

S T U D Y G U I D E

52 WEEKS WITH JESUS

J A M E S M E R R I T T



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52 WEEKS WITH JESUS STUDY GUIDE

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

52 Weeks with Jesus

This discussion guide has been prepared to help you get the most out of *52 Weeks with Jesus*, whether you are reading the book alone or as part of a group. Each chapter of this guide features three main sections.

In the first section, “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus,” you’re invited to interact with some selected Bible passages that highlight the person, character, ministry, and teaching of Jesus Christ. Sometimes these passages will echo the texts featured in the corresponding chapter of the book; sometimes they will introduce new but related selections. In all cases, the texts and the discussion questions connected with them are designed to get you thinking about our amazing Savior.

The second section, “Reflect on the Book,” directs you to three key quotations taken from each chapter of *52 Weeks with Jesus*. A series of discussion questions after each quotation encourages you to delve a little deeper into some of the main themes of the chapter.

The final section, “Put It into Practice,” offers ideas to help you apply what you have learned. I want to encourage you to take the truth you have encountered and find ways to let it take root in your soul, so that you become increasingly like your Savior.

I pray that as you read the book and interact with this discussion guide, week by week you’ll come to know, appreciate, and love the Lord Jesus more than you did the week before.

Just Like Us

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

1. Read Matthew 13:53-57.
 - a. How did Jesus offend the people of his hometown? What in particular upset them?
 - b. How does the “ordinariness” of Jesus still offend people? Why do you think God didn’t make Jesus more like a Marvel comics character?
 - c. In what ways was Jesus just like *you*? How does this make you feel? Explain.
2. Read Revelation 13:8.
 - a. The “Lamb” mentioned in this verse is Jesus Christ (see Revelation 5:5-13). What does it mean that this Lamb was “slain from the creation of the world”? What does this say about God’s plan for the world?
 - b. Why would Jesus have a “book of life”?
 - c. Compare this verse with Ephesians 2:10. What similarities in concept do you see between the two verses? How could these thoughts be important to you as you go about your daily life?

Reflect on the Book

1. “The next time your world seems to be spinning out of control and you wonder if someone has a hand on the throttle of the train, just read the first verse of the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament. You’ll be

reminded that Jesus's tree is your tree and that God is in control."

- a. Describe a time your own world seemed to be spinning out of control.
 - b. How does God intend for the genealogy of Jesus to encourage you during uncertain times? Does it? Explain.
2. "God can overcome whatever troubles are behind you to achieve the purpose he has set before you."
- a. What troubles behind you do you still need to overcome?
 - b. What do you think God's purpose for you might be? Describe it.
3. "Jesus was just like us—born with a past and a history—and we have been made to become like him. God wants you to be a masterpiece of his grace by living for his glory and expressing his goodness to others."
- a. Why is it important that Jesus was "just like us," with a specific past and a history? Why is it important to you that Jesus was "just like us"?
 - b. How can you live for God's "glory," right where you are? How can you express God's goodness to others? What can you do to help them see God through you?

Put It into Practice

1. Spend a little time investigating your own heritage. What does your genealogy tell you about who you are and where you come from?
2. Who in your sphere of influence most needs to see God's glory right now? What can you do this week to help this person see God's glory?

A Misfit Among Misfits

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

1. Read Isaiah 53:1-3.
 - a. What does it mean that Jesus grew up like a “tender shoot” and like a “root out of dry ground” (v. 2 NIV)? At the time Jesus was born, what kind of status did Israel enjoy? What kind of status did the family line of David enjoy at that time?
 - b. Would Jesus’s physical features have attracted much attention (v. 2)? Would we probably have called Jesus handsome? Explain. Why do you think Isaiah would mention this detail?
 - c. How would most men respond to Jesus, according to Isaiah’s prophecy (v. 3)? In what way would Jesus be a “man of sorrows”? In what way would he be “familiar with suffering”? Why would men “hide their faces” from him? In what ways is Jesus still not “esteemed” today?
 - d. Why do you think God gave Jesus the sort of body he had? Why not give him movie star looks and a throng of fans?
2. Read John 9:24-34.
 - a. How did the religious leaders want the formerly blind man to “give glory to God” (v. 24)? What were they asking him to do? Why did they want him to do this?
 - b. What one piece of testimony was the man willing to give (v. 25)?
 - c. Why did the religious leaders begin to insult the man (vv. 26-28)?

- d. What comparison did the leaders make between Moses and Jesus? What is significant about the comparison?
- e. What conclusion did the man make on his own (vv. 30-33)?
- f. What price did the man have to pay for choosing to speak the truth (v. 34)? Why do you think he was willing to pay it? Would you have been willing to pay it? Explain.

Reflect on the Book

1. “Jesus’s genealogy in the Gospels includes five females. This sets the tone for justice and equality between the genders that is reinforced throughout Christ’s ministry.”
 - a. How does the inclusion of five females in the genealogy of Jesus set “the tone for justice and equality”?
 - b. How did the rest of Christ’s ministry continue to set this tone?
2. “God seems to be saying that no one is beyond his grace—a message that Jesus reiterates repeatedly.”
 - a. Is it really true that no one is beyond God’s grace? Explain. Describe someone in your own experience who appeared to be beyond God’s grace, but wasn’t.
 - b. In what ways does Jesus reiterate that no one is beyond his grace? Does it ever feel to you as though *you* are beyond God’s grace? Explain.
3. “God is reminding us that he can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves: pick up broken pieces and put them together, take broken lives and make them whole, gather broken hopes and make them reality.”
 - a. What broken pieces of your own life has God, through Christ, put back together?
 - b. What hopes is God in the process of making reality for you?

Put It into Practice

1. Get alone somewhere and make a list of all the ways you feel like a “misfit.” Then spend some time praying over that list, thanking God that he accepts you just as he accepts Jesus.
2. How has God been showing his grace in your life over the past week? Over the past month? Over the past year? Give him praise by telling someone else what you’ve watched him do in your life.

A Messy Messiah

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

1. Compare Isaiah 7:14 with Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38.
 - a. How was Matthew careful to say that Mary was a virgin? Why was he so careful to say it?
 - b. What language did Luke use to convey that Mary had not had sexual relations before she became pregnant? Why did he explain this was important to know?
 - c. What would you say to someone who claimed the virgin birth couldn't be very important, since the apostle Paul never once mentioned it?
2. Read Ephesians 2:11-22.
 - a. What was true of all non-Jews before the coming of Christ (vv. 11-12)?
 - b. How did Christ change the Gentiles' ability to have a relationship with God? (v. 13) How did Christ make this change possible?
 - c. In what way is Christ our "peace" (v. 14)?
 - d. What did Jesus intend to create through his death on the cross (vv. 15-16)?
 - e. How do we see the Trinity working together on our behalf (v. 18)? How does this truth affect you personally?
 - f. How has your spiritual heritage changed because of what Christ did for you (vv. 19-22)? Name all the benefits you see.

Reflect on the Book

1. “The central point of Luke’s genealogy is the fact that it *ends* in God.”
 - a. Why is it important that Luke’s genealogy ends in God?
 - b. In what way is it important to you that Luke’s genealogy ends in God?
2. “Christ, the Son of God/ Became a son of Adam/ That we, sons of Adam,/ Might become sons of God.”
 - a. What does it mean that Jesus became a “son of Adam”? Why is it remarkable that “sons of Adam” could become “sons of God”?
 - b. Why did Jesus have to become a son of Adam in order to make it possible for us to become sons of God?
3. “Just as God used two ordinary women named Ruth and Mary to make a lasting impact on the world, so God can use you to make a lasting impression on others by your living for him and loving him and doing his will.”
 - a. How do you think God might want to use you to make a lasting impression on others?
 - b. In what ways is it especially hard for you to live for God? In what ways do you find it easy to love him? How might it be especially challenging to do his will this week? How will you meet that challenge?

Put It into Practice

1. What kind of Christian heritage do you want to leave to your family? What can you do, starting today, to begin leaving that kind of heritage?
2. Write a note to someone in your family (or to a friend), describing what he or she has done to encourage you to follow Jesus for the rest of your life.

Bread for the Journey

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

1. Compare Deuteronomy 8:3 with Matthew 4:1-4.
 - a. How did God “humble” his people, according to Deuteronomy 8:3? Why did he do this? In what way is God’s Word “bread”? Why is it necessary for life?
 - b. Describe the temptation mentioned in Matthew 4. What was Satan trying to get Jesus to do? How did Jesus counter the temptation? How does his strategy provide us with an example for countering our own temptations?
2. Read John 6:25-59.
 - a. Why did Jesus believe the people had gone looking for him? Did he rebuke them for this (vv. 25-26)? Explain. What instruction did he give them (v. 27)?
 - b. How is believing “in the one [God] sent” the way to “do the works God requires”? How can “belief” be a “work” (vv. 28-29 NIV)?
 - c. How did Jesus compare himself to manna (vv. 30-33)? What did he want to teach the people through this word picture?
 - d. What claim did Jesus make in verse 35? What do you think he meant?
 - e. How did the people respond to Jesus’s claim in verse 41? Why did they respond in this way (v. 42)?

- f. What further comparisons did Jesus make between himself and manna (vv. 48-51)? How did the people respond to these comparisons (v. 52)?
- g. What claims did Jesus make in verses 53-58? What promises did he make? What do you think of these claims and promises? Why?

Reflect on the Book

1. “‘What food is to your body I am to your soul,’ Jesus said.”
 - a. How is Jesus like food for your soul?
 - b. How do you, personally, “consume” the “food” of Jesus? How do you take him into your system?
2. “In one simple statement, Jesus reminds us that he is sustenance for all people in all places at all times.”
 - a. In what ways does Jesus sustain you?
 - b. How has Jesus sustained you at various parts of your life? How have you been aware of his sustenance?
3. “There is a spiritual hunger in the human heart and an eternal hunger in the human soul that can never be satisfied with anything other than Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life.”
 - a. Describe what your own “spiritual hunger” felt like before you placed your faith in Christ.
 - b. How is your “spiritual hunger” different now than it was before you placed your faith in Christ? How do you satisfy it?

Put It into Practice

1. Even if you’re not used to the bread-making process, bake a loaf of bread from scratch. As you do so, think of all the ways Jesus wants to be the “bread of life” for you. Write down in a journal any new insights you have.

2. Make an appointment to observe some professional bakers at work. Note not only their culinary skills, but also the desires and needs of their customers. If it is appropriate at some point, see if you can initiate a casual conversation about Jesus, the Bread of Life.

Light in a Dark Place

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

1. Read John 1:4-9.
 - a. How was Jesus's life the "light of men" (v. 4)?
 - b. Why did not (and does not) the "darkness" understand the "light" (v. 5)?
 - c. How did John testify to the light of Jesus (v. 8)?
 - d. In what way is Jesus's light "true" (v. 9)? How does his light illuminate everyone?
2. Read John 8:12-20.
 - a. What does Jesus mean that those who follow him will never walk in darkness (v. 12)? How are "light" and "life" connected in this passage?
 - b. Where did Jesus come from? Where was he going (v. 14)?
 - c. Why would someone know God the Father if they knew Jesus Christ (v. 19)?
 - d. Why would the religious leaders have wanted to seize Jesus (v. 20)? Why didn't they do so?

Reflect on the Book

1. "Darkness runs for the hills when light comes. And Jesus is the light that banishes spiritual and emotional darkness."
 - a. Describe a time when you witnessed darkness "running for the hills" when light came.
 - b. What does spiritual and emotional darkness look like to you? How does Jesus banish it?

2. “Of the seven things that Jesus calls himself, this is the only title [“light”] that he also gives us. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you should also be light amidst the darkness.”
 - a. Why do you think Jesus calls his followers “light” but not “bread” or the “vine” or one of the other “I am” statements?
 - b. How can you be light amidst the darkness in your neighborhood? At your work?
3. “Jesus called us to find people in dark places and to move toward those who need him.”
 - a. How can you find people in dark places? What dark places are especially accessible to you?
 - b. Describe a specific way you can “move toward” someone you know who needs Jesus.

Put It into Practice

1. Get a concordance and look up all the times the Gospel of John uses the terms *light* and *darkness*. What do you discover about Jesus?
2. How does your local church strive to be the “light” that Jesus commissions it to be? How are you participating in these endeavors? If you are not currently involved in some kind of outreach, investigate what your church offers and determine to get involved. Determine when and how to make things happen.

An Open Door

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

1. Read Luke 13:22-30.
 - a. What question prompted Jesus's answer in this passage (v. 23)?
 - b. Why did Jesus speak of a "narrow door" (v. 24)? What kind of "effort" (NIV) does he have in mind? How many will unsuccessfully make an effort? Why is this significant?
 - c. What story did Jesus tell to illustrate his main point (vv. 25-27)?
 - d. What word picture did Jesus use to describe what's at stake (vv. 28-29)?
 - e. What did he mean in verse 30? How does this summarize his teaching in this passage?
2. Read John 10:7-18.
 - a. Who did Jesus call "thieves" and "robbers" (v. 8)? Why did he call them this?
 - b. How does someone "enter" through the "gate" of Jesus (v. 9 NIV)? What can they expect to find when they enter?
 - c. What comparison did Jesus make in verse 10?
 - d. How did Jesus characterize himself in verse 11? What did he do?
 - e. What comparison did Jesus make in verses 12-13?

- f. What knowledge did Jesus claim to have in verse 14?
- g. How is this knowledge like that of the Father (v. 15)?
- h. Who are the “other sheep” mentioned in verse 16?
(Remember that Jesus was speaking here to his Jewish countrymen.)
- i. How many times did Jesus mention “laying down” his life in verses 7-18? Why is this significant?

Reflect on the Book

1. “The flock could rest only if the sheep knew that their shepherd was protecting them with his life.”
 - a. When do you find it hardest to rest securely? Why?
 - b. How have you seen Jesus protect you in your walk of faith?
2. “Jesus put you here to live for him. He provides the purpose you’ve been pining for.”
 - a. How do you live for Jesus wherever he’s put you? In what particular ways could you live for him more effectively?
 - b. What is your purpose in life? Do you “pine” for something more? Explain.
3. “Are you secure in who you are, what you have, where you are going? Do you feel significant? Are you giving your life to things that matter and make a difference? Are you satisfied? Is there a settled peace in your heart when you go to bed and rise in the morning?”
 - a. Answer the five questions above.
 - b. Are you satisfied with the answers you just gave? Explain.

Put It into Practice

1. If you have not yet read the book *The Purpose Driven Life*,

get a copy and read it. Keep a journal to record your discoveries and insights. How can you start to live a more purposeful life?

2. Sit down sometime and write out an imaginary obituary for yourself. By the end of your life, what do you want to have accomplished? What would you want people to be able to truthfully say about you?