Reading Jesus Again with Grace and Mercy

A companion to *Jesus Said What?* by DeDe Jones and Jeff Jones

Four Week Small Group and Class Study Guide

This guide helps a group move from reading Jesus Said What? to exploring Scripture together and trying its invitations in everyday life. Each week includes a leader overview, a Bible passage, questions connected to the book, a group activity and a practice for the days ahead. Participants don't need a theological degree or a tidy faith story. They need room to wonder and a willingness to listen.

This four-week version covers the whole book at a faster pace. Begin the Introduction and Chapters 1–3 before the first gathering, and spread each week's reading across several days. Mark one passage from each chapter that you'd like to revisit. Read the assigned chapters before each gathering. Bring the book and a Bible; a notebook is helpful. Leaders can use this guide as written for a 60-minute session or allow 75–90 minutes for more conversation. The Scripture passages are companion readings selected for this study. Book connections identify chapters and themes without page numbers or requiring a particular edition.

The reading schedule

Week 1 • Introduction and Chapters 1–3 • Hearing Jesus and rediscovering the invitation

Week 2 • Chapters 4–6 • Belonging and the love that makes room for grace

Week 3 • Chapters 7–8 • Humility and the rebuilding of trust

Week 4 • Chapters 9–10 and Epilogue • Practicing the life Jesus invites us into

Preparing to lead

Read the week's chapters and Bible passage before the group meets. Mark one short book passage that connects with the session's focus. You can read it aloud or ask participants to find it; there's no need to prepare a lecture. The guide supplies enough context to begin, while the book and the participants' observations carry the conversation.

Choose three or four of the main questions ahead of time, giving each assigned chapter some attention. You won't need every question. Use the book connections to introduce the session's larger focus, then follow a useful thread rather than trying to discuss every page. Give people time to think before inviting responses, and let a useful conversation breathe. Bring paper and pens for the activities. For a larger class, use groups of three or four and invite brief reports afterward. Offer a quiet writing option for anyone who prefers it.

Each session follows the same timing: welcome and opening question, 5 minutes; Scripture and book connection, 10 minutes; discussion, 20 minutes; group activity, 15 minutes; reflection, homework and prayer, 10 minutes. For 45 minutes, shorten discussion and the activity by five minutes each and close in five minutes. For 75–90 minutes, use the additional questions and allow a fuller activity debrief.

If someone hasn't finished the reading, welcome them into the conversation. Briefly explain the book connection and read the Bible passage aloud. Avoid making preparation a test of belonging, especially in a study about belonging.

Making room for honest conversation

At the first meeting, ask the group to agree to these practices. Return to them whenever needed.

- Speak from your own experience. Leave room for another person's experience to be different.
- Listen to understand. Ask before offering advice, and resist turning someone's story into a theological problem to solve.
- Everyone may pass on a question or activity. Nobody owes the group a painful story.
- Keep personal stories private. Don't repeat someone else's story outside the group without permission. Explain that confidentiality has limits when someone's safety is at risk; follow your church's safeguarding procedures.
- Disagree with care. We can examine beliefs without questioning someone's dignity or treating their identity as a debate topic.
- Share the time. Make space for quieter voices without putting anyone on the spot.

A leader can say, “We don't have to settle every question tonight. Let's stay with what the passage shows us and what we're learning about loving people well.” If a discussion becomes hurtful, pause it, name the impact and return to the agreements. If someone shares a wound, thank them for trusting the group and ask what would help them in that moment. Avoid pressing for details or promising answers the group can't provide.

A simple reflection to use each week

Invite participants to keep a brief record between meetings: What caught my attention in the reading? What did I notice when I tried the practice? What question am I carrying? Begin Weeks 2–4 with an optional one-minute response to the previous week's practice. An unfinished practice can still teach us something.

Week 1

Hearing Jesus and rediscovering the invitation

Reading before the gathering: Introduction and Chapters 1–3

Scripture: Matthew 5:43–48 Optional companion reading: Mark 1:14–15

Question to carry: What assumption about Jesus needs another look, and what life is he inviting me into?

The leader's focus

Help participants examine inherited assumptions and hear the breadth of Jesus' invitation. Chapter 1 explores enemy-love, Chapter 2 attends to how we read Scripture and Chapter 3 considers the language we use about salvation. Connect these ideas through a central question: How does hearing Jesus more carefully change the way we live? Leave room for gratitude for someone's upbringing alongside questions or hurt.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

In a new group, invite names and introduce the conversation agreements. Ask: “What's a saying about faith you've heard often, and how do you hear it now?” Keep responses brief so everyone who wishes can speak. Invite people to pass without explanation.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Matthew 5:43–48. Ask what Jesus says about loving enemies and what the sun and rain reveal about God's generosity. Jesus teaches within Jewish life and Scripture; avoid contrasting a loveless Judaism or harsh Old Testament God with Jesus.

Link Chapter 1's treatment of enemy-love with Chapter 2's attention to context. Then introduce Chapter 3's examination of “ask Jesus into your heart.” Invite participants to name what that familiar phrase communicates and what needs fuller explanation. Read one short book passage chosen in advance. If time allows, read Mark 1:14–15 and notice Jesus' announcement of God's kingdom and invitation to respond.

Leader note: Honor meaningful conversion experiences while examining language. Enemy-love doesn't require giving a harmful person access to your life. Context includes the surrounding passage and the people affected by our interpretation.

Discussion 20 minutes

Choose three or four questions, including one connected to each chapter.

1. What assumption did the Introduction or Chapter 1 invite you to revisit? What makes it difficult to loosen?

2. How could enemy-love take shape while still resisting harm and keeping appropriate boundaries?

3. Chapter 2 asks us to read with attention to context. What changes when we ask who is speaking, who is listening and what happens around a verse?

4. What has the word “saved” meant to you? What did Chapter 3 add to your understanding of salvation and life now?

5. Which familiar phrase about faith has helped you, and which has needed more explanation? What would you want a newcomer to understand?

6. How could taking Jesus seriously change one ordinary choice this week?

Group activity 15 minutes

Give a familiar phrase another hearing

Give everyone paper. Allow three minutes to write a familiar phrase or assumption about faith and what it has meant to them. In pairs, spend five minutes considering it alongside Matthew 5:43–48 and one theme from the assigned chapters. Ask: “What does this phrase help us see? What could it leave out? What needs further study?”

Invite pairs to draft a fuller explanation for someone new to faith. For example, an explanation of salvation could include receiving God's grace and learning to live differently in response. Avoid turning the exercise into a contest for the best slogan.

Use the remaining time to share one or two examples and debrief: “How did returning to Scripture and the book affect our explanation? What question remains open?” Nobody needs to reject an expression that still carries meaning for them.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Invite participants to name a question they'll carry. Explain the practice and next reading. Pray: “Jesus, help us hear you more carefully. Give us courage to examine our assumptions and patience with one another. Let your invitation take shape in the way we live. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapters 4–6 across several days. Mark one passage from each chapter. Reread Matthew 5:43–48 and try one safe practice of enemy-love: pray for someone's well-being, stop repeating a dehumanizing description or support fair treatment for someone you disagree with. Contact isn't required.

Write a brief reflection: “What did I notice about my assumptions? What became clearer about the life Jesus invites me into?” Bring an observation or an unfinished question next week.

Week 2

Belonging and the love that makes room for grace

Reading before the gathering: Chapters 4–6

Scripture: Luke 19:1–10 Optional companion readings: Mark 3:1–6 and Luke 10:38–42

Question to carry: Where can I make room for someone, challenge harm or release the need to prove my worth?

The leader's focus

Connect welcome with courageous love and receiving grace. Chapter 4 examines the barriers around belonging. Chapter 5 asks when keeping things pleasant allows harm to continue. Chapter 6 explores shame and religious performance. Help participants notice how a community can welcome people, protect their dignity and support growth without requiring them to earn God's love.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite a brief observation from the enemy-love practice. Ask: “What helps you feel you have a place in a group before you've learned all its unwritten rules?” Encourage concrete answers, and keep the opening brief.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Luke 19:1–10. Notice Jesus' initiative, the crowd's grumbling and Zacchaeus' response through generosity and restitution. Welcome and responsibility appear in the same encounter.

Connect Chapter 4's VIP section image with Chapter 5's discussion of love interrupting harm and Chapter 6's emphasis on grace before growth. Read one short book passage chosen in advance. Ask: “What conditions do we quietly attach to belonging? When might love require us to challenge those conditions?” The optional readings offer further examples of Jesus addressing harm and worry; use them in a longer class or for private reflection.

Leader note: Welcome doesn't remove accountability for harmful behavior. Grace can make repair possible. Avoid measuring anyone's faith by their availability, productivity or ability to rest; people's circumstances differ.

Discussion 20 minutes

Choose three or four questions, giving each chapter attention.

1. In Chapter 4's VIP section image, what acts like a velvet rope? How could someone experience belonging here while still having questions?

2. What do you notice about the order of welcome and response in Zacchaeus' story? How might it change our expectations of newcomers?

3. Which example in Chapter 5 helped distinguish being agreeable from being loving? Who would pay the price if nobody spoke up?

4. How can we distinguish discomfort that comes with change from harm that needs addressing?

5. Chapter 6 explores the feeling that God's love is always under review. What pressure does that create, and what could receiving grace make possible?

6. How could our group offer welcome and name harm without turning service or spiritual growth into a test of worth?

Group activity 15 minutes

Make the welcome credible

Present this fictional situation: A newcomer asks for a clearer way to follow the class discussion because the church language is unfamiliar. A longtime member jokes, “You should know this already.” A tired volunteer immediately offers to create every handout and handle all the extra work alone.

In groups of three or four, spend four minutes identifying the barrier, the comment's impact and the pressure the volunteer is taking on. Spend five minutes drafting a leader response that welcomes the question, addresses the comment and shares the work. Include one practical change the class can try.

Invite groups to read their responses. Ask: “How does this connect with Chapters 4, 5 and 6? What follow-through would make our words believable?” Choose one manageable change for your own group, identify a willing volunteer and agree how you'll seek feedback. Nobody needs to act out being shamed.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Invite quiet reflection on one barrier to remove or pressure to release. Explain the homework as a choice, not an additional performance demand. Pray: “Jesus, help us make room for the people before us. Give us courage to address what hurts and grace to share the burdens we carry. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapters 7–8. Choose one practice that fits your circumstances: help someone navigate an unfamiliar setting, thoughtfully interrupt a shaming comment, or name a realistic limit and ask for help. If speaking up could increase risk, seek appropriate support first.

Reflect: “What did this reveal about belonging, courage or grace?” Notice what happened with the group's chosen change. For optional Bible reflection, read Mark 3:1–6 or Luke 10:38–42 alongside the relevant chapter.

Week 3

Humility and the rebuilding of trust

Reading before the gathering: Chapters 7–8

Scripture: Luke 18:9–14 and Genesis 50:15–21

Question to carry: Where do I need to become more teachable, and what makes trust possible over time?

The leader's focus

Connect humility with accountability while allowing wounded people to set the pace of healing. Chapter 7 examines the cost of certainty without compassion. Chapter 8 explores betrayal, boundaries and the slow work of rebuilding trust. Humility can help a person acknowledge harm and accept correction. It must never become a demand that a wounded person distrust their own experience.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite an optional observation from last week's practice. Remind participants that they may pass or use fictional examples. Ask: “What makes a person easier to trust when they've made a mistake?” Don't request personal betrayal stories.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Luke 18:9–14, beginning with its description of people who trust in their own righteousness and regard others with contempt. Ask what comparison does to the Pharisee's prayer. Keep the focus on our own posture rather than stereotyping Jewish people or judging another religious group.

Read Genesis 50:15–21. Explain that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery years earlier and that this conversation follows a long separation and reunion. Joseph names their intention to harm. Don't use the good that later emerges to suggest the harm was necessary or acceptable.

Connect Chapter 7's treatment of certainty with Chapter 8's discussion of Joseph and boundaries. Read one short book selection chosen in advance. Ask: “What would humility ask of a person who has caused harm? What choices still belong to the person who was hurt?”

Discussion 20 minutes

Choose questions that give both chapters attention. Personal disclosure is always optional.

1. What did Chapter 7 help you notice about the temptation to feel faithful because you're right? What can that temptation obscure?

2. What makes it difficult to say, “I misunderstood” or “I caused harm”? How could humility make repair possible?

3. Chapter 8 distinguishes Jesus from people who claim to represent him. What makes that distinction helpful or difficult?

4. In Joseph's story, why does naming harm still matter when good later becomes possible? What do we miss if we rush to the hopeful ending?

5. What distinguishes forgiveness, restored trust and reconciliation? What pressures arise when we treat them as the same event?

6. What would a credible apology and respect for a boundary look like over time? Who gets to decide whether renewed contact is welcome?

Group activity 15 minutes

Practice receiving correction

Use this fictional situation: A class leader shares a participant's private story publicly without permission. When the participant objects, the leader says, “I was trying to help. You're misunderstanding my intentions.”

In groups of three or four, spend four minutes identifying where defensiveness blocks accountability. Spend five minutes writing a better response that names the action, acknowledges its impact and offers a concrete repair. Include how the leader will respect the participant's choice about contact and future participation.

Invite groups to share a response. Ask what changes in the leader's posture and behavior would need to continue after the apology. Don't ask anyone to play the wounded person or draw on their own past.

Debrief: “What did humility sound like? Which actions could begin to make trust possible? What stays outside the leader's control?” Emphasize that an apology doesn't entitle anyone to restored access.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Invite private reflection: “Where am I being asked to listen, take responsibility or honor a limit?” Allow people to leave with an unfinished question. Introduce homework. Pray: “Jesus, help us hear what we've overlooked and tell the truth about harm. Meet us where trust is wounded, and teach us to honor the time and boundaries healing requires. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapters 9–10 and the Epilogue, spreading the reading across several days. Choose one private practice: listen to an experience you've tended to dismiss, identify a boundary or support that matters to you, or consider a responsible repair if you've caused harm. Write what you learned and what still needs time.

You aren't being asked to contact someone who hurt you, forgive on demand or reopen access. If you pursue repair, respect the other person's limits. Share an observation next week only if you wish.

Week 4

Practicing the life Jesus invites us into

Reading before the gathering: Chapters 9–10 and Epilogue

Scripture: James 1:19–20 and Matthew 6:9–13 Optional companion reading: Luke 12:32–34

Question to carry: How will what I've discovered change a conversation or an ordinary choice?

The leader's focus

Help the group practice truthful conversation and choose a sustainable next step. Chapter 9 brings faith into disagreement, and Chapter 10 considers God's kingdom in ordinary life, including our relationships and resources. The Epilogue invites readers to continue. Make room for unfinished questions alongside action; nobody needs a grand resolution to begin.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite an optional observation from last week's private practice without asking people to disclose wounds or boundaries. Ask: “What idea or question from these four weeks has stayed with you?” An unresolved question is a welcome answer.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read James 1:19–20. Ask how listening, speaking and anger affect a conversation. Then read Matthew 6:9–13 and notice how the prayer connects God's kingdom with daily needs and relationships.

Return to Chapter 9's guidance on listening and telling truth with care. Connect it with Chapter 10's attention to everyday discipleship and what we hold too tightly. Read one short selection from the Epilogue's invitation to continue. Ask: “Where could this learning reach a conversation, a calendar or the use of a resource?”

Leader note: A gentle tone can still hide contempt; look at whether people are heard and the issue is addressed. Nobody owes an endless exchange to someone harassing them. Financial means and available time vary, so commitments should fit participants' real lives.

Discussion 20 minutes

Choose three or four questions, including one about each chapter and one about the Epilogue.

1. What did Chapter 9 help you notice about the goal you bring into disagreement? How do you recognize the urge to win?

2. What distinguishes a sincere question from one intended to trap someone? What helps you state a conviction without reducing another person to a label?

3. How has Chapter 10 changed the way you hear “your kingdom come” and the idea of God's will being done on earth?

4. What are you holding tightly that limits your ability to respond with love? What could releasing a little of it make possible?

5. What invitation in the Epilogue feels timely? Which question still needs room to grow?

6. What could you practice over the next month, and who could help you learn whether it's useful to the people affected?

Group activity 15 minutes

Practice a conversation and choose a next step

Use the first eight minutes for paired listening. Choose a low-stakes topic, such as a preferred class meeting time. One person speaks for a minute; the listener summarizes, asks an open question and then states their own view with care. Switch roles. Briefly debrief: “What helped you feel heard? What changed when you waited before responding?” Avoid debating anyone's identity, dignity or painful experience.

Use the next five minutes for private writing. Complete these prompts:

- One insight or question I'll carry forward is…
- One specific action I'll take in the next month is…
- I'll begin by this date and review it on this date…
- The support or adjustment I'll need is…

Use the final two minutes for optional sharing. Examples include a listening practice, a regular check-in with someone isolated, a sustainable act of generosity or a change that improves access to the group. Choose one manageable action rather than a list of promises.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Invite anyone who wishes to finish: “I came with… and I'm leaving with…” Welcome gratitude and uncertainty. Explain the month-ahead practice and consider a follow-up gathering. Pray: “Jesus, keep shaping our lives through what we've heard. Help us listen with care and let your love reach our ordinary choices. Give us companions and courage for the next step. Amen.”

After the study

Carry out your next step over the coming month. Include a safe opportunity to practice pausing, summarizing and asking a sincere question before responding. Return to a chapter or Bible passage that still unsettles or encourages you.

On your review date, ask: “What happened? Whom did it affect? What did I learn, and what needs to change?” If the group wishes, gather again in four weeks to share what participants tried, including what didn't work. Celebrate practical faithfulness without comparing achievements.

Leader tools for difficult moments

When the discussion becomes a debate

Say, “Let's pause and hear what each person is trying to communicate.” Ask each speaker to describe their own understanding without assigning motives to someone else. Return to a specific passage or question. If the conversation keeps circling, name what remains unresolved and move on. You can invite further study without requiring the group to vote on the answer.

When someone shares a painful experience

Say, “Thank you for trusting us with that. Would you like us simply to listen, or is there another way we can support you right now?” Allow a pause. Don't ask the group to explain why it happened, defend the institution involved or offer a forgiveness timetable. Follow up privately if appropriate, and use your church's safeguarding process when safety concerns arise.

When one person takes most of the time

Say, “I'm going to make room for some other voices.” Invite a moment of writing before asking for volunteers; this gives people time to form a thought. Use pairs or small groups when a large discussion makes participation difficult. Avoid putting a quiet person on the spot to balance out a talkative one.

When nobody responds

Wait longer than feels natural. Then ask a more concrete question, such as, “Which word in the passage caught your attention?” You can offer your own brief observation without answering the whole question. Quiet can mean people are thinking, especially when the subject is personal.

When someone hasn't read the book

Give a short description of the chapter's theme and read the selected passage. Invite a response to the Scripture or opening question. Make participation possible without a public explanation for unfinished reading.

When the group asks a question you can't answer

Say, “I don't know enough to answer that well.” Write down the question and identify a useful next step, such as looking at the full biblical passage or asking a pastor about its context. If you promise to follow up, do so. Leaders model humility by taking questions seriously and being honest about their limits.

An optional four week follow up gathering

Allow 45–60 minutes. Begin with a brief prayer and revisit one passage the group found meaningful. Invite each person to share what they tried, what they noticed and what they're still wondering. Ask whether any group action needs adjusting in light of feedback from the people affected. Finish by choosing a next point of connection, which could be another gathering, a shared practice or continuing friendships. Leaving room for unfinished growth honors the invitation of the book.