



Leader's Guide

FAQ

Session 2 – “Is Jesus a Real Person?”

Goal:

- To challenge participants to revisit key questions of faith and affirm and clarify their answers.
- To encourage participants to encourage each other in seeking answers and making belief a central part of their lives.
- To equip participants with knowledge and information in response to key questions of faith.

Session Plan:

Personal Connection
Bible Connection
Life Connection
Prayer

Materials:

pens/pencils
copies of “Is Jesus a Real Person” participant sheet
Video (DVD or Online) – FAQ - Session 2

Personal Connection

Prayer

Invite one of your participants to pray to start your time together.

Transition

Say: ***“Have you ever been asked the question, ‘Who do you think you are?’ That’s kind of an odd question. No matter how we respond we’re indicating some beliefs we have about ourselves and assumptions we make. Maybe the question isn’t that odd after all, maybe it’s essential to find a clear answer to.”***

Six Word Biographies

According to legend the famous author Ernest Hemingway made a \$10 bet with some friends that he could write a novel in six words. After taking the bet he went to a napkin and wrote the following: ***For sale, baby shoes, never worn.***

Words tell stories and paint pictures. During this activity you’ll challenge your participants to come up with six word biographies to begin to answer the question, “Who are you?”

Tell the Ernest Hemingway story in your own words and then give the following directions: ***“Think about the question, ‘Who are you?’ and then try to come up with a six word sentence or phrase that begins to answer the question.”***

This might be a real challenge for some of your group members so maybe prime the pump by having your 6 word bio ready to go or read some of these samples.

“She ran until she could not”

“He fell down and got up”

Remember that these are not required to be super serious and can even be very light hearted. Have some fun as a group and if someone struggles with coming up with their own have the group come up with one for them. This might lead to some moments of encouragement and laughter.

Transition: ***“As we continue in our series called FAQ we’ll be looking at an important question. Is Jesus a real person? Let’s watch the video to get thinking about this essential question and how we might answer it.”***

Bible Connection

Video: Watch Session 2 – FAQ – Is Jesus a real person?

- Recap video and transition by saying: ***“So everyone has a picture of Jesus in their mind. Even people who say he wasn’t real and never lived have a picture in mind, of nothing. What is your picture of Jesus? Is he a cartoon character, a shiny, glowy person, or a normal looking person?”***

After you ask this question get a few responses and then continue on. The most natural follow-ups to people’s answers might be:

- Why do you picture Jesus like that?
- Where did that image of Jesus come from?

- Continue with discussion by stating:
 - **“Let’s see what artist’s tools we can use to paint a picture of Jesus using resources and information that we can know. As we wrestle with the tension between knowing and believing the goal is to have a clearer picture of Jesus come into view.”**
 - **“What do ancient sources say about Jesus? What do these stories and acknowledgements reveal about Jesus?”**
- Take time to review the following content. Highlight the most important things for your group to know and then walk through the information. If someone has a question answer to the best of your understanding or say, **“I’m not sure on that and I’ll check with our leaders to find out.”** Then, contact your NT Group coaches and get their input.

Ancient Sources

- 1000’s of historical writings document Jesus’ existence.
 - 42 authors mention him within 130 years of his life.
 - 9 of them are non-Christian sources
 - Only 9 authors mention Tiberius Caesar (reigned during Jesus’ life)
 - Only 5 authors report conquests of Julius Caesar
 - “If we apply to the New Testament, as we should, the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus’ existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned.” – Jesus: A Historians Review of the Gospels, Michael Grant
- Several sources that take Jesus existence for granted are highly critical and negative towards Christianity.
 - Josephus – Jewish historian (AD 93-94) – 2 references to Jesus
 - Tacitus – Roman historian (AD 116) – Christ, Pilate, Crucifixion
 - Jewish Talmud – religious text – Aims to discredit Jesus, not deny him

So...

- “Overwhelming majority of New Testament scholars and Near East historians find that the historicity of Jesus is more probable than not.” – Wikipedia Summary Statement
- With very few exceptions critics support the historicity of Jesus and reject the Christ myth theory that Jesus never existed.

- Discuss the following:
 - **“In your opinion, what is the strongest reason the ancient sources give us to believe that there was a man named Jesus?”**
Let your group participants share their thoughts about what helps them the most as they seek to affirm their faith in the real Jesus.

- Transition to another reason to believe in the historical/real Jesus. Again take time to review the following content. Highlight the most important things for your group to know and then walk through the information. If someone has a question answer to the best of your understanding or say, ***“I’m not sure on that and I’ll check with our leaders to find out.”*** Then, contact your NT Group coaches and get their input.

We Agree That Jesus...

- Biblical and non-Biblical scholars agree that:
 - Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist
 - Jesus called disciples
 - Jesus caused a controversy at the Temple
 - Jesus was crucified by Romans near Jerusalem
 - Jesus was a Galilean
 - Jesus primarily acted/lived/served in Galilee and Judea
 - Jesus’ disciples continued on after his death
 - Jesus’ disciples were persecuted
- Several non-Christian sources affirm that:
 - Jesus was from Nazareth
 - Jesus lived a wise and virtuous life
 - Jesus was crucified in Judea under Pilate during Tiberius Caesar’s reign during the Passover time
 - Jesus’ disciples believed he died and rose from the dead three days later
 - Jesus’ enemies believed that he performed unusual feats
 - Jesus’ disciples multiplied rapidly – spreading as far as Rome
 - Jesus’ disciples lived moral lives and worshipped Jesus as God

So...

- “In ancient times even opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus.” – Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Volume 1, Josh McDowell
- We can have a high degree of confidence that a man named Jesus existed, and that several important aspects of the Biblical account of his life are believed to have occurred by both Christian and non-Christian historians.

- Ask: ***“What parts of the story of Jesus life are easiest for you to accept as true? Which ones are the most difficult to believe really happened?”***
Since this is a personal experience answer give your group some time to share. Each person may find different reasons to believe and/or wrestle with parts of Jesus’ life. Let participants respond to others answers and thoughts.
- Continue: ***“Are there any parts of Jesus’ story that are essential to him being the messiah, the Christ, that the Bible talks about?”***
Discuss for a short time. Likely answers will be: virgin birth, divine nature, death on cross, resurrection. Other opinions may come up during your discussion.

Good news, in the coming sessions we're going to wrestle with three of these key ideas:

- Was Jesus God? (Session 3)
 - Did Jesus really live a sinless life? (Session 4)
 - Did Jesus rise from the dead? (Session 5)
- Transition by saying: ***“There is an abundance of evidence for Jesus’ existence from religious and non-religious sources. At some point, no matter the amount of evidence presented you must make a decision about your belief regarding Jesus. Is Jesus a real person?”***

Life Connection

- Ask: ***“Let’s walk through the consequences of Jesus reality. In other words, if Jesus is real, then what? Several authors and thinkers have called Jesus the most divisive or defining person in all history. How is this true?”***
Let your participants give their thoughts about Jesus being a person in history that divides and defines us. The key here is that his very reality demands that we decide what we believe about God and choose where we stand.

- Ask one of your group participants to read John 14:6-7.

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”
Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

- Discuss by asking:
 - ***“In John 14:6 Jesus draws a line in the sand regarding his reality and a relationship with God. What does he say and how does it demand a decision?”***
The words are simple but powerful. The phrase “No one comes to the Father except through me” brings us to a defining decision. We either come to God through Jesus on Jesus’ terms or we in futility attempt to approach God and fall far short.
 - ***“Jesus doesn’t see this news as a bad thing. In fact, it might be the best news for all of humanity, even us. Now, there is a way to God where before, The Law (religion) was highlighting how we weren’t measuring up. How does Jesus unlock the possibility of knowing God and being with Him for eternity?”***
Jesus’ life makes our eternal lives possible and our current lives full and purposeful. While some view Jesus as a burden the more we learn of following him we find new freedom and new life.

- Begin to wrap up with some personal questions:
 - **“Where are you right now when it comes to the Jesus questions. First, do you believe his was a real person?”**
 - **“Next, do you believe he is the way to the Father. Have you made him your way, your truth, your life?”**
- Transition: **“Jesus is the most important person in all of human history. His life, death, and resurrection are the pivot point of the story of humanity. Without Jesus the world we live in would be a far different place and not for the better. The great news is that Jesus came to bring life and freedom and he offers those to us. We can be encouraged by the love of God revealed in the person of Jesus.”**

Prayer

Invite one of your participants to read the following prayer as a way to conclude your time together.

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your glorious love. Your passion for us is beyond doubt as we continue to learn and understand You through the life of Your son Jesus. He is Your love letter to us telling us over and over of Your great love.

Thank You for reaching into our desperate state of sin and brokenness and bringing healing, hope, and life. We receive Jesus not from a position of achievement and success but in complete emptiness and need. Your grace in giving us what we need most in spite of our sinful nature is a glorious mystery that only magnifies Your love.

We confess that we are sinners. We confess that without Your action we would still be lost in our sin. We confess that Your love and Your Son have brought us new life in our sinful lives and are redeeming us daily to be Your people.

Oh God, when this story of our desperation and Your love collide we are stunned with the greatness of You. We celebrate You and Your great generosity and we worship You and You alone. We were doomed and now we are alive. All praise be to You God.

In the name of Your son Jesus we pray this, Amen.