MSSNL

THE BELIEF TABLE · JESUS & BELIEF

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

ABIDE	BECOME	BE SENT

Make room for honest questions. Keep pointing to Jesus.

Preparation, a minute-by-minute plan, opening and follow-up questions, closing words, and session-by-session guidance for groups of believers and people exploring faith.

New here? Choose one session. Read its Scripture and teaching together; take turns with the questions. Each person writes one small thing they will try and when. Pray and agree when to meet again. Next time, return to that written step: what did I try, and how did it go? At your first meeting, skip this check-in. If a step is untried, begin again without a score. Each person keeps their own notes and chooses what to share.

Abide. Become. Be Sent.

A free discipleship resource from MSSNL.
For followers of Jesus and anyone exploring faith: one person, a pair, mentors, and small groups.
mssnl.org/table/belief

Your role at the table.

Prepare carefully. Listen well. Point to Jesus.

Read each chapter before leading. You are a fellow traveler and host, not a debater, a judge, or a salesperson. Ask open questions, make room for silence, and let the Scriptures do their work.

- Never collect, photograph, or read participants' private notes.
- Never ask anyone to declare faith, pray aloud, or describe where they stand with God.
- Treat questions and doubts as welcome. Do not correct someone's question in front of the group.
- Do not overstate what any argument proves. It is fine to say, I do not know, let us look into it.
- Keep the focus on Jesus and the book. Avoid debates over secondary matters where Christians differ.
- If someone shares something heavy, listen, offer a private conversation, and help them find a pastor or other appropriate support.

> **You are welcome here as you are**
>
> Come as a follower of Jesus, as someone exploring faith, or somewhere in between. Nobody needs to claim faith, recite the right answer, or share personal answers to belong at this table. Questions are welcome. Every question may be passed. If something in your story is heavy, you are welcome to talk privately with a pastor or another trusted person.

Your first meeting.

At your first meeting, skip this check-in and ask what brought each person here. Before closing, show everyone the My next step box. Each person writes one small thing to try and when. For example: I will read John 20 slowly on two mornings and write down one question. Next time, begin by returning to that note and asking how it went.

What to say first (read aloud)

Welcome. Some of us have followed Jesus for years, some are just beginning to look at him, and some are not sure. All of us are welcome here. We will read Scripture, talk honestly, and choose one small step. You never have to say where you stand with God, pray aloud, or answer any question. What people share stays in this group. If you want to talk more personally, I am glad to meet afterward.

Before people arrive

Choose a welcoming room. Bring a few Bibles to lend and copies of the participant workbook. Do not use a sign-in sheet that asks about church background or beliefs. Speak about what you are learning and wondering. Nobody needs to explain where they stand with God, and nobody is asked to share more than they choose.

A meeting from start to finish.

Plan about 75 to 90 minutes. Use the times as a guide.

1. **Welcome and pray · 8 minutes.** Welcome everyone. Say that believers and people exploring are equally welcome and that anyone may pass. Pray briefly, or invite a moment of quiet for those who prefer not to pray.
2. **Last time: how did it go? · 10 minutes.** Skip this at the first meeting. Later, invite everyone to find the My next step box from their previous session. Use the follow-up questions below; everyone may pass.
3. **Opening question · 10 minutes.** Ask the session's opening question. Everyone answers in a sentence or passes.
4. **Read and reflect alone · 10 minutes.** Read the Scripture passages aloud or have them looked up. Each person quietly writes their own answers. Nobody shares these papers.
5. **Pair or group talk · 20 to 30 minutes.** Pairs take turns with the pair prompt. Then bring everyone back for the optional group sharing question.
6. **Choose your next step · 7 minutes.** Read the session's suggested practice. Give everyone time to write one small step and when in their own My next step box. Anyone may pass.
7. **Close · 5 minutes.** Say the closing words and pray. Remind everyone you are available for a private conversation.

Opening question

Each session page gives you an actual opening question. Ask it exactly as written, then wait. Silence is fine.

Following up on last time.

From the second meeting on, begin with an optional check-in on last meeting's personal step. Ask these questions, one at a time.

1. Look at the My next step box from your previous session. What did you plan to try, and how did it go? You may pass.
2. What did you notice about Jesus, or about trusting him, when you tried it?
3. What got in the way? There is no wrong answer and nothing to prove.
4. If you did not try it, that is fine. What would make it easier this week?

Give people a quiet moment to find their note first. Let each willing person briefly describe their step. If someone has no note, missed a meeting, or did not try a step, say: You can begin here today. There is nothing to catch up on. Do not ask for proof or compare people. Offer advice only when invited.

How to close (read aloud)

Thank you for being here and for your honesty. Your notes are yours to keep. Before you go, choose one small way to respond to today's session. If you want to talk about anything privately, including what it means to trust Jesus, I am glad to. Let us pray.

Make the next step clear.

Your next step is one small thing you will do before you meet again to respond to this session. It might be reading a passage, praying a short prayer, asking a question, or practicing trust in one ordinary moment. Write what you will do and when in the My next step box.

> Example: Before our next meeting, I will read John 20 slowly on two mornings and write down one question I want to ask.

1. Choose: use the session's suggested practice to pick one small response. You may adapt it or pass.
2. Write: in the My next step box, say what you will do and when, such as on two mornings before we meet.
3. Try: do it in ordinary life between meetings. Notice what you learn about Jesus and about trusting him.
4. Last time: at the next meeting, read that same note and reflect on how it went. Share only if you wish.
5. Continue: keep the step, make it smaller, or choose a new one after today's conversation. End with prayer.

If you did not choose a step, missed a meeting, or did not try it, simply say not yet or pass. You can try it again, make it smaller, or choose a new one. There is no score and nothing to catch up on.

Show the connection

At the end of each session, point participants to their My next step box. Let them write in private. Next time, ask them to open that same box; do not collect or inspect their answers.

Example of a last-time check-in: I read John 20 on two mornings. I kept thinking about Thomas. Next time I want to ask about doubt. Keep the focus on each person's own experience, never on whether they now believe.

For your first meeting, skip this check-in. For the final meeting, invite people to keep one practice privately or with a trusted person; another group meeting is not required.

Choose a way to meet.

On your own or with one other person

- Set aside 40 to 60 minutes somewhere quiet. Read the chapter first if you can. If you have not, the session page gives you enough to begin.
- Open a Bible beside you. Each Scripture reference is summarized in plain words so you can find it and read it for yourself.
- Write your own answers. They are private. Honest questions and honest uncertainty are welcome answers.
- If you meet with one other person, such as a friend or mentor, take turns. One speaks while the other listens without fixing, then switch. Either of you may pass.
- Choose one small step to take before the next session and write what and when in the My next step box. At your next session, return to that note first. Skip this check-in at your first session.
- Close with the prayer, aloud or silently. If you are not ready to pray, you may simply read it and sit quietly.

As a mentor or small group

- A mentor or small group meets every one or two weeks for 60 to 90 minutes. Groups of three to ten work well. Each person keeps their own notes. Nobody hands in papers.
- Begin with a short welcome. Say plainly that believers and people still exploring are equally welcome, that every question may be passed, and that what people share stays in the group.
- Read the Scripture aloud, then give a few minutes to reflect alone before talking. Take one question at a time.
- Treat honest questions as part of the conversation, not as problems to solve quickly. If you do not know an answer, say so and offer to look into it together.
- Never press anyone to declare faith, pray aloud, or explain where they stand. Do not correct a person's question in front of the group.
- Close with one next step per person and a prayer. Each person writes what they will try and when in their own My next step box. At the next meeting, invite a brief check-in on last time; skip it at the first meeting.

Nothing in this tool is shared automatically with a mentor, facilitator, or group. Keep saved notes focused on your own learning, questions, and next steps.

Your session guide.

Fourteen sessions in three movements: Abide (sessions 1 to 7), Become (8 to 11), and Be Sent (12 to 14). Go at a pace that leaves room to respond. The following page numbers lead to each session.

1. Introduction: The Question of Belief · **page 9**
2. Chapter 1: The Promise of a Savior · **page 11**
3. Chapter 2: Jesus the Fulfillment · **page 13**
4. Chapter 3: The Cross: Why He Came · **page 15**
5. Chapter 4: The Empty Tomb: Why Hope Is Possible · **page 17**
6. Chapter 5: The Witnesses: Why They Spoke · **page 19**
7. Chapter 6: The Story That Can Be Trusted · **page 21**
8. Chapter 7: More Than Agreement · **page 23**
9. Chapter 8: Received by Grace · **page 25**
10. Chapter 9: Alive in Christ · **page 27**
11. Chapter 10: Faith in the Fire · **page 29**
12. Chapter 11: The People of Jesus · **page 31**
13. Chapter 12: Sent Under the King · **page 33**
14. Conclusion: Believe and Follow · **page 35**

Free book, audiobook, and EPUB: mssnl.org/jesus-and-belief

Introduction: The Question of Belief

Preparation: Read the Introduction, The Question of Belief.

Keep this teaching central

Every person lives from what they believe. Some beliefs are easy to name. Others sit beneath the surface and shape how we understand God, ourselves, other people, suffering, and the future. A person who believes their value must be earned may live under constant pressure. Someone who believes their past has the final word may carry shame into every new season. Underneath the daily decisions is a deeper question: who is Jesus? A wise teacher can instruct us and a moral example can inspire us, but neither can rescue us from sin or make us right with God. John wrote so that people would see Jesus clearly and respond in faith. The book traces the story Scripture tells: God made people for life with him, sin brought separation, and Jesus came, lived in full obedience, died bearing sin, and rose again. That gift cannot be earned. The book also says plainly that questions do not vanish when someone begins to believe. Jesus met Nicodemus with his questions and a father who said, in effect, I believe, help my unbelief. Belief is more than agreeing that Jesus existed. It means trusting who he is, receiving what he has done, and beginning to follow him.

Read Scripture in context

John 20:31 gives John's reason for writing: that readers may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in his name. Romans 10:13 promises that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Mark 9:24 records a father who asks Jesus for help with his unbelief while saying he believes. John 3 and John 4 show Jesus in conversation with Nicodemus at night and with a Samaritan woman at a well.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: First meeting: there is no previous step to follow up on. Skip this check-in.

Session-specific guidance

Welcome each person and explain the simple flow: read, reflect, talk, choose a step, pray. Say clearly that people exploring faith and long-time believers are equally welcome, and that nobody will be asked where they stand. There is no earlier step at this first meeting. Share a short, honest question of your own to set the tone.

Opening question

Say your first name and finish this sentence: One question about Jesus I have carried for a while is... You may pass.

Pair conversation

Take turns: What brought me here, and what would help me feel free to be honest at this table?

Optional group sharing

Share one thing you hope to understand by the end. You can pass.

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Make clear that believers and people exploring are equally welcome. Do not ask anyone where they stand with God. There is no earlier step to discuss yet.

Respond and pray

Read John 20:30-31 slowly. Then write one sentence that begins, Right now, I think Jesus is... and one sentence that begins, One question I want to bring to him is... Keep both. You will look at them again at the end of these sessions.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 1: The Promise of a Savior

Preparation: Read Chapter 1, The Promise of a Savior.

Keep this teaching central

Every person knows something is not as it should be. We see it in violence, betrayal, sickness, and death, and we see it in ourselves when we want to love generously and still protect our own interests. God made the world good and made people in his image, with work to do and boundaries that reflected his care. The serpent questioned God's word and suggested God was holding something good back. Sin entered, and Adam and Eve hid. People still hide, through achievement, control, anger, distraction, or the appearance that everything is fine. Scripture treats sin as a serious condition, not a few unfortunate mistakes. Yet God did not leave them hiding. He called, where are you, and in the middle of judgment he spoke a promise of victory over evil. That promise moved through Abraham, through Israel's long story of faithfulness and failure, through David's covenant, and through prophets who spoke of a child, a ruler from Bethlehem, and a servant who would suffer for others. Israel waited through exile and disappointment. When the time came, Jesus was born in humility. The book draws a quiet lesson for us: God keeps his word across generations, even when we cannot see how.

Read Scripture in context

Genesis 3:1 records the serpent's question, did God actually say, which casts doubt on God's goodness. Genesis 3:9 has God calling to the man who was hiding, where are you. Genesis 3:15 speaks of the woman's offspring who will strike the serpent's head. Genesis 12:3 promises Abraham that all the families of the earth will be blessed through him. 2 Samuel 7:16 promises David a lasting kingdom. Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2 point to a coming child and ruler from Bethlehem. Luke 1:33 records Gabriel telling Mary that her son's kingdom will have no end.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 1's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Some people carry heavy waiting, such as unanswered prayer or loss. The book does not promise that every hope will be granted. Let honest sorrow stand without rushing to a neat answer. Invite general examples of hiding; nobody needs to name specific sins.

Opening question

Name one place in the world where you can see that something is not as it should be.

Pair conversation

Take turns: How do I tend to hide when I feel ashamed or afraid? Keep it general.

Optional group sharing

What promise of God would you most like to be true for you?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Let waiting and unanswered prayer be named without quick answers. Nobody needs to name specific sins.

Respond and pray

Read Genesis 3:8-15 and then Luke 1:30-33. Write down one way you have been hiding and one promise of God you want to hold on to. Once this week, when you notice yourself hiding, pause and pray the short words, here I am.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 2: Jesus the Fulfillment

Preparation: Read Chapter 2, Jesus the Fulfillment.

Keep this teaching central

Jesus was born into the story God had been telling from the beginning. Matthew starts with a genealogy full of kings, failures, and exile, and keeps showing that events in Jesus' life fulfill what God had spoken. Fulfillment is more than a prediction matched to an event. The law revealed God's holiness and the prophets exposed idolatry and injustice; together they showed what people needed. In Jesus, God is with us. The Father named him beloved Son before any miracle or crowd. In the wilderness he trusted the Father where Adam and Israel had not, and he lived without a divided heart. That sinlessness matters, because he could stand in the place of sinners with no sin of his own. He taught that obedience reaches the heart, where anger, pride, and greed begin. When John the Baptist struggled in prison, Jesus pointed to the signs of the kingdom and to good news preached to the poor. He welcomed the overlooked and blessed the poor in spirit, people who know they cannot earn their place. The book adds a careful note: not every personal desire carries a hidden promise. Scripture asks us to tell the difference between what God has promised and what we long to see.

Read Scripture in context

Matthew 1:22-23 connects Jesus' birth with Isaiah's promise of Immanuel, God with us. Matthew 5:17 records Jesus saying he came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. Matthew 3:17 has the Father calling Jesus his beloved Son at his baptism. 1 Peter 2:22 says he committed no sin. Matthew 11:5 is Jesus' answer to John the Baptist in prison. Matthew 5:3 blesses the poor in spirit. John 5:39 says the Scriptures bear witness about Jesus. Galatians 4:4 says God sent his Son when the fullness of time had come.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 2's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Some participants will know the Old Testament well and others not at all. Avoid insider language. If someone asks a hard question about prophecy, it is fine to say, I do not know, let us look into it. Keep the talk on Jesus himself rather than on debates.

Opening question

Which person Jesus welcomed in the Gospels do you find most surprising?

Pair conversation

Take turns: What does poor in spirit mean to me, and where do I rely on my own record instead?

Optional group sharing

What did you learn about Jesus from how he treated overlooked people?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Avoid insider language and debates about prophecy. It is fine to say, I do not know.

Respond and pray

Read Matthew 11:2-6 and Matthew 5:3-10. Each day this week, notice one person who is easy to overlook and offer them simple attention or kindness. Write down one thing you learn about Jesus from how he welcomed people.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 3: The Cross: Why He Came

Preparation: Read Chapter 3, The Cross: Why He Came.

Keep this teaching central

The life of Jesus moved steadily toward the cross. The disciples expected victory and could not understand why the Messiah would suffer, but the cross was central to his mission from the beginning. A ransom secures a release that captives cannot obtain on their own. To see why it was needed, we have to be honest about sin. Sin is more than our choices. It shows a heart turned away from God, and it makes us proud, bitter, or dishonest. All have fallen short. God is holy and does not call evil good just because we want to be forgiven. At the cross, his justice and mercy are seen together. The book is careful here: Jesus did not persuade an unwilling Father to love us. Sending the Son was itself God's love. The Passover lamb and Isaiah's suffering servant prepared people to understand his death. On the cross Jesus prayed for his executioners. He did more than set an example; he stood in the place of sinners and bore the judgment they deserved. His words, it is finished, mean nothing can be added. Receiving grace does not deny the harm we have done. Repentance still tells the truth and seeks to repair what can be repaired.

Read Scripture in context

Mark 10:45 says the Son of Man came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Romans 3:23 says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. John 1:29 records John the Baptist calling Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Isaiah 53:5 describes a servant wounded for the wrongs of others. Luke 23:34 records Jesus asking the Father to forgive those crucifying him. Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us while we were still sinners. 2 Corinthians 5:21 speaks of the sinless one bearing sin so we might become God's righteousness. John 19:30 records his words, it is finished.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 3's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Some people will find the cross moving and others confusing or troubling. Welcome both. Do not ask anyone to describe their sins. If someone carries deep shame, point them to the book's words that the cross leaves no room for boasting and no room for despair, and offer a private conversation.

Opening question

Before this chapter, how would you have explained why Jesus died, in one sentence? You may pass.

Pair conversation

Take turns: Where do I try to add something to what Jesus finished?

Optional group sharing

What part of the cross stood out to you most this week?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Welcome both confusion and gratitude. Never ask anyone to describe their sins. Offer a private conversation for anyone carrying deep shame.

Respond and pray

Read Mark 15:21-39 or Luke 23:32-49 slowly in one sitting. Write the words it is finished at the top of a page, then write one thing you have been trying to add to what Jesus did. Bring it to him in prayer and, if you are ready, set it down.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 4: The Empty Tomb: Why Hope Is Possible

Preparation: Read Chapter 4, The Empty Tomb: Why Hope Is Possible.

Keep this teaching central

The cross was not the end of the story. Jesus truly died and was buried, and his followers were grieving and afraid. Grief changes the way we see everything. Then, early on the third day, women came to the tomb and heard that he had risen. The apostles first thought their report was nonsense, and Peter ran to see. Mary Magdalene stood weeping until Jesus spoke her name; her sorrow turned not because of an explanation but because she met him alive. The two on the road to Emmaus had hoped he would redeem Israel, and he helped them see from Scripture why the Messiah had to suffer. The resurrection showed that Jesus did not die as a defeated teacher. Before his own death he had wept with Martha and told her he is the resurrection and the life. Paul calls the risen Christ the firstfruits, the first of a harvest still to come, so Christian grief is real but not without hope. The resurrection was bodily: he showed his wounds, and doubting Thomas confessed him as Lord and God. The book is careful again: this does not promise that every illness will be healed or every plan rescued in this life. It does mean that obedience is a response to a living Lord.

Read Scripture in context

Matthew 28:6 records the angel telling the women that Jesus is not here, for he has risen as he said. John 20:16 shows Mary Magdalene recognizing Jesus when he says her name. Luke 24 tells of two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus. John 11:25 has Jesus telling Martha he is the resurrection and the life. 1 Corinthians 15:20 calls the risen Christ the firstfruits of those who have died. John 20:19 and 20:28 show Jesus greeting frightened disciples with peace, and Thomas answering, my Lord and my God.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 4's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

This session can touch recent loss. Allow quiet and do not offer quick explanations for anyone's grief. Thomas is a gift to people who struggle to believe; let doubters see that Jesus met him rather than rejected him.

Opening question

Which person at the empty tomb do you relate to most, and why?

Pair conversation

Take turns: What fear or grief does the resurrection speak to for me?

Optional group sharing

What difference would a living Jesus make in one part of your week?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> This may touch recent loss. Allow silence. Do not explain anyone's grief.

Respond and pray

Read John 20:1-18 and imagine hearing your own name spoken by the risen Jesus. Write a short response to him. Also name one fear that the resurrection speaks to, and take one small step this week that you would take if you trusted he is alive.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 5: The Witnesses: Why They Spoke

Preparation: Read Chapter 5, The Witnesses: Why They Spoke.

Keep this teaching central

The news of the resurrection did not stay in a locked room. Frightened followers who had scattered at Jesus' arrest began speaking openly in Jerusalem, the city where he had been crucified. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, stood before a crowd and said, we are witnesses. His confidence makes sense only in light of what happened on the shore of Galilee, where the risen Jesus asked him three times, do you love me, and restored him. Failure did not have the final word. Jesus promised the Spirit's power so that ordinary people could be his witnesses. A witness tells the truth about what has been seen and heard. The apostles did not claim to invent their message, and they kept speaking when it cost them. Women were the first messengers of the empty tomb. Paul, who had persecuted the church, became one of its preachers and passed on a list of people who had seen the risen Christ. The book is honest about limits: willingness to suffer shows sincerity, but it does not by itself prove every claim. Their testimony deserves careful examination. Today, our witness is different from theirs. We do not need to make ourselves impressive; we speak truthfully, treat people with dignity, and point to the Jesus they proclaimed.

Read Scripture in context

Acts 2:32 records Peter saying God raised Jesus and that they were all witnesses. John 21:15-17 tells of Jesus asking Peter three times, do you love me, after Peter's denial. Acts 1:8 promises power from the Holy Spirit to be Jesus' witnesses. Acts 4:20 has Peter and John saying they cannot stop speaking about what they have seen and heard. 1 Corinthians 2:2 shows Paul resolving to know Christ crucified. 1 Corinthians 15:6 mentions an appearance to more than five hundred people, many still living when Paul wrote.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 5's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Keep the second question open. People exploring faith may have real doubts about the evidence; thank them for raising them. The book itself does not overstate what testimony proves. Never pressure anyone to tell a testimony aloud.

Opening question

Who first told you about Jesus? Say a word about them, or pass.

Pair conversation

Take turns: What makes the first witnesses believable to me, and what question remains?

Optional group sharing

What did Peter's restoration show you about failure?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Thank doubters for honest questions. Never pressure anyone to tell their story aloud.

Respond and pray

Read John 21:15-19. Then write a short, honest account of how you have come to know or wonder about Jesus so far, in a few sentences and in your own words. You do not need to share it. If you wish, thank the person who first told you about him.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 6: The Story That Can Be Trusted

Preparation: Read Chapter 6, The Story That Can Be Trusted.

Keep this teaching central

Christian belief invites us to consider what is true. The gospel is not just personal preference or family tradition; it makes claims about events in history. Jesus lived among people who knew his name, was crucified under Roman authority, and his followers announced that God raised him. Paul passed on a message he had received, naming people who saw the risen Jesus. Luke describes careful work with eyewitness accounts, and John says plainly why he wrote. The four Gospels tell the story from different angles, and the book says these differences deserve careful reading, not quick dismissal and not forced harmony. They also keep the disciples' failures in view. The book is careful about what testimony can establish: sincerity is not proof, and embarrassing details do not settle every question. Faith does not require abandoning careful thought. We can tell the difference between a hard question and a demonstrated contradiction, and admit what remains uncertain. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus showed that the whole Bible finds its center in him. Some questions come from wounds rather than research, such as harm done by a church leader or prayers that seemed unanswered; those call for patient listening. Eventually the question becomes personal: is the crucified and risen Jesus worthy of my trust?

Read Scripture in context

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 records the message Paul received and passed on: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Luke 1:3 describes Luke following things closely to write an orderly account. John 20:31 states John's purpose. Luke 24:27 tells how Jesus explained from Moses and all the Prophets the things about himself. Mark 9:24 is the father's prayer, I believe, help my unbelief.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 6's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

This is the session where questions about evidence are most likely to come up. Do not exaggerate what any one argument proves, and do not dismiss a question as a heart problem. If someone was harmed in a church, listen carefully and separate the character of Jesus from the failures of those who claim him.

Opening question

What is one honest question you have about whether the Gospels can be trusted? You can pass.

Pair conversation

Take turns: Is my biggest question mostly about evidence, or about an experience?

Optional group sharing

What helps you hold careful thinking and trust together?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Do not overstate what any argument proves. If someone was hurt by a church, listen and separate Jesus from the failures of his followers.

Respond and pray

Choose one Gospel and read the first chapter and the last chapter this week. Write down one question you would like to explore further and one thing about Jesus that stood out. If you wish, bring the question to a pastor, mentor, or friend and look into it together.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 7: More Than Agreement

Preparation: Read Chapter 7, More Than Agreement.

Keep this teaching central

It is possible to know a lot about Jesus and still keep him at a distance. Familiarity with the story is not the same as trusting the Savior at its center. When Jesus called fishermen, they did not understand everything; their faith began as a response to the one who called them. The book uses a simple picture: a person can study a bridge, know others have crossed it, and still stand on the bank. Trusting Jesus engages the whole person: understanding, acknowledging need, receiving grace, and bringing our desires and decisions under him. John says those who receive him become God's children, not by ancestry or effort. Jesus' parable of the two men at the temple shows that the man with nothing to offer but a plea for mercy went home right with God. The criminal on the cross had no time to build a record and still heard Jesus' promise. Grace comes first, and good works follow as a response, never as payment. Repentance belongs to this life of faith, not as a way to make God love us, but because his grace has brought us to Christ. Jesus pictures this life as a branch abiding in a vine: continued dependence, sustained by the Spirit, in community.

Read Scripture in context

Matthew 4:19 records Jesus calling Peter and Andrew, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. John 1:12 says those who received him and believed in his name were given the right to become children of God. Luke 18:9-14 tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who prayed, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Matthew 11:28 is Jesus' invitation to the weary to come and find rest. Ephesians 2:8 says we are saved by grace through faith as God's gift. Luke 23:43 is Jesus' promise to the criminal beside him. John 15:4 calls disciples to abide in him.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 7's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

This chapter invites a personal response. Make it clear that nobody is expected to announce a decision in the group. If someone wants to talk about receiving Christ, offer to meet privately and gently. Long-time believers may find this chapter exposes places they have kept Jesus at a distance; welcome that honesty.

Opening question

Describe a time you knew something was safe but still hesitated to rely on it.

Pair conversation

Take turns: Where might I be agreeing with Jesus without trusting him with my life?

Optional group sharing

What does abiding look like in one ordinary part of your week?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> No one should feel pressure to announce a decision. Offer private conversation for anyone who wants to talk about receiving Christ.

Respond and pray

Read Luke 18:9-14 and John 15:1-5. Pray the tax collector's short prayer once a day in your own words. Choose one area, such as a decision, a relationship, or a habit, and take one concrete step to bring it under Jesus' care.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 8: Received by Grace

Preparation: Read Chapter 8, Received by Grace.

Keep this teaching central

Much of life connects what we receive with what we have earned. Wages, skills, and trust are earned, and that is good. But it makes a free gift hard to understand. Many people believe Jesus forgives and still feel they must become worthy before coming near. Paul says we were dead in our trespasses and God, rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ. Faith receives this gift; it is not a payment that puts God in our debt. Jesus pictured God's welcome in the father who saw his wasteful son far off, ran, and embraced him before the son finished his speech. The book notes that the father also went out to the resentful older brother, so the story speaks to the rebellious child and the dutiful one who keeps score. Grace gives an identity our past cannot: children of God. That does not place us beyond correction; obedience flows from grace rather than buying a place. Confession agrees with God about our sin, and may involve apologies, restitution, and facing consequences. The book is careful that forgiveness does not erase the need for wisdom, boundaries, protection, or justice, and that trust may take time to rebuild. Grace makes us humbler and kinder toward others who fail.

Read Scripture in context

Ephesians 2:4-5 says God, rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ when we were dead in our trespasses. Ephesians 2:8 says salvation is by grace through faith and is God's gift. Luke 15:11-32 tells the parable of the lost son, including the father running to embrace him and going out to plead with the older brother. 1 John 3:1 says the Father's love calls us his children. 1 John 1:9 promises forgiveness and cleansing when we confess. Matthew 18:21-35 is the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 8's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Some people will hear forgiveness as pressure to reconcile with someone who harmed them. Make the book's point clear: forgiveness does not require returning to an unsafe relationship or ignoring justice. Never ask people to share specific confessions in the group.

Opening question

Younger son or older son: which one do you relate to more right now?

Pair conversation

Take turns: Where do I still feel I must become worthy before coming to God?

Optional group sharing

What does it mean to you to be called a child of God?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Forgiveness never means returning to an unsafe relationship. Do not ask for specific confessions.

Respond and pray

Read Luke 15:11-32 twice, once as the younger son and once as the older son. Write a short prayer of confession about one thing, then read 1 John 1:9 over it. If appropriate and safe, take one step to make something right with another person.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 9: Alive in Christ

Preparation: Read Chapter 9, Alive in Christ.

Keep this teaching central

Believing in Jesus begins a new life. People can be busy and successful and still sense something essential missing. Jesus, the good shepherd, came to give abundant life, and the book is clear that this is not measured by wealth, comfort, or the absence of hardship. In Christ a person is a new creation. Their past remains part of their history but no longer gives the final word on who they are before God. That does not erase memories or end every struggle; old habits may need patient repentance and wounds may need care. Believers are not left to grow by willpower. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, who is fully God, personally present, teaching, comforting, convicting, and assuring us that we are God's children. That assurance does not depend on a constant feeling. The Spirit forms new desires and grows fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Growth is often quiet, like a patient answer where anger used to rule. Peace with God is first a restored relationship, and it can coexist with grief. Joy is not constant happiness. Our hope also looks ahead to Christ's return, which gives reason to love our neighbors faithfully now.

Read Scripture in context

John 10:10 records Jesus saying he came so his sheep may have life abundantly. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says anyone in Christ is a new creation. John 14:16 promises another Helper to be with believers forever. Romans 8:16 says the Spirit bears witness that we are God's children. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit. Romans 5:1 speaks of peace with God through faith. John 14:27 and 15:11 record Jesus giving his peace and his joy. Philippians 3:20 says our citizenship is in heaven. Colossians 2:6 says to walk in Christ as you received him.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 9's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Avoid making the fruit of the Spirit a checklist or a comparison. Some people feel spiritually dry; the book says assurance does not rest on a feeling. People exploring faith may find this chapter describes a life they have not entered; let them listen and ask without pressure.

Opening question

What is one thing you looked to for life that could not finally satisfy?

Pair conversation

Take turns: Which fruit of the Spirit do I long to see grow, and where might it show up this week?

Optional group sharing

Where have you seen a quiet sign of new life?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Avoid checklists and comparison. Feeling dry is not proof of being outside God's care.

Respond and pray

Read Galatians 5:16-25. Choose one fruit of the Spirit and pray each morning for the Spirit's help with it. At the end of each day, note one moment where you saw it or missed it, without scorekeeping. Thank God for any small growth.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 10: Faith in the Fire

Preparation: Read Chapter 10, Faith in the Fire.

Keep this teaching central

Following Jesus does not remove hardship. He told his disciples plainly that trouble would come and gave them a reason to take heart: he has overcome the world. Faith is often tested in circumstances we would never choose: unanswered prayer, a broken relationship, lost work, a diagnosis, grief, or the cost of doing right. Questions in those seasons do not automatically mean faith has failed. Joseph, Moses, David, and Israel all walked long, painful roads, but the book warns against turning their stories into guarantees that our stories will end the same way. Jesus entered human suffering fully; he wept, was betrayed, and went to the cross, so he can help those who struggle. Scripture does not let us assign a simple cause to every person's pain. Job's friends made his suffering worse with quick explanations. Compassion listens, tells the truth, and never makes suffering a measure of spiritual worth. Someone facing illness may need treatment and practical help; someone in danger needs protection. The Psalms give words for lament. Paul's weakness was not removed, yet grace was enough. Endurance grows through small acts of faithfulness and is a work of grace, never a demand placed on someone who is overwhelmed. God places us among his people so no one walks through the fire alone.

Read Scripture in context

John 16:33 records Jesus saying his followers will have trouble, but to take heart because he has overcome the world. Hebrews 2:18 says Jesus, who suffered when tempted, is able to help those who are tempted. The book of Job shows a righteous man suffering and friends who wrongly blame him. Psalm 13:1 asks, how long, O Lord. 2 Corinthians 12:9 records the Lord telling Paul his grace is sufficient and his power is made perfect in weakness. Romans 5:3-4 traces suffering to endurance, character, and hope. 1 Peter 1:8 speaks of loving Jesus without having seen him. James 1:2-5 calls believers to face trials and ask God for wisdom.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 10's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

This session may surface grief, illness, or other heavy circumstances. Listen more than you speak, and avoid explaining anyone's suffering. Encourage people to seek medical, practical, or protective help where needed; the book says faith and wise care go together. Offer a private conversation after the meeting.

Opening question

What helps you most when life is hard: presence, practical help, prayer, or space? You may pass.

Pair conversation

Take turns: What would an honest how long prayer sound like for me?

Optional group sharing

What is one small faithful step that fits the weight you carry?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Listen more than you speak. Do not explain anyone's suffering. Encourage medical, practical, or protective help where needed.

Respond and pray

Read Psalm 13 and write your own short lament in the same shape: honest complaint, a request, and, if you can, one line of trust. If you are carrying a heavy burden, tell one trusted person and accept one concrete offer of help this week.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 11: The People of Jesus

Preparation: Read Chapter 11, The People of Jesus.

Keep this teaching central

Faith is personal. No one can trust Jesus on behalf of someone else, and growing up in a Christian family does not do it for us. Yet the Savior who welcomes us one by one gathers us into a people. From Abraham onward, God has been forming a people, and in Christ he brings together those who were far apart. Jesus said he would build his church, and it belongs to him; no leader or organization takes his place. The first believers devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, meals, and prayer, and Acts is honest that they still had disagreements and overlooked needs. Churches today are full of imperfect people. The book takes church hurt seriously: harsh judgment, manipulation, and mishandled wrongdoing are real, and the name of Jesus must never be used to silence anyone or excuse abuse. Leaving an unsafe church is not abandoning Christ. Paul describes the church as a body where every part matters, and quiet service in kitchens and hospital rooms honors Christ as much as visible roles. Belonging means receiving as well as giving. Healthy community makes room for trustworthy friendship, worship, and shared burdens, and finding such a community may take patience: look for one rooted in Scripture, centered on Christ, and marked by humility and safety.

Read Scripture in context

Ephesians 2:13 says those once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Matthew 16:18 records Jesus saying he will build his church. Acts 2:42 describes believers devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. 1 Corinthians 12:12 compares the church to one body with many members. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges believers to stir one another up to love and good works and to keep meeting together. Galatians 6:2 calls believers to bear one another's burdens.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 11's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Expect a wide range of experiences with church. Do not defend any congregation's failures, and do not pressure anyone to join one. If someone describes harm, listen, thank them, and help them find appropriate support. Keep the focus on Christ, the head of the church.

Opening question

In one word, what has church been for you so far?

Pair conversation

Take turns: Is it easier for me to give help or to receive it? Why?

Optional group sharing

Whose burden could you help carry this week? No names needed.

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Expect church hurt to come up. Do not defend failures or pressure anyone to join a congregation.

Respond and pray

Read Acts 2:42-47 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. This week, take one step toward Christian community: attend a gathering, share a meal, reach out to a believer you trust, or ask a question of a church you are considering. Do one practical act of care for someone carrying a burden.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Chapter 12: Sent Under the King

Preparation: Read Chapter 12, Sent Under the King.

Keep this teaching central

Jesus does not call people to believe and then leave them without direction. Mission grows from belonging to him. After the resurrection, he met his disciples in Galilee, some of whom had denied or abandoned him, and began with his own authority. They were not sent because they were impressive, but because Jesus is Lord. He told them to make disciples, which reaches beyond one conversation to baptism, teaching, and walking with people over time. This work belongs to the whole church. Some will travel far, and many will be faithful in homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods; faithfulness is not measured by distance or audience. The Spirit empowered the witness from Jerusalem outward, across real divisions. The book encourages us to look at those already near: a coworker, a neighbor, a friend with unspoken questions. Not every conversation must become a presentation. Love listens, serves, keeps promises, and respects a person's freedom to respond. Peter says to be ready with a reason for hope, and to give it with gentleness and respect. It is fine to admit we need to study. We cannot create faith in someone's heart and must never use pressure or manipulation; God gives the growth. Mission also looks like integrity, generosity, and forgiveness in ordinary life, and Jesus promises to be with us always.

Read Scripture in context

Matthew 28:18-20 records Jesus saying all authority has been given to him, sending his followers to make disciples of all nations, and promising to be with them always. Acts 1:8 names Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. 1 Peter 3:15 calls believers to be ready to give a reason for their hope with gentleness and respect. 1 Corinthians 3:7 says God gives the growth. Matthew 5:16 calls Jesus' followers to let their light shine so others glorify the Father.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 12's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Some participants may not yet consider themselves followers of Jesus. Invite them to reflect on what they think about this mission rather than asking them to take part in it. Discourage any approach to sharing faith that pressures or manipulates people.

Opening question

Who is one person you see every week who might need friendship or care? No names needed.

Pair conversation

Take turns: What makes me hesitant to speak about Jesus, and what would gentleness and respect look like?

Optional group sharing

How does knowing God gives the growth change how you feel about sharing faith?

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Invite those still exploring to reflect rather than take part. Discourage pressure or manipulation in sharing faith.

Respond and pray

Read Matthew 28:16-20. Write the names of two or three people near you and pray for them by name this week. Take one simple step of love toward one of them: listen without hurry, help in a practical way, or, if the moment comes, share honestly why Jesus matters to you.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Conclusion: Believe and Follow

Preparation: Read the Conclusion, Believe and Follow.

Keep this teaching central

The question that opened the book remains: who is Jesus? The book's answer is that he is the eternal Son of God, fully God and fully man, who fulfilled God's promises, died for sinners, rose bodily, and reigns as King. Our sin is real, and no record of good deeds can remove it, but forgiveness is offered through him. We come to these words with different stories. Some have followed Jesus for years and are returning to the foundations. Some know the language of Christianity without having placed their confidence in Christ. Some are exhausted by trying to become worthy. Jesus knows our failures and our hard questions, and his invitation is still open. The Lord who calls us to believe also calls us to follow, as he called fishermen who could not see the whole road. Faith grows in ordinary places: how we speak to people at home, treat coworkers, spend money, and respond to interruptions. This life is sustained by the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, not our strength alone. There will be weak days. We need Scripture, prayer, the church, and honest friendships. For someone who has never trusted Christ, the book says you can turn to him in repentance and faith. For long-time followers, the same gospel remains the foundation. Wherever you are: receive his grace, trust his words, and keep walking with Jesus.

Read Scripture in context

Matthew 4:19 records Jesus calling fishermen, follow me. Romans 10:13 promises that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. John 20:31 returns to the purpose of believing and having life in his name. Colossians 2:6 calls believers to keep walking in Christ as they received him.

Guide without taking over.

Begin here: Invite people to open session 13's My next step box in their own workbook. Ask: What did you try, and how did it go? Anyone may pass.

Session-specific guidance

Close with thanks, not a test. Do not ask anyone to declare a decision in front of the group. Offer to meet privately with anyone who wants to talk about trusting Christ, baptism, or finding a church. Remind everyone that their notes are theirs and that you will not keep them.

Opening question

What is one thing you will keep from these sessions?

Pair conversation

Take turns: Where am I now with Jesus, and what is one next step?

Optional group sharing

What would you like to say to the group as we close? You can pass.

> **Facilitator guidance**
>
> Close with thanks, not a test. No public decisions required. Offer private conversations about trusting Christ, baptism, or finding a church.

Respond and pray

Write a short closing plan: one practice to keep, such as daily Scripture reading or prayer; one person to keep talking with about faith; one question to keep exploring; and one person to pray for. If you want to talk with someone about trusting Jesus, name who you will ask.

Before closing: Give each person time to write one thing they will try and when in their My next step box, or pass. This is the step to follow up on next time. Pray the participant workbook's session prayer together or in your own words. Do not collect worksheets.

Continue with care.

Invite feedback about pace and questions. Ask what practices people want to continue. Offer private conversations about trusting Jesus, baptism, or finding a church. Do not publish attendance, reflections, or stories without explicit permission.

Where did people engage most with Scripture?

What should change in the next group?

Who asked for a follow-up conversation, and when will I offer it?

Finishing the sessions is not a finish line. Keep the door open for questions.