you'll get, but sometimes it seems that the stronger the response, the more that person is trying to deal with the issues. We're part of something bigger."

Laurie's final lesson has to do with flexibility. "Even though I plan ahead what I will do and try to follow closely to the lesson plan, things will come up that might diverge or springboard. God is the one who directs the conversation, and He often uses the lessons to get to a deeper issue. You have to be flexible and let the Spirit lead. This is a doorway into people's lives to see where they're coming from and what God has for them! That's a real encouragement!"

Locations: Maryland and Iowa

Leaders: Julianne Baker, Lisa Hamby, and Sharon Hoerichs

Participants: All women

By Nance McCown

When it comes to Jesus, one thing often leads to another. Call it God's "ripple effect." He works through one changed life to change yet another. But for a group of women living in Maryland several years ago, the ripple

tripled, and as a result, ladies in three different parts of the United States are today being transformed as they get to know the person of Jesus.

It all started with Julianne Baker and Lisa Hamby. A gifted Bible study leader, Julianne had been introduced to Paul Miller and *The Love Course*. At the time, Paul was working on the original *Person of Jesus* course material, and he asked Julianne to take a look. Meanwhile, Lisa, who was Julianne's neighbor and friend as well as a participant in one of Julianne's Bible studies, had befriended a new neighbor, Sharon Hoerichs. Somewhere in the process, Sharon became a believer. As a new Christian, she was yearning to share her faith with others. So she decided to host a Christmas tea for both believers and non-believers to share the true meaning of the holiday.

Soon after, Sharon was thirsting for a better understanding of who Jesus really is. That's where Lisa's gifts came in. "I was the 'gatherer,'" she laughs. "Julianne loves to teach, and I love to organize and invite people to learn!" Together, the duo invited Sharon as well as two other women to come to a study using *The Person of Jesus* materials.

The group was geographically scattered and from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, but that only served as a catalyst for God to work. "One woman had a Jewish parent and a Protestant parent, but had been brought up Jewish," Julianne recalls. "She had recently become more interested in spiritual things, and on week three, she came to the study and said, 'I did it! I became a Christian!' She asked a million questions, and *The Person of Jesus* study gave her great perspective. It helped put in the pieces that she needed."

For Sharon, the study was more than just the basics of Jesus and His work. "I knew so little," she says. "There were several lessons that really stood out powerfully to me, that showed me how Jesus focused on individual people. He didn't care about what the crowds or other people around Him thought. I think that for me, it was the very beginning, the first inkling, of what it meant to have a relationship with Jesus."

The study was short-lived, though, because just a few months later, Sharon moved to Milford, Iowa. And Lisa also moved, to a new home in Finksburg, Md. But before long, Lisa's "inviting spirit" began itching to gather more women for another study. There was just one problem: she no longer lived close to Julianne, on whom she had relied to lead the studies she organized. "I spent two years waiting for God to provide a teacher. But then I felt God leading me to step into that role!"

Again, the duo teamed up, this time with Lisa as the study leader and Julianne as the long-distance prayer partner. Three women attended, and Lisa feels that God has broken through to regenerate one of them. The other two, already believers but who had never been deeply challenged in their studies, had the chance to look at Jesus in a new way.

As the group takes a summer break, Lisa reflects on her new role. "Teaching has been one of the biggest challenges of my life," she says. "I have been totally dependent on people praying for the study. I feel totally inadequate and not spiritually strong—totally ill-equipped to do this. And though it's been a large stress and a larger time commitment, it's been a real growing experience. It's very rewarding and I'm encouraged to keep going."

Julianne agrees that prayer is crucial to undertaking these studies. She also has recently moved—to Chesapeake, VA—and is considering starting another study herself. But the proposition of doing that without Lisa to gather participants is frightening. "Prayer is the key, honestly," she says. "As I bike around my neighborhood almost every day, I'm scared about who to ask to come to the study. I try to ask God for people to invite and for the courage to invite them! And I partner with other Christians to ask them to pray for me."

Meanwhile, in the Midwest, Sharon had settled into her rental home, knowing she would move again into a more permanent home. But she had found a church and was getting to know several mothers with children the same age as her own. "I don't know what came over me," she laughs, "but I wanted to do a study and felt like I could do it!"

She invited her new friends—several of whom seemed to be lacking something in their faith. More than a year after the study ended, one of the women was in the midst of caring for her extremely ill child. She shared with Sharon that it was during *The Person of Jesus* study that she finally understood the commitment to Jesus that she had made as a teenager. She felt that God had introduced Himself in a real way, and she knew that it was only her renewed relationship with God that carried her through this most painful time in life. "*The Person of Jesus* study was a place for her to meet God," Sharon says. "The details Paul Miller includes in this study really helped." Lisa agrees, adding that *The Person of Jesus* study's "inductive questioning style is the key to drawing people in. You can't sit passively in a study like that."

And for Julianne, the tangents that sometimes come as the result of inductive leading are "critical in getting

to where a person's heart is. That's more important than my agenda in leading."

Recently, Sharon's inevitable move brought her to her new home in a rural area on the edge of her town. "I have all these new neighbors now that I know are not believers, and I really want to do another study! But I think God would have me focus on relationship-building first. I'm really into gardening and canning, and I've invited a neighbor to can tomatoes with me, so we'll have lots of time to talk. And my kids will be back in public school this year after homeschooling for awhile, so that will be another relationship builder."

Lisa understands that strategy, especially when she feels compelled to invite someone she knows a little bit but not really well. "You feel like you're inviting them out of the blue. I end up saying to them, 'I've got a crazy question for you. . .' But when you have something that you want everyone else to have, too, you look for opportunities. Everyone ought to have this relationship with Jesus!"

Sharon and Lisa are in touch frequently, and share prayer times for their potential studies. But in addition to prayer, Sharon feels that she has another "weapon" in her arsenal as she considers leading groups of non-believers. "I was not a believer all my life," she says. "It was such a great thing that God gave me my faith later in life, because I know that I don't have to knock people over the head with faith stuff."

"The lingo is really hard for me," she adds. "I totally know what it means to think that 'fellowshipping' is not a verb! And people know that I'm real. I think that's an asset—to be vulnerable and exposed. That's very important for someone who wants to lead a study like this and try to reach non-Christians."

The women agree that being real also includes being willing to make what they feel might be mistakes in their leading. "The huge thing I've noticed as a Bible study leader is that you always think it's worse than it is," says Julianne. "You just never know how God is using even a terrible experience. It's amazing how God uses what we think are our failures, and we need to be open to that and even expecting it."

Location: near Philadelphia

Leader: "Gwen"

Participants: all women

By Paul Miller

Much of the Christian life is not about mountain-top experiences but about hanging in there when you don't feel like it. My dad, Jack Miller, asked Moishe Rosen, the founder of Jews for Jesus, how he found so many talented people. He replied, "I don't hunt for talented people. I hunt for obedient ones." Watch the simple perseverance of Gwen, an obedient one. (All of the names in this story have been changed.)

In late 1998 Gwen told me she'd like to start a *Person of Jesus* study with some of her non-Christian friends. She was nervous, though, because her husband was opposed to her having the study. I told Gwen that she needed a partner. Not until late 1999 did a friend of Gwen's, Penny, step forward and say she'd help.

At their first meeting in February 2000, no one showed up. So Gwen tried again in March. This time Lola, Nancy (Gwen's sister-in-law), and Diane (her sister) showed up. Gwen said that their hearts were gripped by Jesus in the Widow of Nain story. Nancy in particular kept asking questions after the meeting. She asked, "What is love?" Gwen reflected later: "With the earthly fathers we all have had, it is hopeless to see the love of the Father through them. My heart breaks for them and me."

In April no one showed up again. Gwen sent me an e-mail: "I feel so weak. I am beginning to understand the meaning of 'without me you can do nothing.' ARGHH. Please pray I would always be aware that it is not my power, my charm, and my persistence that is availing this group. All I want to do is snuggle up on the couch of this world, watch TV and sleep. The Spirit is reminding me that this is not my home."

At the next scheduled meeting no one showed up again. I suggested to Gwen that she call the women and ask them if they wanted to keep meeting and if another night would be better. Friday night was better.

At the next meeting, only Diane came on time, and Nancy came after the study with her kids (ages 2 and 6) and asked Gwen to baby-sit them for the weekend. Gwen wrote me, "I baby sit her kids A LOT. Watching her kids feels like suffering. I am trying to minister to her, but I end up watching her kids all weekend. Go figure. Please pray for Diane. She has a very difficult marriage, but she is very self-reliant and HARD. HARD AS A ROCK. I pray for her to open up about her need and suffering. I pray our setting would be a safe place for her."

They met a second time and Gwen's two sisters-in-law, Nancy and Jane, came. They had a good, free-

flowing discussion.

In June, Sandy, another non-Christian, told Gwen they could meet at her house. Sandy lives with Bruce Simpson, her cousin and Gwen's brother-in-law. When Gwen asked Bruce to join them he snapped back, "No way! All Christians are hypocrites! I am not interested at all." Then he began to curse at Sandy. Gwen e-mailed: "He was so close to her, I thought he might hit her. It was tense. [In the past,] Sandy has asked him to leave but he has threatened to turn her over to immigration since she got married to stay here."

The next meeting, Nancy brought her friend, Stephanie. Gwen said about that meeting, "I am also thankful that God showed up. The other woman, Debbie Hines, whose husband is in prison didn't show up. I found out later that she found her way to the casino with her mother on Friday so that is why she didn't come. She refers to Jesus as the 'Man Upstairs.' God provided a baby sitter for an hour. Please pray that God would show up because I, we need HIM desperately."

Nothing spectacular has happened to date with Gwen's group. But Gwen is spectacular. The beauty of Jesus shines through her simple, loving perseverance. Look at the obstacles that she endured: her husband's refusal to open up their home; her friend committing to help then never showing up; her sister-in-law taking advantage with babysitting; and nearly a third of the meetings nobody coming out even though Gwen was calling people to remind them.

Jesus is stalking the world through people like Gwen.

J. FAQs—Group Leadership Issues with Seekers

Q. The non-Christians seem to be making little progress. What am I doing wrong?

When you are sharing Jesus, expect things to get messy. Here is an email from a woman who is leading a *Person of Jesus* study:

Let me update you on the non-Christian girl coming to our Bible study. She says she 'accepted' Jesus after class the first day. She has continued coming, but she has pulled back from me a little. She lives with her baby and her boyfriend, the baby's father. She asked me to look into a place she could go so she could leave her boyfriend. After I made an appointment for her to just go see the place, she gradually backed out and then away from me.

Look at the messiness: Is the woman truly a believer? Why is she backing away? How do you relate to her when she has backed away?

When you bring Jesus where he is not known, you enter territory long held by Satan. Satan resists intrusions into his kingdom. The friction of two kingdoms at war results in messiness.

Von Clausewitz, the military thinker, writes in his classic book, *On War*, that one of the characteristics of the battlefield is "a fog or moonshine [that] gives to things exaggerated dimensions and unnatural appearance."³¹ Military strategists call this the "fog of war."

What does fog do? It makes visibility not only poor, but also distorted. A tree several feet in front of you may be clear, while the cliff just to your left is totally invisible.

It is easy to think that this messiness means you've done something wrong. You might have, and you need to look at that, but often it just means you've made contact with the enemy and you are in the battle.

This kind of suffering is particularly unnerving for Americans. We like a tidy world that works reasonably well. A secret of Satan's power is using confusion to unnerve us. He has little recourse because the kingdom of heaven is so powerful. Satan has no power to create, to bring life. Jesus does. Satan can only destroy by bringing confusion through his lies.

In short, the inevitable feel of spiritual warfare is confusion. When you feel confusion, slow down, dig in, and pray—it is your air support. The weapons that God has given us (prayer, the Holy Spirit, the love of Christians, the Word, and the gospel) are relentlessly victorious against Satan if given time. We mustn't get discouraged because we don't see progress. We just need to stay in the fight.

Q. How do you develop community with a mixed group of Christians and seekers?

1. **Listen.** I noticed that my first group enjoyed the time after the lesson, when we spend 45 minutes around the table eating dessert and just chatting. One of them said how much she enjoyed that time. It struck me that many non-Christians probably don't enjoy the rich fellowship that we have as Christians. The beer commercials of guys playing basketball, and then sitting around having beer, are rare for many non-Christians.
2. **Enjoy them.** During our time, I just enjoy them, and tell funny stories about my life and ask them about their lives. We talk all over the map. I told them how I had struggled with one of my children for his being on the phone late at night. I did it in a lighthearted way. I want them to see me for what I am: a parent who struggles just like they do with their kids. We have a lot of laughs together. I came into this thinking that non-Christians are probably afraid of Christians. They don't understand our world and it seems kind of weird to them. I want my life to be like grease for Jesus.

Q. How and when should we pray during a *Person of Jesus* study?

It is good to pray together as a group, yet you may not want to begin praying until after you have met a few weeks, when everyone will be more comfortable. I would suggest not praying the first time since many will be absorbing a new setting. The only reason not to pray in a study is if you know that someone is strongly irreligious and may be offended.

A natural time to pray during a study is at the end of the lesson; or, if you have a dessert, after that.

When you pray, encourage people to utter “one-breath” prayers—saying only what they can in one breath. One-sentence prayers help people to have a conversational style in prayer. Explain to your group the idea of “one-breath prayers;” perhaps joking that praying in one breath keeps people from being long-winded. Tell people that they are free not to pray as well. Remind Christians who are part of the study ahead of time to (1) give short, one-breath prayers and (2) not use religious language in their prayers (e.g., “I lift up Bob to you,” etc.).

You may want to hand out 3 by 5 cards so people can write down prayer requests or questions that they may feel uncomfortable sharing so only you will see them. Encourage them to put their name on the card and have a basket available at the exit for the cards. This is a great way to encourage people to share deeper needs and allows you to follow up with them and begin caring for them.

A time of prayer will demonstrate to non-Christians that God is a personal being with whom you may have a relationship, and that his power and blessings are available now—not just tied to some event in the distant past. Further, it will plant the seeds for their lives to be characterized by prayer.

Q. How do you get non-Christians to come to a study on Jesus?

This is the most frequently asked question. Christians are skeptical that non-Christians would want to come and study about Jesus because we have felt “the wall” when we mention any thing about Jesus, the Bible, Christianity, the gospel, or church. Often, non-Christians will change the subject, tell us flat out they aren't interested, or say they have other commitments. Frankly, they get nervous when religion comes up.

But non-Christians are willing to come to this study. What is my evidence? 90% of the people who try *Person of Jesus* studies are able to get non-Christians to come more than once. Why would non-Christians want to come to?

1. **We don't invite them to a Bible study.** We don't say, “Would you come to a Bible study on Jesus?” The word Bible makes some people nervous. Say something like, “We're having a four week study on what Jesus is like as a person and how he relates to people as a way of seeing what love is. Would you be interested in coming?” Even better, if you have been through one of *The Person of Jesus* Training Seminars or been through *The Person of Jesus* study in your small group at church you can say something like, “I have been through this study on what Jesus is like as a person. The study looks at him

- as a model for what love is and how to relate to people. It has been a help to my husband and me.”
2. **Many people are hurting and lonely**, and we don't even know it. We assume their lives are okay because everything seems normal on the surface. A Muslim woman attended a study because someone had put a flyer on her mailbox. She told the women at the study that she was so lonely she would have responded to anything. A Jewish woman in Philadelphia was willing to study about Jesus for almost twenty weeks because she was separated from her husband.
 3. **The commitment is only for four or six weeks.** At the end of four weeks, ask them if they want to go on for another four weeks. By that time, commitment has usually become a non-issue because they are enjoying not only the study of Jesus but also the fellowship of Christians. The Jewish woman mentioned above wouldn't even commit to four weeks—only to coming once. But she kept doing that for almost five months, each week committing herself to only one more week.
 4. **People are intrigued by Jesus.** Even Norman Mailer has gotten into the act by writing a book about him.

K. FAQs—Hard Questions From Seekers

Q. How do you answer hostile or difficult questions?

In these FAQs we'll deal with how to logically answer difficult questions that people might ask such as, "Aren't Religions the Cause of Wars?" It is good to know those answers, but how you answer is as important as what you say. The basic rule of thumb is this: You approach a difficult question by focusing on the person and not just the question. If you keep the person in mind, it will change how you answer him or her. It's just like Jesus with the widow of Nain.

Instead of arguing with people about what's wrong with their questions, you can appeal to something good in their question or worldview. When Paul was in Athens (Acts 17), he preached the gospel to an audience that was conditioned by Platonism, which rejects the physical world as impure or less real. But the gospel is rooted in the Hebrew worldview that delights in the physical. God was born as a physical baby that cried in a manger. (The line from the second verse of *Away In A Manger*—"the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes"—is not true! That idea comes from a Greek worldview called Docetism that despised the physical, and therefore denied that God was truly Incarnate.) Jesus has a physical body even after the resurrection.

So how does Paul approach this Greek world with his Hebrew-rooted-in-the-earth-mentality? He finds something good in the Greek worldview. He appeals to their emphasis on the eternity or transcendence of God, which is central to their Platonic worldview. They would have agreed with him when he said, "How can God live in a dwelling made by hands?" And to make that case he doesn't quote the Bible, but two of their own poets. He uses their "altar to the unknown God" as a bridge to introduce the true God. So instead of saying how goofy their worldview is, he takes what is right in it, affirms that, and uses that as a bridge. You can do that with almost any hard question thrown at you. The reason we can do that with confidence is because everyone is made in the image of God and some of that image will leak through, no matter how much anyone suppresses the knowledge of the true God. Hunt for that leakage and build on it.

Remembering the person helps you realize that people can change their minds. Ultimately the gospel, not logic, will win the day. I always want to get back to some aspect of the gospel story. No matter what the argument is about, try to personalize it by telling stories about Jesus or his work. A well-known evangelical was on a secular talk show after September 11th, along with several other pundits. They were asked about the Islamic terrorists who committed suicide with the planes: What did they believe happened to them after they died? The unbelievers said, "They have just disappeared." The evangelical said, "They are in hell." Here's an alternative response: "Once when Jesus had a little child on his knee, he said this about people that hurt little children who believe in him: 'It would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea' (Matthew 18:6b). In effect, Jesus says, "You don't want to go down that road with God.'" This answer builds on something that Americans prize—children—and it gives them something personal about Jesus in the form of an image that is easy to remember. Plus it shows Jesus' hatred of evil. It

doesn't answer the question directly, but then Jesus often answers questions indirectly. Jesus tells his followers to "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16b). Shrewdness shapes its answer to the person while, at the same time, maintaining biblical integrity.

People will remember how you answer a question more than whether you answer it correctly. I can prove that. Think back to first grade. Which do you remember more: what your first grade teacher was like or what he or she taught you? Likely you remember your teacher—that is, his or her character, demeanor, or appearance—more than what you were taught.

Your gentleness is the most powerful argument for the ongoing resurrection life of Jesus. Paul tells Timothy what the Lord's servant should do: "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct..." (II Timothy 2:25a). So answer difficult or hostile questions truthfully, but gently.

Q. Are the Gospels Reliable?

I was talking with a friend recently about Jesus, and she said, "Maybe it is not really Jesus but Jesus through the people that wrote about him." I asked her, "Why are the four New Testament accounts of Jesus' life viewed by some scholars as constructs when they don't view other ancient documents as constructs? I.e., the works of Julius Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, Plato, Philo, Socrates, Suetonius, Josephus. Why are the rules different?" She was surprised to hear this.

It is even more surprising when you discover that the New Testament is the best-attested, book-sized document in the ancient world. One way of testing the reliability of ancient documents is to determine how many years separate extant copies from original manuscripts. The oldest New Testament copies are Egyptian papyri (labeled "P") that have survived in the dry desert, usually in ancient garbage pits. A fragment from the book of John called P⁵² dates to about AD 125-130, about 35 years after John was written. In comparison, the earliest extant manuscript for Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars* is 1000 years after the original. That is typical.

The second way of testing the reliability of a document is by the number of copies that are known to exist. For the New Testament we have 24,000 surviving manuscripts. No other ancient Roman or Greek document even comes close. The second most prevalent writing of the Ancient Near East is Homer's *Iliad*, for which there are 643 extant manuscripts. Few other documents have more than 10 surviving copies.

So why are the gospels treated badly? The answer goes back two hundred years to the period called the Enlightenment when the "in crowd" of the day decided that miracles did not occur. The assumption of the Enlightenment was that the supernatural is nonsense. Only what you saw or could test existed. So Thomas Jefferson wrote his famous "Jefferson Bible" in which he edited out all the miracles. People are beginning to realize that that very statement "only what can be tested exists" cannot be tested! In fact, the statement itself is a belief. And it flies in the face of an almost universal acceptance of the supernatural throughout history.

Another form of the Enlightenment attack on the gospels is the objection, "The gospels are religious writings." The assumption is that religious things aren't true. But most of the ancient documents were deeply religious and dealt extensively with the author's view of the supernatural world: Josephus, Plato, Socrates, and Philo were all deeply religious in their own way. And who decided that religious knowledge was not factual? The Enlightenment did.

Another objection is that the gospels are biased because Christians wrote them. If this were true, then no people could ever write about their own life. Jews can't write about Nazi internment camps. Americans can't write American history books. Julius Caesar can't write about his battles.

Another reason for the bias against the gospels was because Jesus was an outsider in a Roman-Greek dominated world. He was a second-class citizen in his own country. So Julius Caesar was in the "headlines" but peasants in backwater corners of the realm simply did not make the news because they weren't important. For instance, where do you go to find out what the daily life of an American slave was in the 1800s? Jesus is dismissed today simply because the incarnation was so humble. Humble people don't get noticed.

Initially, don't try to get someone to believe the Bible is the Word of God. Just get them to treat it with the same respect they would any other historical document. The Bible has a way of selling itself!

Q. What do you say to someone who believes it's unfair for God to judge homosexuality (i.e., because it's just their nature and people are born with it)?

Here are some thoughts:

1. Draw them out to get behind their real concerns. For instance, ask them what disturbs them most about God condemning certain actions, lifestyles, or attitudes. How does that bother them? What is it they deem unfair or unjust? This will reveal the “larger” issues they are really wrestling with. You will usually get to the real issues they have with the character of God. The issues they are defending are just an example.

Another way of getting to their heart is to ask, “Why is it so important to you to feel God approves of this?” This will also get you into territory with them that reveals the deeper stumbling block.

2. If they present the “inborn” genetic basis for homosexuality, ask them to offer proof of their beliefs. In the past when this has come up, I have asked people if they could name anyone who has done any scientific research on this or if they can cite any actual scientific studies that conclusively show that homosexuality has a genetic or biological basis. Almost 100% of the time no one can even cite one person or study.
3. A couple of times in the past I have had people bring up the fact that some science has proved a genetic link between alcohol and drug dependency and so this must also be true for homosexuality. I have then gone on to talk about the fact that while these two problems have one of the highest recidivism rates, more money is spent in preventative and treatment programs and social services on these problems than any other. In other words, it is generally accepted that even though people may be “inclined” to these abuses, our society spends millions of dollars and millions of man-hours helping people not go that route or be that way. Are they suggesting that we also help set up programs that would help homosexuals not be that way? They will usually be quick to give an “of course not” kind of response. I will then remind them that they have brought up the two problems and used them to set up a comparable scenario with homosexuality. I am only being consistent with their examples.
4. You can always take it out of the realm of the homosexual issues and offer a substitute issue or problem. Why is it, for instance, that God speaks disapprovingly of adultery or gossip? The answer is of course that there is something inherent in sin that distorts or mars both the character of God and the image of God in man and that sets man up to cease to live as a dependent creature reflecting the attributes of God.

Of course, in any conversation with a non-believer (or a deceived believer) one must rely on the Spirit for direction and the right kind of heart-engaging questions. I think God honors our heart desiring to engage another heart for the sake of the gospel.

Several years ago when I was on a trip to Amsterdam, I was with George Abbott, who was himself converted out of a homosexual lifestyle. We saw a guy standing beside a building one night, sort of propped up against it with one foot on the ground and one on the building. I knew that he was a male hustler looking for business. We were only about 20 feet away from him when we saw him. I said to George that we should go over and talk to the guy. George immediately said, “What will we say to him?” I replied that I did not know yet, but that we would know by the time we got there.

What transpired was a two-hour conversation not about the man’s homosexuality (that was done with as a topic within about 15 minutes), but rather his anger and disgust with God, including his history of personal suffering and disappointment with God. What we saw and initially spoke of was just a window dressing on the real issues of his heart.

I think the same is true with anyone who questions the justice or fairness of God. It’s just so politically correct nowadays to see the homosexual as such a victim, not responsible for his choices. Of course you might have to do some repenting on behalf of other Christians as a whole for their tendency to place homosexuality on the top of the scale as the worst thing someone could ever do. [It is featured prominently in several lists of

sinful habits that exclude people from the kingdom of God, such as in I Corinthians 6:9-11.] In other words, you might have to concede that a lot of damage has been done to homosexual strugglers by the church. Explain that real love is always based on speaking truth and showing mercy (Jude 20-23).

John Freeman, Harvest USA

Q. How can you say that Jesus is the only way to God?

This is one of the most difficult questions to answer, not because it is a hard question, but because the bias of the question reflects the modern presupposition that all religions are essentially the same. God is at the top of the mountain and religions are the different paths up the mountain. Each path has the same goal. We have McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King; so likewise we have Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity—many choices, but the same goal.

In a potentially tense situation, people appreciate having their own idea restated. (And it buys you time while you are praying desperately to know how to answer them!) So I rehearse the ideas in the first paragraph above. Then I tell them the parable of the Man in the Pit below. A parable can keep something from turning into a debate. Paul tells Timothy, “Those who oppose him he must gently instruct . . .” (II Timothy 2:25a).

The question of different religions has been illustrated by the story of a man in a pit—in a deep, vile, filthy pit with a huge serpent in it that he is desperately trying to avoid. He has fallen into this ghastly pit! What happens?

Well, along comes an Animist (representing primitive native religions), and he looks down into the pit and sees the serpent. His eyes open wide, and he flees into the jungle lest the same evil spirit should heave him into the pit. Then, along comes the Confucianist, and he says, “Ah, so, great man never fall in pit, but walk circumspectly and henceforth you will look where you walk.”

The Hindu comes along and says, “Ah, my brother, you think that you are in a great black pit, but that is the error of mortal mind. The fact is that all is Brahman and Brahman is all and this external world is merely illusion. The pit does not exist. Think, ‘There is no pit, there is no pit, there is no serpent, and all will be well . . . peace.’ ”

Then comes a Muslim who sees the man in the pit and says, “It is easy to get out of the pit, my friend. Just practice the five truths of Islam: Give alms to the poor, make a pilgrimage to Mecca, pray five times a day to Mecca, fast during the month of Ramadan, and confess ‘There is one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.’ ”

Then comes the Buddhist who looks down and says, “Dear friend, you are suffering greatly in that pit, and the reason you are suffering is because you want to get out of the pit. It is your desire that is making you miserable. What you must come to is a cessation of all desire, and then you won't mind being in the pit.”

And then Jesus comes and looks with compassionate eyes at the man in the pit, and into that foul and filthy pit he leaps between the man and the serpent—who rears his ugly head and strikes at the Savior, and sinks his fangs into His side. As the venom of that serpent flows into the blood of Jesus, He lifts that man out of the pit. That is a Savior. That is the difference between Christianity and all other religions.³²

This parable highlights the fact that religions view the world differently. A friend of mine overheard someone, who believed that all religions are essentially the same, tell a Muslim, “Is not it great that we're all going to the same place when we die?” The Muslim replied, “What do you mean? You are going to hell!”

Because we look at the world differently, our solutions are also very different. In Christianity, the person is made whole, restored. In Buddhism the person disappears. Salvation for the Buddhist is a state of being completely dissolved and swallowed up in the cosmic spirit of the universe, or All-soul. In Hinduism, good or bad karma accumulated in this life is either rewarded or punished in the next. In Christianity, sins can be forgiven through the atoning death of Jesus. Every other religion requires us to fix our own problems. Only Christianity takes our sinful human nature seriously. We can't do for ourselves, so Jesus does for us.

Think of the Titanic. ‘Get off the ship and get in a life boat’ sounds dogmatic unless it's the only way to be saved. Imagine someone responding, “Well, I am not going to get in the lifeboat simply because you are dogmatic. It is too narrow minded to provide only one way of getting off the ship.” But for many of life's realities,

there is only one way. The only way for a human to be born is with the egg of a woman and the seed of a man. Period. One of the most maddening things about computers is that unless everything in them is exactly 'right' they just don't work. They were designed to operate only one way.

The modern belief that there are many ways to God is simply that, a belief. The source of the belief is our emphasis on tolerance in American culture. We've confused tolerance for other religions with the assumption that they are equally true. Accepting the right of others to believe as they want doesn't mean that what they believe is correct. Ironically, our world has become intolerant of those who believe that Jesus is the only way to God.

A word of caution: I would not use the parable of the Man in the Pit with anyone whose religion is mentioned in the parable. For instance, when speaking to Christians, Paul boldly speaks of the foolishness of men who suppress the truth of God's existence (Romans 1:18-32). But when Paul is speaking to the pagan philosophers, he quotes their own poets and speaks gently of an unknown God (Acts 17:16-34).

Some of what you are coming up against is the foolishness of popular thinking where truth is based on feelings: "This idea is right if it feels right to me." True, Biblical ideas have a right 'feel' to them. But if your feelings are your only rule, you are lost in a fog. My college professor asked us to design our own system of right and wrong saying that 'anything goes'. He got angry with me when I asked him about Nazi ethics. Underneath his veneer of total acceptance, he had clear ideas of what was right and wrong.

A related idea is "All that counts is being sincere in what you believe." Calvin compares sincere but misplaced faith to a strong runner who sprints at breakneck speed into the stands. On the other hand, weak faith in the right direction is like the crippled person who can barely hobble toward the finish line.

The early church was persecuted for saying that Jesus is the only way to God. Sometimes the Roman officials would even beg the Christians to burn just a little incense to Caesar. 'You don't even have to believe it,' they would plead. But Peter testified in front of men who later tried to kill him, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4.12). If we say "Jesus is Lord," we can't also say, "Caesar is Lord."

Q. How could a just God send people to hell?

Ravi Zacharias, the evangelist, says the first question he gets in India is, "Are you saying Gandhi is in hell?" This is a tough question for our pluralistic age. Here are some of the ways I answer it.

The Divine Tape Recorder. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:1,2). In other words, every time you say or think a critical thought a little divine tape recorder, just behind your left ear, starts silently recording. Day after day, all your personal rules for living, all your muttered curses, slowly accumulate. Think of all the free advice you offer other drivers in traffic—everything you've said about other people. At judgment day, this lengthy tape is played back and compared with your life. Could God be fairer? Your own words will be your judge. Just the thought makes me break out in a sweat.

This could be why Paul says that "every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). God's justice will be so completely just, so perfect, that the whole courtroom will fall silent when his judgment is pronounced. No one will cry, "That's not fair."³³

Don't judge the judge. I am glad I am not God—though I periodically give it a go, like last weekend when our family was in Lancaster. When Jill and I travel, we have worked out a good compromise that keeps me from hyperventilating: I read the maps and Jill drives. Anyway, as a passenger, I did not like the way Jill was driving so I made some suggestions on how she could improve. She was less than thrilled. A little bit of controlling came out. I am not a very good controller. Only God is the controller. He's not called me to control the universe. Part of being his creature is to surrender to him.

As Americans, we are so used to evaluating and voting that we think that we can do that with God. But God has not made us little gods—we are created in his image, under him. To him we must surrender our lives, our dreams, and our plan for an ideal universe. Sometimes, there are ideas in Scripture we don't like that we have to surrender to him. It doesn't mean you turn your mind off—tell God it's hard—but it does mean that you can't sit above God and judge him. Don't judge the judge. God never tells Job why he permitted Satan to

take his family away. Paul, quoting Isaiah says, “Who has ever known the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor?” (Romans 11:34).

Jill has a hypothetical drawer in which she hides hard things from God. She shoves them in and closes the drawer. When she comes across something hard, that she doesn’t understand, she is quick to say, “That’s a drawer issue.”

Imagine a driver who sees a curve ahead in the road and says, “I don’t like that curve so I am going to ignore it and go straight.” He maintains his independence and goes right over a cliff. Truth is like curves in the road—it doesn’t change if you don’t like it. No truth was ever altered by believing it wasn’t true.³⁴ (It is never an issue for the person raising the question. They have heard. They can believe in Jesus.)

The Consequences of Rejecting Divine Judgment. Our age does not struggle with the question of hell. Rabbi Kushner asks the question our age does struggle with: Why do bad things happen to good people? His assumption is that people are good and don’t deserve bad things. God therefore owes us forgiveness almost like Santa owes us toys. Given this idea of God, it is unthinkable that God would send anyone to hell. This, more than anything, underlies our culture’s dislike of hell.

Rabbi Kushner says that bad things happen to good people because God can’t control evil. Philosophers call Kushner’s idea dualism. Evil and good are equal, competing forces. Taoism is an eastern form of dualism. Kushner recreates the world of paganism where God is not all-powerful—he is swept along by forces larger than himself. You too are set adrift in a sea of chaos. Go ahead and pray to God, but he might not be strong enough to help you. If you eliminate divine judgment, you are left with unrestrained evil and chaos. By contrast, the existence of hell means that God will, one day, destroy evil completely and forever.

The real question, according to Jesus, is “Why is God so patient with bad people?” When Jesus is told of a report of an atrocity committed by Pilate, he says, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:2). Paul’s comments are similar: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The 20th century, more than any other century, denied the existence of the spiritual world and, thus, heaven and hell. Ironically, the 20th century, more than any other, created living hells on earth. In fact the three thinkers who shape our world more than any other—Freud, Marx, and Darwin—were directly responsible for the three great genocides of the 20th century. Freud was the father of our modern culture of self that has led to abortion. Marx was the father of communism which led to millions killed and imprisoned. Darwin influenced not only the robber barons of America but Hitler. German’s were the fittest to survive, the master race.

God as the Judge. There is much about judgment day that I don’t understand—that God hasn’t asked me to understand. But I have come to trust God as a judge by watching him judge. Take David’s sin of counting the army of Israel. When the prophet of God confronts David, he gives David three choices: Three years of famine [nature], three months of war [man], or three days of the angel of death [God]. David jumps at the chance to be judged directly by God. He says to the prophet Gad, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men” (II Sam. 24:14). This answers their concerns about the future by looking at how God has functioned as a judge in the past.

When they brought guilty people to Jesus, his judgments were always wise. He’s a judge I trust. Read the story from John 8:1-11 of the woman caught in adultery. Or Luke 7:36ff, the story of the sinful woman at Simon’s house.

Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Sometimes, when people raise abstract questions it is good to be very simple in response. A simple response to this question is that most of the Bible’s teaching on hell comes from Jesus. See especially Matt. 25:31-46, the parable of the sheep and the goats.

Q. Why did Jesus have to die?

“The idea of Jesus dying on a cross and shedding his blood for our sins seems so barbaric.”

This is a very common question in small groups. The very nature of the problem that the cross solves—human pride—means that the gift of forgiveness will be underappreciated. Sin means that we do not see either

ourselves or God clearly. So the sacrifice of Jesus as the Passover lamb for us will seem unnecessary. This is a particular problem in American culture. Like the Lost Son, America has gone to the far country with our Father's inheritance. We are living off the inherited goodness of past generations. Our world is so comfortable, we can't imagine the need for Jesus to die.

Below I've broken down the answer to this question into two sides. The first "Is the Atonement Really Necessary?" deals with our need for atonement, and the second question, "How Can Evil be Eradicated by Someone Dying on Your Behalf?" deals with the possibility of the atonement working.

Is the Atonement Really Necessary?

Answer #1: We do not see our Sin (from *Love Walked Among Us*)

Most people don't think they have a problem. Simon the Pharisee certainly didn't. Why? Sin is pride—self-absorption, self-glorification, and even its flipside, self-loathing. Pride doesn't see itself as proud—that's its very nature. Jesus puts his finger on this in his story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Pharisee prays, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even this tax collector" (Luke 18:11).

Because we have trouble seeing our own evil, we have trouble seeing that our evil has consequences. It just doesn't seem that bad. God's anger at sin seems like an overreaction. While in a Russian prison camp, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was shaken by the depth of his hatred for his persecutors. He came to a new realization about himself:

If only there were people somewhere committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. Confronted with the pit into which we are about to toss those who have done us harm, we halt stricken dumb: it is after all only because of the way things worked out that they were the executioners and we weren't.³⁵

He was able to say, "I have evil in me, too." Evil isn't just out there. It's in us. As we've seen, Jesus repeatedly takes our pointing finger and gently turns it back toward us. He interrupts our quiet superiority and blame-shifting by holding a mirror up to our faces. The problem isn't other people, it's me. It's me saying, "I am the boss. My will be done."³⁶

Answer #2: We do not see God

Modern Culture: A Santa Claus God. We have created a Santa Claus God who does not care about what we do. He forgives without a second thought. He is no different from a flaccid husband who does not care if his wife commits adultery and is thus incapable of jealousy. That is not love; that is an empty, non-human soul. But God cares. And because he cares, he is a jealous husband. He holds us accountable for our sins. Because modern culture has created God in our image, we have lost touch with God's justice and his anger over our sin. Nevertheless, each of us has a deep sense that our sins need to be paid for. Psychologists will tell you that many people get depressed either because they're beating themselves up for their own sins or they're beating someone else up for sinning against them. The one we call "mental penance" and the other "bitterness." In both cases, we have a deep sense that sin should be made right.

How Can Evil be Eradicated by Someone Dying on Your Behalf?

Answer #1: Ancient History

From the beginning of history, every tribal group on every continent has had some kind of animal sacrifice at the heart of its religious ceremony that pays for sin, that appeases the wrath of God. There was a deep, universal sense that sin needs to be atoned for. Christianity was the first religion that did not practice animal sacrifice, and everywhere it has spread, animal sacrifice has died out. But it is impossible for the blood of an animal to pay for my sins. Only a person can pay for the sins of a person.

Answer #2: Modern History

We might say, "Back then people believed that evil was eradicated through the shedding of blood, but we

don't believe it today." But how was the evil of Hitler and Nazism removed? Blood was shed. Millions lost their lives. Abraham Lincoln came to believe that a kind of exchange occurred on the battlefields of the Civil War, in which "...every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword." Evil is not eradicated without a cost. You cannot delete evil with the stroke of a key. It is far too embedded. It infects every part of the system.

Answer #3: Modern Culture

We instinctively know that it is not right for a judge to say to a murderer, "You know I like you as a person, therefore I am going to forgive you." When we see a murderer or a rapist go free it is not just wrong, it is appalling. It adds one crime on top of another. Something deep within us tells us that this is not right. Wrong must be paid for. The fact that we live in a moral universe is inescapable.

Q. A woman in my group refers to God as "she." How do I handle that?

Two small group leaders have told me that they have women in their groups who have referred to God as she. Welcome to a postmodern, post-Christian world! We're in for a wild ride. Here are some suggestions:

1. **You are a missionary.** When a missionary brings the gospel to a new culture, he or she prays, "How do I make the gospel the central issue rather than stumble over cultural issues that may be non-Biblical, but are not central?" The answer is not easy. The Spirit may want to use those cultural sins as the point of contact with the gospel. Or, the Spirit might want to by-pass those sins initially for the sake of the gospel and let the gospel have its own logic in the culture. Polygamy is an example. If a missionary focuses on the sin of polygamy before people understand the gospel, then he or she risks losing the person. People in the culture might think of Christianity as only a set of laws. Yet, if the missionary never addresses polygamy, then there is a danger of watering down the gospel so that it has no teeth. The gospel only comes alive when people come under conviction of sin. But what sins should you focus on? So pray, asking the Spirit to lead you. Watch the work of the Spirit in the person's life, and work where the Spirit is working—it will save you lots of hassle.
2. **Pray** for this person, that he or she would be taught by the Word. Have other Christians pray, too. Don't passively say, "Oh, this is just postmodernism." Take it seriously. Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13). The more work we do by prayer, the more we'll find problems quietly disappearing.
3. **Give time for the Word to work.** Many attitudes quietly disappear when they are exposed to the Word. The whole point of an inductive study is to let the Word speak for itself. Paul tells Timothy, "Those who oppose you, you must gently instruct, in the hope that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil" (II Timothy 2:25). You are bringing five powerful weapons to bear on their hearts: the Word, the gospel, prayer, the Spirit as witness to Jesus in their hearts, and your love for them. Together, these are overwhelming—let them do their work.
4. **Lift Jesus up.** Let them see Jesus. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). The gospel is on the move; don't be sidetracked by peripheral issues. In warfare, a good general will by-pass strongholds that don't threaten his supply lines.
5. **Ask questions.** Begin by trying to understand as opposed to critiquing. Ask an obvious question: "Why do you refer to God as *she*? I would be fascinated by the answer." The discussion will probably trigger more questions such as, "Have you experienced men being domineering?" Or, "Do you view the church as domineering?" Take the time to find out where he or she is coming from. You can empathize with the motive of someone's thinking without agreeing with his or her conclusions.
6. **Provide a historical context to the Biblical perspective.** If the person asks directly for an answer or is beginning to influence others in the group, then talk directly about the issue. Suggest discussing it at your next meeting time, so that you can cover it in depth and have time to prepare. This is what I would say:

In Palestine, as well as throughout paganism, the gods were seen as a part of nature. Thus the female god (Asheroth) was impregnated by the male god of rain and storm (Baal) every spring. If the gods were angry with me (crops not bearing fruit because of no rain), then I would need to placate them by offering to them the fruit of my womb, my first-born child, as a sacrifice. This was part of their cyclical view of history. People

were trapped in the cycle of the gods.

When the God of the Bible revealed himself to the Jewish people, he said, “It is terrible to sacrifice your children to Baal. Baal and Ashteroth are not gods. Created things aren’t god.” The Creator made the world outside of Himself. He made us in His image both male and female, but God Himself is neither male nor female.

Under paganism, women were pushed down. Baal (or his cultural equivalent) was superior to Ashteroth. Male ruled over female. When Christianity penetrates a culture, the effect of the gospel has always been that women are treated with a new dignity. Some of the clearest examples of that are in the way Jesus treats women. A woman (Mary) is the first to explicitly hear about Jesus’ birth. It is to a woman that Jesus first clearly says that he is the Messiah (John 4:26), and it is to a woman that he first appears after his resurrection (John 20:10). Not only were we created in God’s image as male and female (Genesis 1:27), but we are equal in salvation. Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

In Uganda, Rick Gray, a missionary, was discipling a tribal leader. Rick asked him what he was going to do with what he was learning from the Bible. He replied, “I think I am going to eat with my wife.” The tribal custom is that the wife eats by herself.

After reading Galatians 3:28, I would explain how Jesus’ death levels us. We are all sinners. We all need grace. We’ve all been in rebellion to God. Now, when God grants us forgiveness through Jesus’ blood, we are all co-heirs with one another. The Roman slave who believes is equal to the Roman centurion. (Notice the opportunity this gives to present the gospel.) I’d turn to James 2:1-4 and show how James deals with Christians who are undoing the leveling effect of the gospel by treating rich people better than poor people at their meetings.

That is the context of the Bible’s referring to God as *He*—the pronoun always used for God. There are two views among Christians as to why God is referred to as *He*.

Some say that *He* is simply an anthropomorphism. (E.g. sailors refer to ships as *she*, but they don’t literally mean the ship is a woman.) These Christians believe that the choice of a male pronoun to refer to a person is typical of many languages. The Biblical writers used *He* because it implies both groups. *She* is more specific. *He* is more ambiguous. In this view, it is purely a limitation of language. Male and female are both created in God’s image. Both male and female are needed to truly image God.

The other group of Christians agrees with much of what the first group says, believing that only as male and female together do we fully image God. We see in God what are considered classically feminine qualities: Seeing Jerusalem just before his death, Jesus says, “How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Luke 13:34). They also agree that the usage of *He* is partly anthropomorphic because God is a spirit being. Yet, the choice of the male pronoun all through the Bible is not arbitrary. All three members of the Trinity are referred to as *He*. When God became incarnate, *He* was a male. Why? God is demonstrating a divine headship. There is always a head. For instance, the merger of Chrysler and Mercedes-Benz was publicly announced as a marriage of equals with a co-chairmanship. But behind the scenes, the chairman of Mercedes was the leader. Bob Eaton, the chairman of Chrysler said, “Two people can’t lead a company.” The Biblical model of the family is that the husband is the head of the wife, but it is a headship unlike the model of society. It is a dying headship—just as Jesus’ headship over the church is a dying headship. Jesus died for his people; the husband exercises his headship by a dying love for his wife (Ephesians 5:22-23). This is my own view.

Summary

Notice the overall approach. Begin by waiting and praying for wisdom. Involve other Christians in praying for the person and yourself. Concentrate on making Jesus clear to them.

Then begin by questioning and understanding them. By first listening to them and trying to find the sources of their thinking, I might be able to empathize with hurts they have had from men in the past. It is so easy to assume that someone is a feminist and relate to her out of that grid without taking time to understand her. I might acknowledge that the church, at times, has marginalized women. Jesus tells us to take the beam out of our own eye first. Even if what the other person is saying is inaccurate, I can still acknowledge the sin of the church in a particular area.

Then I show the person the roots of their faith in a matter-of-fact way. I provide context that they can understand. Then I show how their faith has historically worked itself out; i.e. paganism has oppressed women. I show the practical effects of their faith and of Christianity.

Notes:

1. Billy Graham, *Just As I Am* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) pp. 19-21, 25-29.
2. Bill Hull, "Is the Church Growth Movement Really Working?" *Power Religion*, ed. Michael Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 143.
3. From a phone conversation in 1996 with Rev. Archie Parish of Mission to North America of the PCA.
4. Martin Robinson, *The Mind of the Unbeliever* (Publisher information unknown—out of print), p. 103.
5. D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 494.
6. David Briggs, "Survey finds Bible is mere icon in many U.S. homes," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (August 3, 1996).
7. Dieter Zander, "The Gospel for Generation X," *Leadership* (Spring 1995), p. 38.
8. Bill Edgar, "No News is Good News: Modernity, the Postmodern, and Apologetics," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (Fall 1995), p. 381.
9. John Eui-whan Kim, "Postmodernism and Christianity," *Chongshin Theological Journal* (Vol.1, Feb. 1996), p. 8.
10. Jim Reapsome, "Unspeakable Affront?" *Pulse* (Oct. 4, 1996).
11. J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 25.
12. Tim Keller, "Preaching to the Secular Mind," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 14, No.1, Fall 1995, p. 55
13. Stanley Grenz, "Star Trek and The Next Generation," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 18:4 (October 1994), pp. 328-329.
14. James Sire, "On Being a Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody," *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), p. 121.
15. S. Viereck, "Interview with Albert Einstein" (1879-1955), *The Saturday Evening Post* (Oct. 26, 1929).
16. Alistair McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), p. 194.
17. Carl George, *The Coming Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming Revell), p. 150.
18. Steve Smallman and James Engel are the originators of this chart.
19. Horatius Bonor, *Words to Winners of Souls* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), p. 14.
20. Rev. Steve Smallman "Understanding the New Birth" (Unpublished Paper, 1994), pp. 2-3.
21. Jim Peterson, *Living Proof* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1989), p. 150.
22. Os Guinness, "America's Last Men and Their Magnificent Talking Cure," *No God, But God*, ed. Guinness and Seel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 125.
23. Mary Ward Brown, "A New Life," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1991), pp. 82-90.
24. Personal conversations with Dr. Clair Davis, Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1992-1995.
25. B.B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishers, 1950), p. 93.
26. Roger Olson, "Back to the Bible (Almost)" *Christianity Today* (May 20, 1996), p. 32.
27. Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), p. 24.
28. Ernest Reisinger, *Today's Evangelism: Its Message and Methods* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Craig Press, 1982), p. 89.
29. Os Guinness, *Winning Back The Soul of American Business* (Washington DC: Hourglass Publishers, 1990), p. 40.
30. D. James Kennedy, *Truths that Transform* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming Revell, 1974), p. 60.
31. Von Clausvitz, *On War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 189.
32. This parable just shows the logical consequences of religious belief. An individual Muslim or Buddhist might not act the way they are described in this parable. For instance, Buddhist philosophy really believes that the problem of human suffering is our desires. Because we believe this world is real we are in constant tension with it. The only solution for the Buddhist is reaching nirvana, where you are absorbed in the all-soul and cease to exist as person. Different religions are not different ways to God. They are radically different ways of viewing reality.
33. Dr. Tim Keller.
34. Jack Bennett.
35. Alexander, Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1965. An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (London: Book Club Associates, 1974), p.168.
36. Paul Miller, *Love Walked Among Us* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), pp. 235-236.