

LESSON 1: WHO IS JESUS?

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

Opinions abound about who Jesus was (and is)—and it was the same during Jesus' time. So Jesus asked his followers a critical, clarifying question: "Who do you say I am?" Peter's response nailed it when he courageously spoke the truth about Jesus' identity as the promised Messiah and Son of God. This study will guide students in exploring why Jesus' question was so significant for the disciples and is of critical importance for us, too. As your students examine what it means to believe Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, they'll come to know him more intimately.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Peter took a bold step of faith by affirming Jesus' true identity as the Messiah and Son of God.
- 2. WHY:** Like Peter, teenagers' faith will be both challenged and bolstered as they grapple with the life-changing significance of Jesus' true identity.
- 3. HOW:** Students can relate to Jesus more intimately as they more fully understand his role in their own lives as the promised Messiah and Son of God.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16:13-20

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 53:2-6; 58:6; 61:1-2; Matthew 4:24-25; Luke 4:14-30; John 3:16-17; 10:30

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read Matthew 16:13-20.

While Jesus' world wasn't inhabited by paparazzi, the events in Matthew leading up to Jesus' conversation with Peter certainly paint the picture of a headline-worthy cultural phenomenon. To say Jesus was generating "buzz" is a profound understatement. Word had spread far and wide about his phenomenal, shocking, and amazing acts and words (see Matthew 4:24-25). He'd taught revolutionary ideas (see Matthew 5-7) and shared stunning stories (see Matthew 13:1-52). He'd healed lepers, blind people, a paralytic, and even

raised a girl from the dead (see Matthew 8:1-4, 14-17; 9:1-8, 18-34). He'd publicly shown kindness to Gentiles and outcasts (see Matthew 8:5-15, 28-34; 9:9-13; 15:21-28). He'd confronted the keepers of power and defied their religious laws (see Matthew 12:1-14, 38-45; 15:1-20; 16:1-12). He'd performed startling and powerful miracles (see Matthew 8:23-27; 14:13-36; 15:29-39). You can just imagine the buzz: *Who is this man?*

When Jesus asked his disciples this question in Matthew 16, it was not merely out of curiosity. He didn't simply want to know the opinions on the street. Like the great teacher he was, this process of posing a question had a purpose: the building and strengthening of faith in both Peter and his other beloved friends. For the disciples—and for us—grappling with this question is about more than an intellectual exercise or an analysis of facts. It is ultimately about encountering Jesus himself and coming to know him for who he truly is.

Like Peter did, when we grow in our understanding of Jesus as the Messiah and as the Son of God, we come to realize the profound implications for our own lives. This study will begin a three-session exploration of Jesus' identity and the profound importance of how we respond to the truth about who he really is.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Who is Jesus? Come tonight and explore how one man answered this critical question.
- Everybody seems to have an opinion about Jesus—from wise teacher to made-up figure to God himself. What's yours?

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We've launched a new series focusing on the critical question Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15). It's a question we each must personally consider in our own interaction with Jesus. What do we really believe about him, about his purpose, and about his role in our lives?

This week we focused on the key theological ideas in Peter's answer, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Teenagers dug deeper into the Old Testament idea of the justice, mercy, and hope the Messiah would bring. We also explored more deeply Jesus' claim to be not only God's Son, but to be one with the Father (John 10:30).

Teenagers are in a critical place in their spiritual development as they develop and deepen their own sense of conviction about Jesus' true identity. This week, I encourage you to spend a few minutes talking with your teenager about our lesson. Consider building your conversation around these questions:

- What kinds of opinions about Jesus do you hear from your friends or at school? How do you normally react?
- What did it mean to Peter to say Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God? Why?
- What do these ideas—Messiah and Son of God—mean to you personally?

Thanks for all your prayers for our students and our ministry. Have an amazing week!

LESSON 1: WHO IS JESUS?**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]**

You'll need four or five food items that students will taste and try to identify, such as soda, chips, cheese, juice, and pizza. Put each food in a nondescript bowl or pitcher (with cups), set them out in different areas in your meeting space, and then place a piece of paper and pen by each item.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

Have students form pairs or trios and then tour the room with their group, visiting each food or drink station. Their goal is to taste each food or drink item and identify it—name what it is, as specifically as possible (type, brand, flavor, and so on). For example, instead of just “cola,” a teenager might guess “Coke Zero.” Participants should share their guesses within their group *and* should each write their guess on the paper at the station. (If they want, they can consult others' written guesses as they make their own guess.)

When everyone has tried all the foods and made their guesses, reveal the true identity of each item. Then debrief the experience.

ASK:

- *How challenging was it to correctly identify each item?*
- *Which station was toughest? Which was easiest? Why?*
- *How, specifically, did you make your evaluation of each food? What factors did you draw upon to help you reach your conclusion about a particular food's identity?*
- *Did the other guesses influence you? Why or why not?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Identifying food can be a fun—and tasty—challenge. In this activity, we drew upon our own senses, memories, and experience to reach our conclusions. In today's study we're going to look at a pivotal time when Jesus asked Peter to identify him—to stake a claim about who Jesus really was. It was a crucial moment for Peter because his answer couldn't be safe or tame—it had to be an answer of deep conviction and great courage.*

TEACHING POINTS



Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 16:13-20 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Peter's statement about Jesus is jam-packed with meaning. Let's explore it more deeply together.*

1. JESUS ASKED A CRITICAL QUESTION

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus was creating quite a stir. Here's what Matthew 4:24-25 tells us: "News about him [Jesus] spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease...he healed them all. Large crowds followed him wherever he went." Jesus was both hugely popular and dangerously controversial. He taught amazing and radical ideas that threatened the religious status quo. He performed stunning miracles: casting out demons, feeding thousands of people, healing the blind and the paralyzed. He butted heads with the religious leaders, broke their rules, refused their demands, and confronted their hypocrisy. While many opinions were swirling about Jesus, here he asked those closest to him what they'd concluded about his identity.*

ASK:

- *Just like during Jesus' time, lots of people today have various opinions about Jesus' identity. What are some popular or common views of Jesus you've heard from friends, media, or the broader culture?*
- *What words or ideas are commonly linked to Jesus by the culture? within the church?*
- *What do you imagine it felt like for the disciples when Jesus asked this question? What thoughts might have raced through their mind? What emotions might they have experienced?*
- *How do you think the other disciples might have reacted to Peter's statement?*
- *Why would Jesus choose to ask this question rather than just stating his identity clearly to his followers?*
- *How do you think this experience might have affected Peter? What about Jesus' other followers?*

2. JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We're familiar with the word Christ—often in our culture it is treated like Jesus' last name! But for Peter, to say Jesus was the Christ was to make a radical claim. Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew term Messiah. Peter affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah—the one God had promised to send, over and over throughout the Old Testament.*

ASK:

- Read two messianic passages from the Old Testament: Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2. Then see how Jesus interacted with these passages in Luke 4:14-30. What stands out to you about these descriptions of the Messiah and his mission?
- Why is it significant that in Luke 4:21, Jesus claimed he fulfilled all of these promises?
- Look closely at the way others react to Jesus as the account in Luke 4:14-30 progresses. What do you observe? What do their reactions reveal to you about Jesus' claim to be the Messiah?
- Because Peter was a Jewish man, what do you think it meant to him personally to make his claim and declaration in Matthew 16:16?

3. JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Peter not only claimed that Jesus was the Christ—the promised and long-awaited Messiah—but he also said Jesus was “the Son of the living God.” He was not just a teacher or human figure God had promised to send—he was God himself!

ASK:

- Read John 10:30. In your opinion, how critical is it to understand this claim by Jesus? How would you explain, in your own words, what he is saying?
- What do people lose out on or misunderstand if they view Jesus merely as a human being and not as the Son of God?
- Why is it important to you personally that Jesus is the Son of God?
- Jesus, the Son of God, lived with a mission. Read John 3:16-17, and then discuss what key insights this passage provides about the purpose of the Son.
- How does John 3:16 harmonize with or complement the mission of the Messiah described in Luke 4:18-19? Share your observations.

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.

**ASK:**

- Read Isaiah 53:2-6, another messianic passage in the Old Testament that was written hundreds of years before Jesus. What stands out to you most about the character and the purpose of the Messiah?
- How do you see Jesus in this prophecy? Be specific.
- What insight does this passage offer you in light of your own relationship with Jesus?

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus invited his disciples to consider his true identity, and he invites us to do the same. What do we really believe about Jesus? What does it mean to us personally to affirm that he is the Messiah and the Son of God? Those are questions we cannot ignore.*

ASK:

- *What do you sense Jesus may be leading you to consider about his true identity?*
- *What idea or truth from Scripture or from our discussion is Jesus drawing your attention to?*
- *Which aspects of Jesus' mission as the Messiah and the Son of God are personally compelling to you? How might they impact your focus? your values? your choices?*
- *How do you desire to get to know Jesus better so you can deepen your personal understanding of who he is and why he came? What habits or choices can help you draw closer to him?*



Wrap up by praying for your students, asking Jesus to help them each get to know him better and grow in courage and conviction about their beliefs.

SUMMARY



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

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

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

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God' " (Matthew 16:16).