

Session 1



THE INVESTIGATION OF A LIFETIME

For much of my life I was a skeptic. In fact, I considered myself an atheist. To me, there was far too much evidence that God was merely a product of wishful thinking, of ancient mythology, of primitive superstition.... It wasn't a phone call from an informant that prompted me to reexamine the case for Christ. It was my wife.... Eventually I wanted to get to the bottom of what was prompting the subtle but significant shifts in my wife's attitudes, so I launched an all-out investigation into the facts surrounding the case for Christianity.... I applied the training I had received at Yale Law School as well as my experience as legal affairs editor of the Chicago Tribune. And I plunged into the case with more vigor than with any story I had ever pursued.

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*

READ THIS!

If possible, read the following content in preparation for your group meeting. Otherwise, read it as follow-up.

The Case for Christ, introduction: Reopening the Investigation of a Lifetime

WATCH THIS!

DVD Introduction and Teaching Segment #1

For every DVD clip, space is provided to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

DISCUSS THIS!

1. To what degree can you relate to the comments people made about Jesus in the DVD segment? What best represents your current position regarding what you believe about Jesus Christ?

"I don't believe we'll ever know if Jesus was really what everyone says he was. I think it's a lot of folklore. I think it's a lot of historical misrepresentation. It's a lot of wishful thinking. But I don't think we know. I don't think we'll ever know. And I don't think there's any way to prove what has been claimed about Jesus for all these years."

Woman on the street

2. What are your biggest questions or objections regarding Jesus Christ and the Christian faith?



Think About This!

“So, then, Christ may be said to be a fiction in the four senses that (1) it is quite possible that there was no historical Jesus; (2) even if there was, he is lost to us, the result being that there is no historical Jesus available to us; (3) the Jesus who “walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his own” is an imaginative visualization and in the nature of the case can be nothing more than a fiction; and finally, (4) “Christ” as a corporate logo for this and that religious institution is a euphemistic fiction, not unlike Ronald McDonald, Mickey Mouse, or Joe Camel, the purpose of which is to get you to swallow a whole raft of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors by an act of simple faith, short-circuiting the dangerous process of thinking the issues out to your own conclusions.”

Marshall J. Gauvin, *Did Jesus Christ Really Live?*

“If Jesus Christ is only a human being – no matter how splendid a specimen of humanity he may be – he is part of the problem, not its solution.”

British theologian Alister McGrath

“Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if he did we do not know anything about him.”

Atheist Bertrand Russell

3. What level of confidence do you have that Jesus is an actual historical figure? Or, how confident are you that the existence of Jesus Christ is a matter of legend or wishful thinking? Give reasons behind your response.

*“Jesus? I would say no
doubt he lived as a person
but to the extent of what
he did, I’m not sure.”*

Woman on the street

4. How possible is it for us to know if Jesus was, in fact, divine? Give reasons for your response. What factors would increase our ability to determine the truth about Jesus' identity?

"If you were selected for a jury in a real trial, you would be asked to affirm up front that you haven't formed any preconceptions about the case. You would be required to vow that you would be open-minded and fair, drawing your conclusions based on the weight of the facts and not on your whims or prejudices. You would be urged to thoughtfully consider the credibility of the witnesses, carefully sift the testimony, and rigorously subject the evidence to your common sense and logic."

Lee Strobel

7. While still an atheist, Lee's initial conclusion was this: *If Christianity is true, it has huge implications for one's life.* What do you think he meant by this statement? Do you agree or disagree with his assessment? Why?

Optional Discussion Questions

- Did you have the opportunity to read the introduction to *The Case for Christ*? Lee Strobel makes the observation that examining the evidence and the facts about Jesus is “the investigation of a lifetime.” What do you think is the significance of determining Jesus’ identity?
- In the video clip, Lee and Leslie Strobel shared aspects of their spiritual stories. Lee had antagonistic attitudes toward both Christians and Christianity, while Leslie was more neutral about the issues and uncertain about what she believed. Which of the two stories do you relate to most and why?
- Generally speaking, are you driven more by your head or by your heart? To what degree are your questions or objections about God a “heart issue” — as they were for Leslie — and to what degree is your spiritual journey a “head issue,” which requires facts and documentation, as for Lee? How might that impact your examination of the evidence for Christ?
- What patterns of church attendance did you establish growing up? How and why has that changed over the years? How would you describe your overall experience with church? If you’ve never attended a church service before, describe your impressions of what that might be like.
- In what ways do Christians repel you from Christianity? In what ways, if any, do they attract you?
- How would you react if the most important person in your life started attending church regularly and eventually became a Christian? How do you suppose your friends and family members would respond if you one day decided to become a Christian?
- Do you know anyone who has made the decision to become a Christian in the time that you’ve known them? If so, in what ways has he or she become a different person? How has their decision affected your relationship? What are some of the positive and negative changes that you have observed?

WATCH THIS!

DVD Teaching Segment #2

DISCUSS THIS!

8. In examining a biography, how can you discern between mythical legend and authentic reality? What are some routes of inquiry you might employ to figure this out?

*"If Jesus is to be believed—
and I realize that may
be a big if for you at this
point—then nothing is more
important than how you
respond to him."*

Lee Strobel



Think About This!

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never had a family or owned a home. He never set foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place he was born. He never wrote a book, or held an office. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness.

While he was still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends deserted him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had—his coat.

When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure for much of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.

Author unknown

9. What do you believe about Jesus? Was he a great moral teacher? Was he a prophet? Did he possess special powers? Was he God in human form or was he simply a good man that legend has elevated to the status of the divine?

10. Did Jesus really claim to be God? What did his followers of that era believe about his identity? What have you heard or read about the divinity of Jesus?

11. If Jesus did claim to be God in human form, as the Bible states, can this assertion ever be proven to your satisfaction? Short of Jesus showing up tonight in physical form, could there ever be enough evidence to convince you of his true identity? Why or why not? Is it realistic to say his identity could ever be proven based on a preponderance of the evidence? Elaborate.



Think About This!

“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 the 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 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, *Mere Christianity*

12. Jesus once asked his disciples “Who do the crowds say I am?” and he received a variety of responses (see Luke 9:18–19). At this point in your spiritual investigation, who do *you* say Jesus is? On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 = I’m very certain Jesus was an extraordinary man, but he was not God in human form; 5 = I’m in a fog concerning who Jesus was; 10 = I’m very certain Jesus was God in human form just as he claimed he was), place an X near the spot that best describes you. Then share your selection with the rest of the group and give reasons for placing your X where you did.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Jesus – a great man but not God				Unsure who Jesus was		Jesus – God in human form			

“Jesus made it clear by word and deed that to know him was to know God, to see him was to see God, to believe in him was to believe in God, to receive him was to receive God, to reject him was to reject God, and to honor him was to honor God.”

British theologian John Stott

Optional Discussion Questions

- What is your assessment of the Bible? Is it a trustworthy historical document? Does it have any spiritual value? Give reasons for your answers.
- Regardless of whether or not you believe the Bible to be true, many have observed that it is a remarkable and beautiful piece of literature that has influenced countless generations. Aside from its potential spiritual value, is this reason enough to read and study it? Why or why not?
- If it could be demonstrated that the Bible is an extremely well-preserved and factual historical document upon which historians and archaeologists rely, what weight would you then give to the information it contains and the implications for your life?
- To what degree of accuracy do you think historical records reflect actual past occurrences? What factors determine the level of accuracy of historical documents?
- Can we ever really know the historical truth about Jesus? Why or why not? What factors would increase the accuracy of our understanding of who Jesus is?

WATCH THIS!

DVD Wrap-up/Lee's Perspective

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Personal Reflection

It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah. He was at the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. The Jewish leaders surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is what I do in the name of my Father. But you don't believe me because you are not part of my flock. My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. So no one can take them from me. The Father and I are one."

Once again the Jewish leaders picked up stones to kill him. Jesus said, "At my Father's direction I have done many things to help the people. For which one of these good deeds are you killing me?" They replied, "Not for any good work, but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, have made yourself God."

John 10:22–33 NLT

- Prior to this study session, when was the last time you gave more than a cursory thought to the person known as Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus? What impact has he had in your life? And how did this humble man from the Middle East manage to revolutionize the entire known world in such a dramatic way that his very birthday divides all of history right down the middle?
- What are some other ways Jesus has had influence—either positive or negative? How well have Christians followed the ways of Jesus? The Bible claims to contain his teachings, but have his words and his legacy been properly preserved? Are the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—accurate biographies of the life and teachings of Jesus? How can you be sure either way?
- According to John 10:22–33 above, what did Jesus appear to believe about himself? What do you think his followers believed about him? What did the religious leaders of that time believe about him? It is a matter of historical record that Jesus was later crucified and buried. The Bible records

that this punishment was handed down, in part, for the charge of blasphemy—for his claim to be God. Did Jesus really believe he was God? If so, what conclusions can you draw about him? Was he telling the truth? British philosopher C. S. Lewis famously proposed that Jesus was either a legend, liar, lunatic, or the Lord God. Are there any other options? Would a sane, truthful, good person falsely claim to be God? How open are you to discovering the identity of Jesus for yourself once and for all? What is the driving force behind your search? What difference might it make in your life? And how committed are you to be open-minded and fair, drawing your conclusions based on the weight of the facts and evidence presented in this case?

- Perhaps you can take some time right now to further reflect on these verses written by the disciple John. Assuming this account has been preserved accurately, does it have anything new to teach you that you didn't already know about Jesus? Are you willing to say a short prayer right now to invite God to reveal the truth about Jesus to you in the coming days?