

# Vision Correction: Seeing Jesus Past Our Own Reflection

This four-week mid-week study is designed to lead the congregation through a "holy unlearning"—a deliberate and Spirit-led process of stripping away the layers of culture, convenience, and comfort that have clouded our vision of Christ. We've grown so accustomed to seeing Jesus through the lens of our own preferences, political leanings, and personal agendas that we've lost sight of who He truly is. This journey is about getting back to the root, returning to the raw, unfiltered reality of the One who claimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." It's not a comfortable process. True vision correction rarely is. But it's necessary if we're going to move from knowing *about* Jesus to truly *knowing* Him.

Each week follows a consistent, intentional pattern that mirrors the process of spiritual sight restoration. We begin with **The Lens**—examining how we currently see Jesus, acknowledging the filters we've placed over our perception of Him. Then we confront **The Distortion**—the blur, the fog, the ways our human inclinations have warped His image into something more manageable, more palatable, more aligned with our own desires. Next comes **The Scriptural Reality**—what we're calling the "Just Jesus" view, where we allow Scripture itself, not our interpretations or traditions, to reveal who He actually is. Finally, we arrive at **The Altar Moment**—the application, the point of decision, where we respond to what we've seen.

This study is for those who are willing to have their assumptions challenged, their comforts disturbed, and their vision restored. It's for church members and small group leaders who sense that something is missing in their spiritual walk—not because Jesus has changed, but because the way we've been looking at Him has become distorted. Over the next four weeks, we'll confront the Cultural Jesus of politics and preference, the Transactional Jesus of blessing and rescue, the Selective Jesus of comfort without command, and the Familiar Jesus who has lost His power to make us tremble. This isn't about tearing down faith; it's about rebuilding it on the solid foundation of who Christ truly is, not who we've wanted Him to be.



# Week 1: Beyond the Ballot & the Brand

🔗 CONFRONTING THE CULTURAL JESUS

Background: John 18:33-37; Matthew 22:15-22; Isaiah 9:6-7

We live in a time when Jesus has become a political prop and a cultural mascot. Both the left and the right claim Him. Both the religious conservatives and the social progressives want Him to validate their positions, to bless their causes, to march in their parades. We've wrapped Him in our flags, dressed Him in our colors, and made Him the spokesperson for our anger and our agendas. The Human Lens through which we see is one of tribalism and validation—we want Jesus to take our side, to affirm that we're the good guys and they're the problem. We've made Him smaller than our politics, reduced the King of Kings to a campaign slogan.

<p><b>The Human Lens</b></p> <p>We use Jesus to validate our social standing or political anger. We want Him to wear our colors and march in our parades—to be <i>our</i> mascot rather than <i>our</i> Master.</p>	<p><b>The Scriptural Reality</b></p> <p><b>John 18:36</b> – <i>"My kingdom is not of this world."</i> Jesus refused to be boxed in by the Pharisees or the Zealots. He transcends our tribal categories.</p>	<p><b>The Altar Moment</b></p> <p>Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal where we have made Jesus a mascot rather than a Master. Surrender political loyalties that supersede kingdom allegiance.</p>
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The Scriptural Reality cuts through our tribal fog with surgical precision: **"My kingdom is not of this world."** When Jesus spoke these words to Pilate, He was standing before the embodiment of political power, yet He remained completely unthreatened and unmoved by it. He didn't come to overthrow Rome or to endorse the Sanhedrin. He didn't come to validate conservative family values or progressive social justice—at least not in the way we've defined those terms. He came to establish a kingdom that operates by entirely different principles, one that makes both the Pharisees and the Zealots equally uncomfortable because it refuses to fit their categories.

In our study this week, we'll examine how both groups tried to force Jesus into their boxes. The Pharisees wanted a Messiah who would uphold religious tradition and maintain their authority. The Zealots wanted a revolutionary who would lead an armed uprising against Rome. Jesus disappointed both. He ate with sinners, which scandalized the religious conservatives. He preached about loving enemies and turning the other cheek, which infuriated the political revolutionaries. He refused to be anyone's mascot.

**Pastoral Question:** If Jesus says something that contradicts your political "party line," who do you follow? When Scripture challenges your tribe's narrative, do you bend the text to fit your politics, or do you allow the text to reshape your allegiances?

The Altar Moment this week is one of honest self-examination. We must come before the Holy Spirit and ask Him to reveal the places where we've made Jesus smaller than our politics. Where have we required Him to endorse our positions before we'll endorse His? Where have we made partisan loyalty a test of orthodoxy? This isn't about abandoning political engagement—it's about refusing to let political engagement eclipse our primary identity as citizens of a kingdom not of this world. It's about repenting of the ways we've tried to baptize our anger, sanctify our tribalism, and recruit Jesus for our cause. It's time to let Him be King on His own terms, not ours.



# Week 2: Beyond the Bargain

🔍 CONFRONTING THE TRANSACTIONAL JESUS

Background: John 6:22-35, 60-66; Job 1:20-22; Philippians 3:7-11

There's a version of Christianity that has turned the altar into a teller window and prayer into a transaction. Sow a seed, get a harvest. Shout loud enough, breakthrough comes. Fast long enough, doors open. We've reduced relationship with the living God to a cosmic vending machine—insert faith, receive blessing. The Human Lens we bring to Jesus is fundamentally transactional: we come to Him not for who He is, but for what He can do for us. We want the Bread, but we don't want to eat His flesh. We want the miracle, but we balk at the mystery. We want the blessing without the surrender, the comfort without the cross.

This is perhaps the most subtle distortion because it wears the clothing of faith. It uses all the right spiritual language—"claiming promises," "standing on the Word," "believing for breakthrough." But underneath the vocabulary is a heart posture that sees Jesus primarily as a means to an end, a solution to our problems rather than the satisfaction of our souls. We measure the success of our faith by the tangibility of our blessings rather than the depth of our transformation.



The Scriptural Reality confronts this transactional mindset head-on. In John 6, after Jesus feeds the five thousand, the crowd follows Him to the other side of the lake. But Jesus doesn't celebrate their pursuit. Instead, He exposes their motives: **"You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life."** They wanted the Bread. He offered to *be* the Bread. They wanted provision. He offered union. And when the cost of following Him became clear—when He started talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, about a kind of communion that required everything—many turned back.

- They Loved the Gift**  
The crowd celebrated the miracle of the loaves—free food, immediate provision, tangible blessing they could hold in their hands.
- He Offered Himself**  
Jesus redirected their attention from the miracle to the One who performed it: "I am the bread of life." The gift was meant to point to the Giver.
- Many Walked Away**  
When blessing required surrender, when provision demanded transformation, when the gift became a call to intimacy—they left. They wanted the transaction, not the relationship.

This week's study will trace the crowd's behavior in John 6. We'll see how they loved the Bread but left when He became the "Bread of Life" that required eating—that demanded not just receiving from Him, but union with Him. We'll confront the uncomfortable truth that much of what we call "faith" is actually just self-interest dressed in spiritual language. We'll ask the Pastoral Question that cuts to the heart: **Would you still love Him if the "blessing" didn't come, but His presence remained?** What if the breakthrough you've been praying for never manifests, but you gain a deeper awareness of His nearness? What if the miracle doesn't happen, but the Miracle-Worker becomes more real to you than ever? Would that be enough?

**The Altar Moment:** This week, we practice "Contemplative Prayer"—spending five minutes asking for nothing, only beholding Him. No prayer lists. No requests. No bargaining. Just being in His presence, letting Him be enough. This is the hardest prayer for transactional hearts to pray, but it's the one that begins to heal us.

The invitation this week is to move from transaction to transformation. To stop treating Jesus like a divine ATM and start receiving Him as the Bread of Life—sustenance not just for our circumstances, but for our souls. To let go of the "give me" prayers long enough to pray the "give me You" prayer. To discover that He Himself is the blessing, not just the Blessor. This is the unlearning that leads to deeper intimacy: learning to want Him more than we want what He can give us.




# Week 3: Beyond the Comfort Zone

CONFRONTING THE SELECTIVE JESUS

Background: Mark 10:17-27; Luke 9:23-26; 1 Samuel 15:17-23


We've become experts at the spiritual art of selective hearing. We underline the promises but skip over the commands. We claim the peace that passes understanding but ignore the call to take up our cross daily. We love the Jesus who calms storms but struggle with the Jesus who storms into temples with a whip. We've essentially created a "designer Jesus"—taking the parts of Scripture that comfort us, fit our lifestyle, and make us feel good, while conveniently editing out the passages that challenge our comfort, confront our sin, and call us to costly obedience. The Human Lens here is one of self-preservation: we want a Savior, but we're not sure we want a Lord.

This cherry-picking approach to discipleship has produced a generation of Christians who know *about* Jesus but don't actually *obey* Him. We've memorized John 3:16 but somehow missed Matthew 16:24. We've claimed Jeremiah 29:11 while ignoring Jeremiah 29:13. We've turned the Gospel into a buffet line where we get to choose which teachings apply to us and which ones are "for someone else" or "for a different time." We celebrate grace but resist holiness. We want the benefits of the Kingdom without the demands of the King.




**What We Love**

- "Come to me, all who are weary"
- "I will give you rest"
- "Peace I leave with you"
- "My yoke is easy"



**What We Skip**

- "Take up your cross daily"
- "Deny yourself"
- "Lose your life to find it"
- "If you love me, keep my commands"



**The Reality**

- You can't have the comfort without the command
- You can't claim Him as Savior while rejecting Him as Lord
- True rest comes through obedience, not around it

The Scriptural Reality confronts our selective discipleship with a simple but devastating question: **"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"** (Luke 6:46). Jesus doesn't ask this question to shame us—He asks it to wake us up. The word "Lord" is not a religious title; it's a declaration of authority. To call Him Lord is to acknowledge His right to command our lives. But if we call Him Lord while simultaneously refusing to obey Him, we're not just being hypocritical—we're lying. We're using His name without submitting to His nature.

## The Rich Young Ruler

This week's study focuses on the story of the Rich Young Ruler—a man who had everything except surrender. He came to Jesus wanting the *comfort* of eternal life, but he couldn't handle the *command* to let go of his idols. He wanted to add Jesus to his life without letting Jesus rearrange his life. When Jesus put His finger on the one thing the man wouldn't surrender—his wealth—the man walked away sorrowful. He loved the idea of following Jesus, but he loved his comfort more.

The tragedy isn't that Jesus asked too much. The tragedy is that the man was so close to everything he truly needed, but his refusal to obey cost him the very thing he came seeking. He wanted eternal life, but he couldn't embrace the kind of life that's eternal—a life where Jesus is Lord of everything, not just the parts we're comfortable surrendering.



**Pastoral Question:** What is the one command you have been "skipping" while claiming to follow Him? Is it forgiveness you've been withholding? Generosity you've been resisting? A relationship you know you need to reconcile? A habit you've been justifying? A call you've been ignoring? Jesus doesn't ask us to be perfect, but He does ask us to be honest—and to be willing.

The Altar Moment this week is a "Litany of Surrender." We don't rush this. We create space for the Holy Spirit to bring to the surface the areas where we've been saying "No" to His Lordship while still claiming His name. Maybe it's our finances—we'll tithe, but we won't be generous. Maybe it's our relationships—we'll be civil, but we won't forgive. Maybe it's our ambitions—we'll pray for success, but we won't submit our plans to His purposes. Maybe it's our time—we'll give Him an hour on Sunday, but the rest of the week is ours. Whatever it is, we name it. We confess it. And we lay it at His feet, asking Him not just for the strength to obey, but for the desire to want to obey.

This week will be uncomfortable. Vision correction always is. But on the other side of this discomfort is a deeper, more authentic faith—one that doesn't just sing about surrender on Sunday but actually practices it on Monday. One that stops calling Him "Lord, Lord" and starts doing what He says. One that discovers that His commands are not burdensome, but the pathway to the freedom and fullness we've been longing for all along.



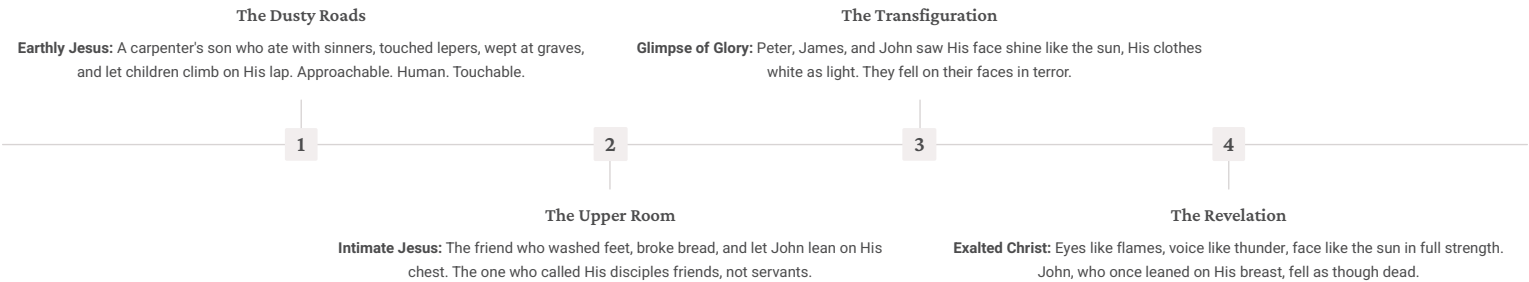
# Week 4: Beyond the "Old Landmark"

## △ CONFRONTING THE FAMILIAR JESUS

Background: Revelation 1:9-18; Luke 5:1-11; John 12:20-26

There's a danger that comes with familiarity. When you've sung the same hymns for decades, heard the same stories since childhood, and can quote the same verses from memory, something subtle begins to happen: the sacred becomes ordinary. The awe-inspiring becomes routine. The Holy One becomes safe, predictable, manageable. We know the "church-y" phrases so well that we can say them without feeling them. We've domesticated the Lion of Judah into something more like a house cat—comforting, controllable, and incapable of surprising us. The Human Lens we bring is one of over-familiarity: we think we know Him so well that we've stopped encountering Him.

This is perhaps the most dangerous distortion of all because it wears the disguise of faithfulness. We mistake longevity for depth, tradition for transformation, religious vocabulary for genuine relationship. We've been in church so long that we've forgotten what it means to be undone by His presence. We can talk about His holiness without trembling, His power without reverence, His glory without falling on our faces. We've made Jesus so familiar that He no longer has the power to shock us, to silence us, to shatter our categories and remake us from the inside out.



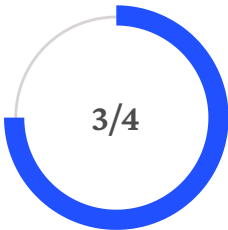
The Scriptural Reality shatters our comfortable familiarity. In Revelation 1:12-17, John—the disciple who leaned on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper, who was known as "the one Jesus loved," who had spent three years in intimate friendship with the Carpenter from Nazareth—encounters the risen, glorified Christ. And John's response is not casual recognition or warm familiarity. He falls at His feet **"as though dead."** The same Jesus he once reclined next to at dinner now radiates such overwhelming holiness and power that John can't even stand in His presence.



### The Consuming Fire

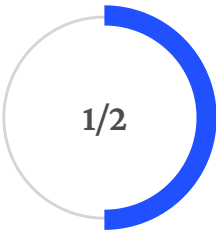
This week's study will compare the "Earthly Jesus" of the dusty roads—eating fish with His disciples, teaching from boats, allowing prostitutes to anoint His feet—with the "Exalted Christ" of Revelation: eyes like blazing fire, voice like rushing waters, face shining like the sun in all its brilliance. Both are the same Jesus. But we've grown so accustomed to the Earthly version that we've forgotten the Exalted one. We've embraced His mercy but forgotten His majesty. We've celebrated His nearness but neglected His otherness.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that **"our God is a consuming fire"** (Hebrews 12:29). Not a cozy fireplace to warm ourselves by, but a consuming fire that purifies, transforms, and overwhelms. The same God who invites us to call Him "Abba, Father" is the one before whom angels cover their faces and cry "Holy, holy, holy." We need both—the intimacy and the awe, the nearness and the otherness, the Friend and the Consuming Fire.



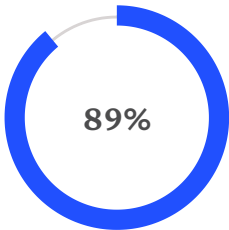
Lost the Awe

Surveys suggest most churchgoers can't remember the last time God's presence actually left them speechless or trembling.



Routine Religion

Half of long-term Christians admit their worship has become more about habit than encounter with the living God.



Want Comfort

The vast majority prefer sermons and songs that make them feel encouraged rather than challenged or convicted by His holiness.

**Pastoral Question:** When was the last time the "nature" of Jesus—His holiness and power—actually made you tremble? When did you last encounter Him in a way that left you undone, speechless, aware of your smallness and His greatness? If it's been so long you can't remember, you're not encountering Jesus—you're rehearsing memories of Him.

The Altar Moment this week is unlike anything we've done before. It's a service of "Silent Awe." No music. No preaching for a set time. No performance, no productivity, no program. Just creating space to behold the weight of His presence. This will feel uncomfortable for many of us. We're so used to noise, to activity, to filling every moment with words and songs that we've forgotten how to simply stand in silence before the Holy One. But it's in the silence that we often hear Him most clearly. It's in the stillness that we remember we're not the center of the story. It's in the quiet that the familiar becomes sacred again.

This final week brings us back to where we started: with a vision that needs correction. We began by examining the cultural, transactional, and selective ways we've distorted Jesus. We end by confronting the most subtle distortion of all—the danger of making Him so familiar that we've lost the capacity to be amazed by Him. The invitation this week is to recover the awe, to rediscover the wonder, to let the familiar become strange and sacred again. To let Jesus be not just the Friend we know, but the Holy God who is beyond our knowing—and to discover that both are true, and both are necessary, and both lead us into deeper worship than we've ever experienced before.



# Pastoral Guide for Leaders

FOR SMALL GROUP FACILITATORS

To equip your facilitators for leading these discussions, provide them with this "Vision Check" framework. Each week confronts a different distortion, and each requires a different pastoral approach. Some conversations will surface political tension. Others will challenge deeply held beliefs about blessing and prosperity. Still others will expose areas of disobedience that people have been justifying for years. Your role as a leader is not to have all the answers, but to create space for the Holy Spirit to do His corrective work. Be pastoral, not preachy. Be honest, not harsh. And remember: you're not trying to win arguments; you're trying to help people see Jesus more clearly.

1	<p><b>Beyond the Ballot &amp; the Brand</b></p> <p><b>We are tempted to see:</b> A Politician who takes sides and validates our tribal loyalties.</p> <p><b>But Scripture reveals:</b> A King whose Kingdom is not from here—who transcends our partisan categories and calls us to a higher allegiance.</p> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> This week will surface political tension. Don't avoid it, but don't let it dominate. Gently redirect partisan arguments back to the question: "Is our primary identity as citizens of a nation or citizens of the Kingdom?"</p>
2	<p><b>Beyond the Bargain</b></p> <p><b>We are tempted to see:</b> A Banker who pays our debts and a Divine ATM who dispenses blessings when we pray correctly.</p> <p><b>But Scripture reveals:</b> A Savior who <i>is</i> our Treasure—the gift Himself, not just the Giver of gifts.</p> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> People may push back on this, especially if they've experienced genuine breakthroughs. Affirm that God does bless and provide, but challenge the group to examine their motives: Do we want Him, or just what He can give?</p>
3	<p><b>Beyond the Comfort Zone</b></p> <p><b>We are tempted to see:</b> A Counselor who makes us feel better and affirms our lifestyle choices without challenge.</p> <p><b>But Scripture reveals:</b> A Lord who makes us like Himself—who loves us enough to command our obedience, not just comfort our emotions.</p> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> This week will get personal. Some will resist identifying the "one command" they've been skipping. Don't force it, but don't let the group off the hook either. Model vulnerability by sharing your own area of struggle.</p>
4	<p><b>Beyond the "Old Landmark"</b></p> <p><b>We are tempted to see:</b> A Friend who is "tame," predictable, and safe—a Jesus who fits comfortably within our religious traditions.</p> <p><b>But Scripture reveals:</b> A Holy God who is "consuming fire"—majestic, overwhelming, and worthy of trembling awe.</p> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> Long-term church members may struggle with this the most. Don't criticize tradition, but invite people to move from religious routine to genuine encounter. The Silent Awe exercise will feel awkward—let it. Discomfort often precedes transformation.</p>

## Four Principles for Effective Facilitation

### Create Safety, Not Comfort

There's a difference between a safe space and a comfortable space. A safe space is one where people can be honest without fear of judgment. A comfortable space is one where difficult truths are never spoken. Aim for the former, not the latter. People need to feel safe enough to admit their distortions, but uncomfortable enough to want to change.

### Ask Questions, Don't Lecture

Your job isn't to preach a sermon every week. It's to facilitate discovery. Ask open-ended questions that help people examine their own hearts. "What does this passage reveal about how you've been seeing Jesus?" is better than telling them how they should see Him.

### Expect Resistance

Vision correction is uncomfortable. People will push back, deflect, intellectualize, or change the subject when conviction comes. That's normal. Don't be discouraged by resistance—it's often a sign that the Holy Spirit is working. Be patient, be prayerful, and trust the process.

### Point to Jesus, Not Shame

The goal of this study isn't to make people feel guilty about how they've been seeing Jesus wrong. It's to help them see Him rightly. Always end with hope, with invitation, with the beauty of who He truly is. Conviction without hope produces despair. Conviction with hope produces repentance.

- ☐ **Final Word to Leaders:** You don't have to have perfect vision to lead this study. In fact, you'll probably discover your own distortions along the way. That's good. Let your small group see you wrestling with these questions too. Authenticity breeds authenticity. And remember: the Holy Spirit is the true teacher here. Your job is to create space for Him to work. Trust Him to do what only He can do—open blind eyes and give sight to those who've been seeing dimly. The goal isn't information. It's transformation. It's seeing Jesus past our own reflection, and being changed by the sight.

May this study lead your congregation into a deeper, truer, more awe-filled vision of Christ. May it strip away the cultural, transactional, selective, and familiar distortions that have clouded our sight. And may we emerge on the other side not just knowing more *about* Jesus, but actually *knowing* Him—in all His beauty, all His holiness, all His majesty, and all His mercy. To God be the glory.