

Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes

2016–2017 PW/*Horizons* Bible Study by Judy Yates Siker

Workshop for Leaders

By Mertie Woolcock

Author Judy Yates Siker invites us to join her on “a journey to expand our understanding of who Jesus was and is—a journey of our hearts and minds, a journey we will take together.” Judy invites us to be good conversation partners along the way, sharing with one another as we experience the various lenses through which Jesus is seen and how these perspectives impact our understanding of Jesus.

Each of the study’s nine lessons explores the question “Who is Jesus?” through a particular theological lens. Who is Jesus . . .

1. **According to Mark?**

Jesus is not the messiah they expected, but he is indeed God’s Son.

2. **According to Matthew?** Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish messiah whose teaching opens the kingdom of heaven to us here and now.

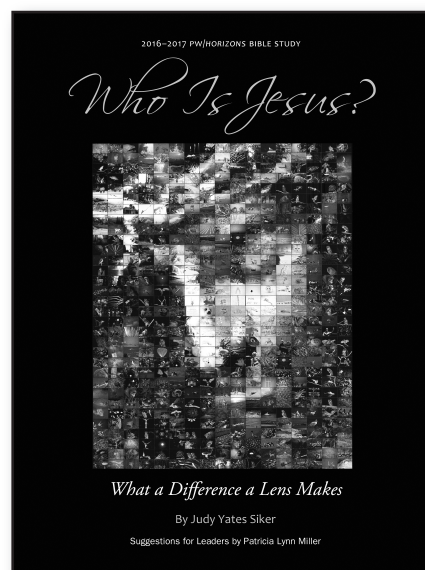
3. **According to Luke?** Rejected by his own people, Jesus, prophet of God, turns the world upside down with his teachings.

4. **According to John?** Jesus and God are one.

5. **According to Paul?** Paul stresses the centrality of the cross of Christ in understanding true discipleship.

6. **According to the Hebrews?** Believers are to hold fast to their faith in times of adversity, and remain firm in their commitment to Jesus, who has run this race before us and now reigns in glory with God.

7. **According to the Non-canonical Gospels?** The four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are not the only Gospels written by early Christians. Other stories about Jesus circulated in the early centuries



of Christianity, offering us stories of the “missing years” of Jesus and, more importantly, information about the diversity of early Christianity.

8. **According to the Other Abrahamic Faiths?**

The major Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) all share the patriarch Abraham in their traditions; these religions comprise the three major monotheistic religions in the world today. While Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, for Christianity alone, it is important to understand how Jesus is viewed in the other two religious traditions.

9. **According to Contemporary Cultural**

Interpretations? Each of us who reads the New Testament is an interpreter of the text; how we interpret depends in part on our own identity. Not only does the context and perspective of the writers of the New Testament determine the answer to the question “Who is Jesus?” so does the context and perspective of the reader/interpreter.

Our Workshop for Leaders writer, **Mertie Woolcock**, is a Presbyterian woman and an experienced Bible study leader from the Synod of the Trinity and the Presbytery of West Virginia. Her home church is Highlawn Presbyterian Church in Huntington, West Virginia. Mertie led a version of this workshop earlier this year at the annual Presbytery of West Virginia Festival of Faith. Follow Mertie's lesson plan or adapt it for your setting. **Use this workshop in your congregation, presbytery, or synod.**

***Who Is Jesus?* timeline**

- Theme chosen: February 2012
- Author chosen: February 2013
- Field tested: Fall 2014
- Revised/rewritten/final draft: January–August 2015
- Published: March 2016

Begin the Workshop

Welcome participants to the PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes*, the Bible study written for Presbyterian Women. If people are early, invite them to help you set up.

Open with prayer. Holy One, be with us as we gather in your name. Break open any preconceived notions of who you are; awaken our spirits and give us courage to set out on new adventures with you. Across the ages, you have made yourself known to many; make yourself known to us today. Amen. (This prayer is the opening prayer for Lesson One.)

Invite participants to introduce themselves and tell the group where they worship.

Introduce the *Who Is Jesus?* authors. Biographies of the author, Judy Yates Siker, and the Suggestions for Leaders writer, Lynn Miller, are on page one of the study book and on the poster attached to the middle of the book. Read the bios from the study book or poster.

Tell the story. Divide your workshop group in half to form two groups. Assign each group the task of telling the story of Jesus in one minute to people who have not heard it before.

- One group is to decide how they will tell the story of Jesus to children.
- The other group is to decide how they will tell the story of Jesus to adults.

Invite groups to share their stories.

Discuss what happened. Point out that when the groups directed their stories to their audiences of children or adults, and changed the way they told the story based on what they knew about their audiences, they were doing the same thing the Gospel writers did. They communicated the story they knew in a way that they thought their audiences would best understand.

Recall together that, before the exercise you just completed, you introduced the Bible study authors and read biographical information about each woman.

Ask participants what they remember about what they heard. Write their answers on an easel pad.

- What are the author's names?
- Where are they from?
- Does the group remember any facts about the authors? What do they remember?

Try an experiment with your group. Choose someone who has been active in the discussion and activities and ask her to step outside.

Ask the rest of the group what they remember about their colleague who has stepped outside.

- What is she wearing?
- What is her name?
- Where does she worship?
- Are her ears pierced?
- What color is her hair?

Ask the volunteer to step back into the room.

Point out that what we hear and see about someone is what we can remember about them. It was the same with the Gospel writers. The Gospel writers heard and saw Jesus and they remembered different things about him.

Our author, Judy Siker, uses the image of lenses to illustrate that what we know about Jesus we know because we heard someone tell us about him, or we read one of the Gospel accounts of his life, or we saw a painting that communicated something about who he is that has stuck with us. We see Jesus through these lenses. What a difference the correct lenses or glasses can make! Once we are aware of the lenses we use, Judy suggests that we read scripture with “fresh eyes, new eyes.”

Explain that many of us have heard the stories of Jesus many times. We are confident that we know the stories so well that we are sometimes not as open as we could be to hearing/seeing/feeling something new. In order to hear a new message, we must read and listen with fresh eyes and ears.

Look, for example, at the story of the Nativity.

Christmas cards and Christmas pageants give us a newborn baby Jesus in a manger, surrounded by animals, shepherds, angels, and Wise Men from the East. Seems complete, right? But each part of that tableau comes from a different Gospel narrative. The wise men are only in Matthew; in Mark we meet Jesus at his baptism; Luke gives us the manger, shepherds, and the angels; and John places Jesus at the beginning of all creation. The story is so familiar to us that, despite what we read in the Bible, we lump all of the versions together. Reading with fresh eyes will be important and it might also be challenging.

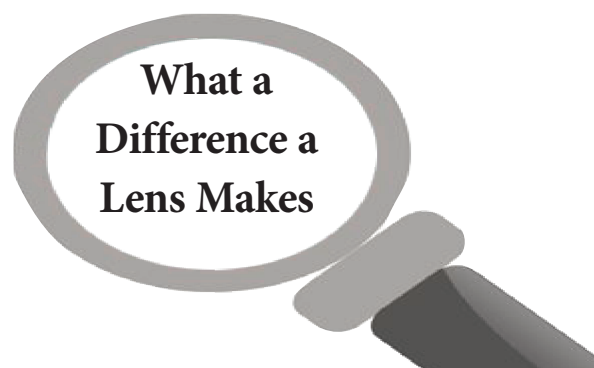
Not only does the author ask us to read with fresh eyes, over and over she asks us, “Who do you say Jesus is?”


Ask the group if they think that we always have the same answer. Circumstances, situations, stages of life, and feelings determine how we answer that question at different times in our lives.

We have different answers to the question, “Who do you say Jesus is?” and so do the Gospel writers.


The Gospel writers’ style often focuses on their audience—the people to whom they write or tell Jesus’ story. Their styles also often reflect their personalities. The writers have their own styles based on their audiences and their own experiences of Jesus.

Judy Siker organizes *Who Is Jesus?* around the lenses she leads us to explore together. Each lens is a lesson. Let’s look at the lenses (lessons).






Mark (the first Gospel written) doesn't begin with the birth story but jumps right into the action with Jesus and John the Baptist.

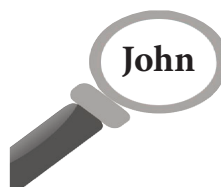


Matthew is written to a Jewish audience and begins with Jesus' genealogy. Tradition is very important to Matthew.

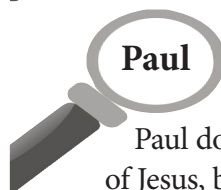


Luke is a storyteller and writes as a historian.

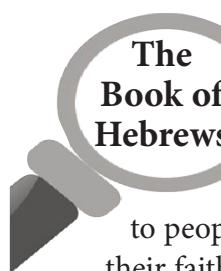
Note: Matthew and Luke probably had Mark's Gospel available to them when they wrote theirs because they share much of the same outline.



John wants us to see that God and Jesus are one.




Paul uses the lens of the cross and Christ crucified as his prominent theme. Paul doesn't focus on the life or teachings of Jesus, but instead on the risen Christ.

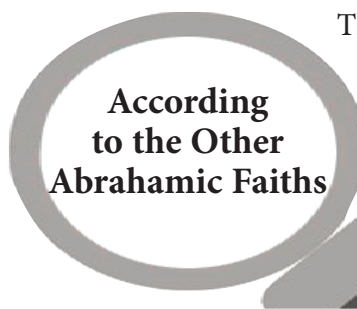


The Book of Hebrews is not in the category of Gospel or letter—it is identified as a sermon. Hebrews is a sermon given to people who are growing weary in their faith. In Hebrews, the people find assurance and comfort as they struggle over whether or not they have made the right decision by choosing to follow Christ.

Up to this point in the study, we will have worked to understand the question “Who is Jesus” based on our exploration of books that are included in the canon, the New Testament. The study also looks at other writings of the time, writings that were not chosen to be part of the New Testament—the non-canonical Gospels.




The Non-Canonical Gospels The non-canonical Gospels offer stories of Jesus that sometimes fill in “missing years” in his life, and help teach us that the early Christian church was a diverse church that offered a variety of ways to understand Jesus.



According to the Other Abrahamic Faiths The next lesson in the study looks at how the two other Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Islam, see and understand Jesus. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the three major monotheistic religions of the world and they all share Abraham as part of their traditions. How do our sister faith traditions see and understand Jesus?

The final lesson in the study is titled, “According to Contemporary Cultural Traditions.” In this lesson we will see how the context and perspective of the reader contributes to the interpretation of the title question. How does who we are and what we have experienced contribute to our understanding of who Jesus is? Lesson Nine includes an exercise to promote conversation in study groups about how we can become aware of



According to Contemporary Cultural Interpretations

our own personal lenses. We are instructed to disregard what we have heard about a certain passage of scripture and do our best to read it with fresh eyes, our lenses, and share our answers to suggested questions. We are asked not to make what we want of scripture but to see it afresh.

In this study we see Jesus through the lens of each of these writers and the lenses of ourselves.

Using the *Who Is Jesus?* Study Book

Note: Help participants find features as you describe them.

Suggestions for Leaders, written by Lynn Miller, the leader of a group that field tested *Who Is Jesus?*¹ helps leaders prepare to lead each lesson.

Sidebars, inserts, and a glossary help readers learn more about each topic.

Prayers begin each lesson and can be used as Christ Candle readings (see the Suggestions for Leaders for ideas).

Worksheets to be used with lessons are printed in the back of the study book. Worksheets that have specific answers come with answer keys. The first worksheet is used with Lessons One, Two, Three, and Four, and provides space to compare the different Gospel stories of Jesus.

Journal along with the study. Each lesson includes a journal reflection and a place to write your reflection. Find them at the end of each lesson and before the Suggestions for Leaders.

About the Art (on p. 8) provides descriptions of the cover art and the featured art for each lesson.

The scope and sequence is on page eleven. Use it to find all of the lesson details on one page.

The order form is on page 111. Check out the companion DVD, charm/pendant, and other versions of the study available there.

A poster of the cover art is attached to the middle of the regular print study and is available for free from Presbyterian Distribution Service (see order form).

Subscribe to *Horizons* magazine, the magazine for PW and by PW, to receive next year's study with your subscription. Details are on the order form.

Closing

Ask the group: After hearing about the study, what opportunities do you see for its use (PW meetings, church school, retreats, small groups, and so on)?

Tell them to put on “new eyes” as they discover Jesus through the lenses of others. (If you’d like to, you can give each participant a lens cleaning cloth as a reminder of your time together).

Pray together using the blessing written by Jan Richardson and used to close Lesson Nine:

That you may have

The wisdom to know the story
To which God calls you,
The power to pursue it,
The courage to abide its mysteries,
And love in every step.¹

1. Jan Richardson, *In the Sanctuary of Women* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2010), 58.

Lesson Summary Chart

	Title	Key Scripture	Key Idea
Intro			What is the study about? How does the study highlight various portrayals of Jesus and illuminate the question that runs through the study “Who do you say Jesus is?”
1	According to Mark	Mark 8:27–33	Jesus is not the messiah they expected, but he is indeed God’s Son.
2	According to Matthew	Matthew 13:51–53	Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish messiah whose teaching opens the kingdom of heaven to us here and now.
3	According to Luke	Luke 4:16–21; Acts 2:22–24	Rejected by his own people, Jesus, prophet of God, turns the world upside down with his teachings.
4	According to John	John 9:1–7	Jesus and God are one.
5	According to Paul	1 Corinthians 1:18–25	Paul stresses the centrality of the cross of Christ in understanding true discipleship.
6	According to Hebrews	Hebrews 12:1–2	In the book of Hebrews, the author encourages believers to hold fast to their faith in times of adversity, to remain firm in their commitment to Jesus, who has run this race before us and now reigns in glory with God.
7	According to the Non-canonical Gospels	See highlighted excerpts from the non-canonical Gospels within the lesson	The four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are not the only Gospels written by early Christians. Other stories about Jesus circulated in the early centuries of Christianity, offering us stories of the “missing years” of Jesus and, more importantly, information about the diversity of early Christianity.
8	According to the Other Abrahamic Faiths	Galatians 4:23–29	The major Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) all share the patriarch Abraham in their traditions; these religions comprise the three major monotheistic religions in the world today. While Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, for Christianity alone, it is important to understand how Jesus is viewed in the other two religious traditions.
9	According to Contemporary Cultural Interpretations	Matthew 15:21–28	Each of us who reads the New Testament is an interpreter of the text; how we interpret depends in part on our own identity. Not only does the context and perspective of the writers of the New Testament determine the answer to the question “Who is Jesus?” so does the context and perspective of the reader/interpreter.

1. Hymns marked (GtG) are from *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013). Hymns marked (PH) are from *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990).

	What the Lesson Does	S for L	Hymns¹ GtG = Glory to God PH = Presbyterian Hymnal
	Includes About the Art, Things to Look for in the Study, and the Scope and Sequence		
	The Gospels are the earliest records of Jesus' life and ministry; Mark is the earliest Gospel. Mark's Jesus is the suffering Messiah.	p. 19	"By All Your Saints Still Striving" (GtG 325)
	In Matthew, Jesus teaches his followers the good news and sends them out to share it.	p. 29	"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (GtG 82)
	The message of the Gospel required Luke's audience to rethink their priorities. It requires us to do that, too.	p. 39	"Live into Hope" (GtG 772); "I Bind unto Myself Today" (GtG 6)
	The mystery of the good news is that God made God's self known to us in the person of Jesus. John explores this mystery.	p. 49	"I'll Praise My Maker" (GtG 806); "Wash, O God, Your Sons and Daughters" (GtG 490)
	Explores the ways Paul communicated the message of the cross to the faith communities he established.	p. 57	"Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle" (GtG 225); "In the Cross of Christ, I Glory" (PH 84)
	Shows how the writer of Hebrews tells readers to be strong and give thanks for the unshakeable kingdom in which Christ reigns.	p. 67	"Fight the Good Fight" (GtG 846, PH 307)
	Explains the development of the canon and helps readers understand why some early Gospels were not included.	p. 77	"O for a World" (GtG 372, PH 386); "Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation" (GtG 394, PH 416)
	Reminds us that we are part of a larger faith community. Asks how we can reach out in conversation with our Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers.	p. 85	"O for a World" (GtG 372, PH 386); "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise" (PH 263)
	Explores the different ways we interpret biblical texts and asks how an exchange of ideas can help deepen our faith in Christ.	p. 93	"Be Thou My Vision" (GtG 450, PH 339); "O Sing a Song of Bethlehem" (GtG 159, PH 308)

Order Form

TITLE	PDS#	QTY	PRICE	SUBTOTAL
2016–2017 PW/<i>Horizons</i> Bible study, <i>Who Is Jesus?</i> by Judy Yates Siker				
English edition	HZN16100		\$8.00	\$
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Audio edition (available by download only, summer 2016) Slightly abridged, no Suggestions for Leaders	HZN16172		\$15.00	Visit http://store.pcusa.org
Companion DVD (available summer 2016) Video of author introducing each lesson.	HZN16103		\$20.00	\$
<i>Workshop for Leaders</i> —an introduction to teaching this Bible study (also available as a free download at www.pcusa.org/horizons)	HZN16101		free	
Charm/pendant	HZN16300		\$10.00	\$
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Bulletin cover—8 1/2"x11"	Free download only at www.pcusa.org/horizons .			

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