

November/December 2012—In the Habit/Guide—Week 9

Who Is This Jesus?

Darren Wright

For use with devozine meditations for December 24–31, 2012.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“A long time ago I sat down and typed out the lyrics to over one hundred songs from pop culture that had Jesus in the title or as a main character in the song. Since then, the list has continued to grow. I’m not going to say that they were all good songs; nor will I send you the entire list, even if you beg, because, quite frankly, some of them were awful or at the least would offend a bucket-load of people.

“Yet, many of these songs asked me to reflect on who exactly I think Jesus is and on the variety of images and descriptions of Jesus that exist in pop culture.

“This session is created to provide a space to listen and reflect on who other people think Jesus is and, in turn, to reflect on how we might answer the question ‘Who is this Jesus?’” —Darren

MEET THE WRITER

Darren Wright is a Uniting Church Youth Worker serving in the Riverina Presbytery in New South Wales, Australia, as the Presbytery Youth and Children’s Ministry Worker. Darren has previously worked in congregational ministry, high school chaplaincy, and local government as a youth worker. He has also been a petrol station attendant, supermarket employee, dairy manager, and furniture salesperson. His interests include music (Moby, Radiohead, Ben Harper, The National, Muse, All India Radio), film (*MegaMind*, *Harry Potter*, *How to Train your Dragon*, *Scott Pilgrim*), TV (*Chuck*, *Doctor Who*, *Big Bang Theory*, *Community*), theology, pop-culture, and the ways church and theology connect with pop culture.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- An iPod, MP3 player, or CD ready to play a selection of these “Jesus Songs” (the ones marked with an asterisk * are highly recommended):
 - + “Picture of Jesus,” by Ben Harper *
<http://www.benharper.com/music/songs-lyrics/originals/picture-of-jesus>
 - + “Comrade Jesus Christ,” by The Herd (Kev Carmody Cover) *
lyrics: http://www.lyricsmania.com/comrade_jesus_christ_lyrics_herd_the.html
download: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Comrade-Jesus-Christ/dp/B002A9QC3I>

- + “Jesus Christ,” by U2 (Woody Guthrie Cover) *
 lyrics: <http://www.atu2.com/lyrics/songinfo.src?SID=219>
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Christ/dp/B001389XAG>

- + “The Rebel Jesus,” by Jackson Browne *
 lyrics: <http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/THE-REBEL-JESUS-lyrics-Jackson-Browne/52F85AD10F6F373E48256A4D0020718B>
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Rebel-Jesus/dp/B001G6MUL4>

- + “Personal Jesus,” by Jonny Cash *
 lyrics: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/johnnycash/personaljesus.html>
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/Personal-Jesus/dp/B000W11G8M>

- + “Christ for President,” by Wilco & Billy Bragg (Woody Guthrie Cover) *
 lyrics: http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Christ_for_President.htm
 download: http://www.mp3s.pl/mp3/Billy_Bragg_*and*_Wilco/Christ_For_President/3739957

- + “American Jesus,” by Bad Religion
 lyrics: <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/badreligion/americanjesus.html>
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/American-Jesus/dp/B0030CK6CM>

- + “Plastic Jesus,” by Flaming Lips
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/Plastic-Jesus/dp/B001MCO9SO>
 lyrics: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/plastic-jesus-lyrics-flaming-lips.html>

- + “Chocolate Jesus,” by Tom Waits
 lyrics: <http://www.lyricstime.com/tom-waits-chocolate-jesus-lyrics.html>
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/Chocolate-Jesus/dp/B000YQUST8>

- + “Jesus Was a Capricorn,” by Kris Kristofferson
 lyrics: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/jesus-was-a-capricorn-lyrics-kris-kristofferson.html>
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Was-A-Capricorn/dp/B00138JBM6>

- + “Cry of a Tiny Babe,” by Bruce Cockburn *
 lyrics: <http://cockburnproject.net/songs&music/coatb.html>
 download: <http://www.amazon.com/Cry-Of-A-Tiny-Baby/dp/B001BW0ETS>

- Copies of the lyrics for each song you choose
- Images of Jesus (Check out the Church Mission Society’s *The Christ We Share* resource at <http://goo.gl/6asVh>. Or do a Google search, and print out a number of images of Jesus from different cultures and of different types.)

- A selection of quotations about Jesus (You may use the handout “Quotations about Jesus” found at the end of this session or quotations from the songs you do not choose to play. You might also consider using some of the lyrics from these songs about Jesus:
 - + “Hey Jesus” by Indigo Girls (<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/indigogirls/heyjesus.html>)
 - + “Jesus Saves” by Del Amitri (<http://www.metrolyrics.com/jesus-saves-lyrics-del-amitri.html>)
 - + “Jesus was a Terrorist” by Jello Biafra (<http://www.lyricstime.com/biafra-jello-jesus-was-a-terrorist-lyrics.html>)
 - + “Jesus Was Way Cool” by King Missile (<http://www.asklyrics.com/display/king-missile/jesus-was-way-cool-lyrics.htm>)
 - + “I’m Dying” by VAST (<http://www.metrolyrics.com/im-dying-lyrics-vast.html>)
 - + “I Still Pray” by Paul Kelly and Kasey Chambers (<http://www.leoslyrics.com/kasey-chambers-and-paul-kelly-the-stormwater-boys/i-still-pray-lyrics/>)
 - + “Jesus” by Cat Stevens (<http://www.metrolyrics.com/jesus-lyrics-cat-stevens.html>)
- One or more of these videos depicting images of Jesus’ face:
 - + “Morph of the Face of Jesus” (<http://vimeo.com/33183806>)
 - + “Jesus Morph” (<http://youtu.be/1LIDwJtihPA>)
 - + “Awesome God—Jesus Pictures” (http://youtu.be/u_OxcUiEeUg)
- Paint and paintbrushes (optional)
- Newsprint and markers
- Pencils and paper

PLUGGED IN

If you want to develop this session in another way, here are a few resources that may be helpful:

Books

- + Both *Jesus Asked* and *Mealtime Habits of the Messiah: 40 Encounters with Jesus* by Conrad Gemf may be good reads or provide short devotional material to explore who Jesus was. Both are available from Amazon:
 - (<http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Asked-Conrad-Gempf/dp/031024773X>)
 - (<http://www.amazon.com/Mealtime-Habits-Messiah-Encounters-Jesus/dp/0310257174>)
- + N. T. Wright has written extensively about who Jesus was. His best book to read while working with young people may be *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*. His newer book *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* might also be of interest.
 - (<http://www.amazon.com/The-Challenge-Jesus-Rediscovering-Who/dp/0830822003>)
 - (http://www.amazon.com/Simply-Jesus-Vision-What-Matters/dp/0062084399/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1348961805&sr=1-1&keywords=Simply+Jesus)
- + Michael Frost’s *Jesus the Fool: The Mission of the Unconventional Christ* and *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, coauthored with Alan Hirsch, are helpful resources for exploring who Jesus is. I would suggest reading *Jesus the Fool* first and then deciding if you want to follow up with *ReJesus*.
 - (<http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Fool-Mission-Unconventional-Christ/dp/0801046289>)
 - (<http://www.amazon.com/ReJesus-Wild-Messiah-Missional-Church/dp/1598562282>)

Multimedia

- + I cannot say enough about *The Christ We Share* resource! Find it at The Church Mission Society website. (<http://goo.gl/6asVh>)
- + The Discovery Channel documentary *Who Was Jesus?* (<http://amzn.to/QDDhaH>)
- + The PBS documentary *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians* (<http://amzn.to/QDD9rK>)
- + The Work of the People has a great selection of short clips that you might want to use in other settings. Look especially at these:
 - “Jesus Disarmed Us All” (<http://goo.gl/DVfNs>)
 - “Was Jesus Political?” (<http://goo.gl/kuzDz>)
 - “The Courage of Jesus” (<http://goo.gl/unfcA>)
 - “Jesus: Man of the Streets” (<http://goo.gl/VC2EE>)
 - “Jesus Wept” (<http://goo.gl/dnXGx>)
 - “Jesus and the Kingdom” (<http://goo.gl/ZxBq1>)
 - “Domesticated Jesus” (<http://goo.gl/8eUeH>)
- + “Picture of Jesus: An Alternative Worship Space” is a guide for looking at and creating an image of Jesus. (*This is available as a handout at the end of this session.*)
- + “A Christmas Story You’ve Never Heard” by Gordon Atkinson (<http://itunes.apple.com/au/album/christmas-story-youve-never/id82078969>)
- + The website *Proost: Inspiring Resources that Fuel Faith* (<http://Proost.co.uk/>) offers a number of great Christmas and Jesus videos and other resources. Check out “9 Lessons” and “25 Advent Comic and Calendar” and “Advent Calendar.” Many of the comics from the “ASBO Jesus” Resources Pack may also prove helpful.

Music

- + I’ve written more reflections on Jesus songs, some of which might be of interest or assistance. (<http://goo.gl/UBqi6>).

Film

You might want to show clips from one or two of the following films about Jesus and use them as you would the music in this session:

- + *Jesus of Nazareth* (<http://amzn.to/QDDVfD> or http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075520/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)
- + *Jesus Christ Superstar* (<http://amzn.to/QDEb7d> or http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070239/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)
- + *From the Manger to the Cross* (<http://amzn.to/QDEfUo> or <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0002199/>)
- + *The Gospel of John* (<http://amzn.to/QDEyif> or <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377992/>)
- + *Godspell* (<http://amzn.to/QDEHlu> or http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070121/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)
- + *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (<http://amzn.to/QDEONW> or <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0059245/>)
- + *Jesus of Montreal*—one of my favorite Jesus films ever! (<http://amzn.to/RQyxxd> or <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097635/>)

CHECKING IN

Display the images of Jesus and some of the quotations about Jesus. Set up computers to play the videos of Jesus' face.

Invite group members to wander around the room, to look at the pictures, and to read the quotations. Play the song "Picture of Jesus" by Ben Harper in the background (see "Plugged In").

Then ask group members to choose one image or quotation that does each of the following:

- challenges you
- interests you
- resembles your image of Jesus
- makes you smile

Let people know that they will be asked to tell the group about the choices they make.

Bring the group together. Invite discussion:

What images did you choose?

Why did you choose them?

What about the images made you look at them?

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Mark 8:27–38

Read aloud Mark 8:27–28. Then invite people to find a place in the room where they can be alone and comfortable. They may want to sit or lie down. Explain that you are going to play a selection of songs about Jesus, songs that answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" The group members are to listen to the songs, both the lyrics and the music. After two or three songs are played, you will ask them to come together to talk about what they heard.

[**NOTE:** If your group is especially artistic or energetic, you may want to provide paint and paintbrushes or markers and invite people to paint or draw their own image of Jesus.]

As they listen to the music, invite them to reflect on who Jesus is.

What does he look like?

What does he do?

Is he happy?

Is he sad?

What is his race or ethnicity?

When group members have made themselves comfortable, play the selection of songs you have chosen from the list in "Stuff You Will Need."

Then bring the group together. Provide each person with a copy of the lyrics to the songs you have just played. Invite discussion:

What image of Jesus

- **grabbed your imagination?**
- **challenged your understanding of who Jesus is?**
- **made you think about Jesus differently?**
- **did you dislike?**
- **did you love?**

SHARING IN PRAYER

Invite each person to choose an image of Jesus and to imagine what that Jesus looked like when he was a baby, a child, and a teenager. As people reflect on their image, play the song “Cry of a Tiny Babe,” by Bruce Cockburn (see “Plugged In”).

Close the session by offering this blessing:

*“May the Jesus we meet this year continue to surprise us
to guide us
to perplex us
to challenge us
to sit with us
to be patient with us
to eat with us
and to call us. Amen.”*

TAKING IT FURTHER

- Invite group members to spend some time (anywhere from several weeks to a year) collecting images of Jesus they find in pop culture. Build a collection or library of images.
- Encourage group members to sponsor a movie night once a week for a month, inviting your congregation or people in your community to watch films about Jesus and to discuss these questions: Who is this Jesus? How does this film portray Jesus?
- Challenge group members to conduct interviews with people in your congregation and community and videotape their answers to the question “Who do you say Jesus is?” Invite the group to post these videos as Creative Work on www.devozine.org.

[The handouts mentioned above—“Picture of Jesus: An Alternative Worship Space” and “Quotations about Jesus” —are available on the next five pages.]

Picture of Jesus: An Alternative Worship Space

(Display images of Jesus from around the world.)

We are part of a visual world.

We absorb images.

Seeing the familiar from a new perspective is sometimes surprising and not unpleasant. Each perspective is born of human story and a desire to understand.

The images in this space are from artists around the world.

Please take some time to look at the pictures and words depicting Christ throughout history and across cultures.

Spend some time wandering through the space, reflecting on the words and images around you and allowing God to meet you where you are.

When you feel comfortable doing so, take pens, paint, crayons, and paper. Spend some time reflecting on the picture of Jesus that you carry with you in your mind and heart, an image of the Jesus you believe in.

What does he look like?

What does he do?

Is he happy?

Is he sad?

Is he black or white?

Create an image. You don't need to be perfect. We have no Monets or Picassos here today. But we can draw, paint, be messy, have fun, get covered in paint, be playfully reverent.

We all carry around a picture of Jesus. The image feeds our ministry, inspires us, urges us on. Yet we rarely reflect on it. Think about how human experiences shape our perception of Christ.

As your image takes form, display it, adding it to the collection of images in the room. If you wish, write an explanation of your image and why you painted or drew it in the way you did.

Quotations about Jesus

“Jesus was killed because of the way he ate.”

—Robert Karris (quoted in *Mealtime Habits of the Messiah*, by Conrad Gemph, page 18)

“If Christ’s power lies in being able to cleanse, then a church where no dirt is allowed in is powerless.” —*Signs of Emergence*, by Kester Brewin, page 172

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” —Matthew 11:19 (NRSV)

The son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. - John 5:19 (NRSV)

“Jesus can be found in the dirt.” —*The Complex Christ*, by Kester Brewin

“Have you ever wondered what Jesus’ first words were? What went through Mary and Joseph’s minds as they watched Jesus take his first steps? If they kept a journal of all his firsts, the first time he used the toilet properly, photos of the first time they caught him sitting naked, eating mud? When did puberty hit him? I hardly ever imagine the baby Jesus rather than an adult one.”

—Darren Wright

“Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.”

—“As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame,” by Gerard Manley Hopkins
Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose (Penguin Classics, 1985)

“Whether you think Jesus was God or not, you must admit he was a first-rate political economist.” —George Bernard Shaw

“I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.” —H. G. Wells

“A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

“There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that he believed in hell. . . . It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take him as his chroniclers represent him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that.” —Bertrand Russell

Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete. Christianity alone has felt that God, to be wholly God must be a rebel as well as a king.”

—G. K. Chesterton

“From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother.” —Martin Buber

“As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. . . . No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.” —Albert Einstein

“Jesus Christ is to me the outstanding personality of all time, all history, both as Son of God and as Son of Man. Everything he ever said or did has value for us today and that is something you can say of no other man, dead or alive. There is no easy middle ground to stroll upon. You either accept Jesus or reject him.” —Sholem Asch

“In Jesus, God wills to be true God not only in the height but also in the depth—in the depth of human creatureliness, sinfulness and mortality” —Karl Barth

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” —C. S. Lewis

“In his own lifetime Jesus made no impact on history. This is something that I cannot but regard as a special dispensation on God's part, and, I like to think, yet another example of the ironical humor which informs so many of his purposes. To me, it seems highly appropriate that the most important figure in all history should thus escape the notice of memoirists, diarists, commentators, all the tribe of chroniclers who even then existed.” —Malcolm Muggeridge

“Every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, that person is the one person in the world at that moment.” —Mother Teresa

“He might be described as an underprivileged, working-class victim of political and religious persecution.” —Prince Phillip

“I accept the resurrection of Easter Sunday not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as a historical event. If the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on that Easter Sunday were a public event which had been made known . . . not only to the 530 Jewish witnesses but to the entire population, all Jews would have become followers of Jesus.” —Pinchas Lapide

“An unsurpassed master of the art of laying bare the inmost core of spiritual truth.”—Geza Vermes

“If Jesus had been killed 20 years ago, Catholic school children would be wearing little electric chairs around their necks instead of crosses.” —Lenny Bruce

“It is as wholly wrong to blame Marx for what was done in his name, as it is to blame Jesus for what was done in his.” —Tony Benn

“After the fall of so many gods in this century, this person, broken at the hands of his opponents and constantly betrayed through the ages by his adherents, is obviously still for innumerable people the most moving figure in the long history of mankind.” —Hans Kung

“Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth and goodness.” —Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind.” —Mikhail Gorbachev

“If Jesus came back and saw what was being done in his name, he wouldn't be able to stop throwing up.” —Woody Allen

“We're more popular than Jesus now.” —John Lennon (talking about The Beatles)

“2,000 years ago one man got nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be if everyone was nice to each other for a change.” —Douglas Adams

“O hidden strength! A man hanging on a cross lifts the weight of eternal death; a man fixed on wood frees the world from everlasting death. O hidden power!” —St Anselm

“Jesus was lost in his love for God.” —Rumi Sufi

“When I was abandoned by everybody, in my greatest weakness, trembling and afraid of death, when I was persecuted by this wicked world, then I often felt most surely the divine power in this name, Jesus Christ. . . . So, by God's grace, I will live and die for that name.” —Martin Luther

“Christ teaches and commands us to learn of him, for he is meek and lowly in heart and so shall we find rest to our souls.” —Schleitheim Confession

“No one else holds or has held the place in the heart of the world which Jesus holds. Other gods have been as devoutly worshipped; no other man has been so devoutly loved.” —John Knox

“Not only do we not know God except through Jesus Christ; We do not even know ourselves except through Jesus Christ.” —Blaise Pascal

“Socrates dies with honor, surrounded by his disciples listening to the most tender words—the easiest death that one could wish to die. Jesus dies in pain, dishonor, mockery, the object of universal cursing—the most horrible death that one could fear. At the receipt of the cup of poison, Socrates blesses him who could not give it to him without tears; Jesus, while suffering the sharpest pains, prays for His most bitter enemies. If Socrates lived and died like a philosopher, Jesus lived and died like a god.” —Jean-Jacques Rousseau

“The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as His father, in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.” —Thomas Jefferson

“I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of people would die for Him.”

—Napoleon Bonaparte

“If Jesus Christ were to come today, people would not crucify him. They would ask him to dinner, hear what he had to say, and make fun of it.” —Thomas Carlyle

“I believe there is no one deeper, lovelier, more sympathetic and more perfect than Jesus—not only is there no one else like him, there never could be anyone like him.” —Fyodor Dostoevsky

Jesus died to save men—a small thing for an immortal to do—and didn’t save many, anyway. But if he had been damned for the race, that would have been act of a size proper to a god, and would have saved the whole race.” —Mark Twain

“Jesus died too soon. If he had lived to my age he would have repudiated his doctrine.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche

“Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ They answered, ‘John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.’” —Luke 9:18-19 (NRSV)

“God has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ, who is his Word issuing from the silence.”

—St Ignatius of Antioch

“Jesus has now been celebrated about 300 years, having done nothing in his lifetime worthy of fame, unless anyone thinks it is a very great work to heal lame and blind people and exorcise demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany.” —Julian the Apostate

“He who alone was free among the dead—because he was free to lay down his life and free to take it up again—was for us both victor and victim . . . and it is because he was the victim that he was also the victor.” —St Augustine

“Christ is the great hidden mystery, the blessed goal, the purpose for which everything was created.” —St Maximus the Confessor

“I believe in . . . Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost. Born of the Virgin Mary. Suffered under Pontius Pilate. Was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead.” —The Apostle’s Creed

