

LESSON 2: WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?

This includes:

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

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

While it's common in the broader culture to regard Jesus merely as a great teacher with some memorable quotes, the biblical accounts of his life and his teachings allow us no such option. In this study, students will grapple with some of Jesus' more stunning claims about his identity and the implications of those claims. Jesus' contemporaries understood that such radical claims demanded a similarly radical response. Just as Jesus made it personal with Peter, this study will prompt teenagers to formulate a personal response to Jesus.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Jesus' claims about his identity don't allow for a neutral response of middle ground; we must either believe him or reject him.
- 2. WHY:** As teenagers grapple with Jesus' extreme claims about himself, they more clearly see who Jesus really was—and is.
- 3. HOW:** Students' individual faith-lives are solidified as they allow Jesus' question—"Who do you say I am?"—to become deeply and profoundly personal to them.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

John 10:22-39

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Exodus 3:13-14; Leviticus 24:16; Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 4; John 8:58-59; 10:1-21

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 John 10:22-39.

It's not uncommon to hear some of Jesus' more memorable teachings quoted in the broader secular culture: the Golden Rule, love your neighbor as yourself, the Beatitudes, and so on. Treated like words from a historical, Confucius-like figure, these quotes and sayings of Jesus are popularized for their wisdom, but stripped of their context.

After all, the same person who told the beloved parable of the Good Samaritan also said this: “Before Abraham was even born, I AM!” (John 8:58). And this: “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30). The inevitable response to such unbelievable assertions? “We’re stoning you...for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God” (John 10:33).

What our contemporary culture gets horribly wrong is the idea that you can edit away Jesus’ unpalatable—even seemingly bizarre—claims and render him a tame, wise, and benign sage. The truth is that Jesus himself, in his words and actions, allowed no room for such a response. There were and still are really only two options: Believe Jesus’ claim or utterly reject him. There is no neutral option.

What’s particularly stunning about Matthew 16:13-20 is that Jesus didn’t let the disciples play it safe. He didn’t let them merely talk about others’ thoughts and ideas. Instead, in that moment Jesus made it profoundly personal. In a sense, he forced their hand—*Who do YOU say I am?* The time to respond was upon them, and Peter courageously voiced his response of faith.

Similarly, Jesus’ claims demand a distinctly personal response from each of us. As we face the full implications of his identity claims, we each must either go the way of the many who rejected him or the way of the few who saw him for 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.

- Did you know that Jesus said some crazy stuff about himself? Decide for yourself tonight what you think about his claims.
- Was Jesus really “Mr. Nice Guy”? Come this week to look more closely at his shocking claims.

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,

While your teenager undoubtedly hears some negative or critical opinions about Jesus from the secular culture, they likely also hear opinions like this: “Jesus was a kind man who worked for peace” or “Jesus was a wise and good teacher.” These generally positive ideas about Jesus cloak a dangerous idea: Jesus was tame and innocuous.

This type of stance toward Jesus fails to deal with the historical, biblical accounts detailing Jesus’ own claims about himself—and they were anything but tame! This week, as we continued exploring Jesus’ question “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15), our teenagers looked at the confrontational nature of Jesus’

identity claims and the response they demand from each of us. We must either accept Jesus at his word or reject him. There is no safe, tame, nice-guy option.

Ask your teenager about our study, using questions like:

- What stands out to you as Jesus' more radical claims?
- How would you describe the options for how people could respond to Jesus during his time and culture? How about today?
- What's been most challenging or inspiring to you about this series so far? Why?

Thanks for all you do, and have a great week!

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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

LEADER
TIP

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

Have teenagers stand in a line in the middle of your meeting room, and then ask them a series of either/or questions. For each possible answer, give teenagers movement directions to follow.

For example:

- Are you a male or a female? If you're male, take five steps backward. If you're female, take five steps forward.
- Do you have any siblings (including step-siblings)? If you do, turn right and take one step. If you don't, turn left and take one step.
- Does your name start with a vowel? If you answered yes, take three steps sideways. If you answered no, turn halfway around and then take three steps.

The critical idea is that no *neutral* answers are allowed—no “both” or “maybe” or “neither.” Participants *must* make a choice—and move as a result—every single time.

Have fun laughing together as students make their way around the room, run into each other, and so on. When you're done, draw everyone's attention to the various spots in the room where everyone ended up, and then gather together to talk about the experience.

(Need more question ideas? Consider the following: Are you a coffee drinker? Are you an underclassman or upperclassman? Do you prefer books or movies? Which comes most naturally to you—staying up late or getting up early? Are you right-handed or left-handed? School: love it or hate it? Pets or no pets? Do you prefer chocolate or vanilla?)

ASK:

- *What did it feel like to have to make a choice each time? Was it natural? easy? challenging? Explain.*
- *Were any of you frustrated that there were no “neutral” answers allowed—no “boths,” no “sort ofs,” no “maybes”? Why or why not?*
- *In our activity, your responses determined where you ended up in the room. Look back at your life so far: What's an example of a choice or decision you've made that has affected your life's trajectory? [NOTE: If students need help with this question, provide an example to get them started, such as choosing band class in middle school and now really loving an instrument and hoping to pursue music in college.]*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Sometimes we can make neutral decisions in life—we can answer with “maybe” or “sort of.” But there are also decisions where there are no neutrals—forks in the road where we must make a choice. Jesus is the ultimate fork in the road. When it comes to Jesus, we must make a choice. There is no neutral.*

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 John 10:22-39 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's investigate some of Jesus' own claims about his identity and consider how Peter, the disciples, and the crowds reacted to him.*

1. JESUS ELIMINATES THE OPTIONS

ASK:

- *In your opinion, what are Jesus' most controversial statements in this confrontation?*
- *How would you rephrase Jesus' claims here in your own words?*
- *As you read this account, how did you picture the facial expressions and body language of Jesus and the crowd? How did you imagine their voices—tone, volume, and so on? Why?*
- *It's common in our culture to try to “tame” Jesus, to reduce him to “Mr. Nice Guy” or “important historical teacher.” What other opinions or ideas about Jesus have you heard that try to tame him?*
- *Why would anyone try to tame Jesus? What might motivate such a response?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The Gospels make it clear that when people made a choice about who Jesus really was and what they believed about him, “Mr. Nice Guy” and “great teacher” were not on the table. Jesus' radical claims about his identity eliminate the tame, safe options. Either he's the Messiah, the Son of God, united with God the Father—or he's not.*

2. JESUS' CLAIMS DEMAND A RESPONSE

ASK:

- *Revisit Luke 4:14-30 from Lesson 1, looking closely at verses 28-29. Then skim through Luke 4 and John 10, and brainstorm a bunch of different adjectives to describe the people's emotions and reactions to Jesus' identity claims.*
- *Why were people so angry? What values, beliefs, or passions do you think motivated their incensed response to Jesus?*

- Read Leviticus 24:16. How does this Old Testament law apply to Jesus' claims about himself? How does it force a non-neutral response? Explain.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus' claims demanded a response: Either believe he was who he claimed to be—the Messiah, God himself—or declare it blasphemy—the ultimate disrespect to all that was sacred and holy to the Jewish people, a profound insult to God himself, and a crime worthy of death, according to Old Testament law.*

3. JESUS MAKES IT PERSONAL

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *In our previous study, we looked at Matthew 16:13-20, where Jesus first asked his disciples a seemingly safe question, wondering what the common opinions were about his identity. But then Jesus made things personal in verse 15: “But who do you say I am?”*

ASK:

- Review Matthew 16:13-20. How do you imagine Peter felt when Jesus made it personal? What do you guess the others might have felt?
- Why did the disciples so eagerly answer Jesus' first question but were silent—except Peter—for Jesus' second question? Why was Peter the only one who answered?
- If Jesus' question “Who do you say I am?” was multiple choice, what are the real options for possible answers? What aren't real options? Why?
- How does what we've studied about blasphemy and the crowds' responses to Jesus add weight to Peter's answer in verse 16? What did it really mean for Peter to say this?
- In what ways is Jesus' question in Matthew 16:15 a confrontation? How is it an invitation?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus' disciples couldn't coast along in neutral or lean on the opinions of others; Jesus forced their hand. They had to make a personal decision about Jesus' identity. The same is true for us. We each—on our own, apart from the opinions of our friends or our family or our culture—need to make up our own mind about Jesus. He asks each of us, “Who do YOU say I am?” And we each must answer.*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

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



ASK:

- Read about Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 3:13-14, and then read John 8:58-59. Why were people so furious with Jesus? Explain Jesus' claim in your own words.
- How would you respond—emotionally or otherwise—if a human claimed to be God? What if that person said or did something horribly insulting to your faith? Explain.
- How would your reaction compare or contrast to the people in Jesus' audience, their situation, and their culture?

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

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- *What actions could help you come to your own response to Jesus' statements about his identity? Or what spiritual habits can help you solidify your sense of conviction about your answer?*
- *How could journeying more deeply through this question about Jesus' real identity solidify your faith? How might that strengthen your relationship with Jesus?*
- *While there's a lot to be gained from learning from each other and supporting each other within the church, how can you make your answer more personal and less dependent upon the opinions of others?*

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.

"Then he asked them, 'But who do you say I am?' " (Matthew 16:15).