

# The Essential Jesus Challenge

## How to Guide

*Practical Ideas for Exploring the Bible's Greatest Story  
For Churches, Groups and Individuals*

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Helping people meet God every day.™

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### **Introduction**

Imagine the impact of having your entire church, Sunday School or home group network reading and discussing the Bible's greatest story...together.

Or imagine the impact of having an outreach Bible study in your neighborhood or of guiding a non-believing friend, loved one or colleague through what the Bible says about Jesus.

That's what *The Essential Jesus Challenge* is all about! This How To Guide will show you lot's of ways you can help everyone you know discover for themselves "the Bible's greatest story."

### **How Does The Challenge Work?**

Based on the book, *The Essential Jesus*, the Challenge guides participants through the list of short Bible passages following the storyline of Jesus Christ—25 from the Old Testament and 75 from the New Testament—over a 20-week period. The program is undated and can be started at any time during the year. And it's designed to be flexible, too; it fits any time schedule and works with any Bible translation.

From this website ([www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com](http://www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com)) you can receive free downloadable resources including a How-to Guide, a poster, a bulletin insert, invitation card and everything you need to make *The Essential Jesus Challenge* an effective Bible engagement experience.

### **Who Should Take The Challenge?**

*The Essential Jesus Challenge* is for anyone who wants to know more about Jesus. That includes Christians who have never really read all that the Bible says about Jesus, those not sure about Jesus but honestly seeking to know more about him and non-believers who want to make their own assessment of Jesus and his claims— all will find that *The Essential Jesus Challenge* helpful. In addition, the Challenge will help you, your friends, small group or church take an honest look at what Jesus said and did so you can determine for yourself who he really is.

To take the Challenge, you'll need a Bible and the book, *The Essential Jesus*. It will guide you to read and reflect on 100 carefully-selected passages from the Bible. And you'll want to approach your journey not with the goal of becoming a theological expert but as someone with an open mind who wants to get a true understanding of the most influential person in history.

### **Don't Go It Alone**

The best way to take the Challenge is with another person, as part of a small group study or a church-wide program. At the end of each 5-reading section in *The Essential Jesus*, you'll find a page of discussion questions. Each week, try to complete a set of five readings on your own. Then get together with your friend or group to talk about what you've learned.

When you get together, start by encouraging each person to share their own insights from the readings. Then, use the discussion questions to help you continue your conversation. You'll find that reading through the Bible with others creates a positive motivation to keep going and makes your experience of God's Word more meaningful.

# 5 Ways to Take The Essential Jesus Challenge

There are many ways you can take *The Essential Jesus Challenge*. However, the five most popular are:

1. Church-wide Program
2. Small Groups
3. On Your Own
4. One-on-One Outreach
5. Neighborhood Outreach

Here is some “how to” information on each.

## 1. Church-wide Program

There’s something exciting and motivating about taking part in a program with the entire church. And that’s how *The Essential Jesus Challenge* is designed—to be a church wide Bible reading experience helping your entire church explore the “Bible’s Greatest Story” together.

Take advantage of the excitement of a church wide program. Use all means available to publicize and promote it (there are posters, bulletin inserts and other promotional material available on this website). Get as many key people involved in planning and promoting the Challenge as possible, from the Pastor(s) and other church leaders right on down to Sunday School teachers and small group leaders. Having them involved in planning and implementing The Challenge will help insure the widest participation throughout the church.

Helping your congregation get a complete picture of Jesus from the Scriptures will significantly deepen the spiritual life of your congregation. For the greatest effect, you’ll want as many Challenge participants as possible to have a copy of the book, *The Essential Jesus*. It offers insightful comments on each of the 100 passages and provides discussion questions that can be used in your church’s small groups, also. You’ll want to order copies to have available 2-3 weeks before the “kick-off” date so that everyone can have one when the program begins.

Any time of the year is a good time to take The Essential Jesus Challenge and focus your church on getting to know Jesus better. But whenever you decide to take The Challenge, pray, work and plan to see your congregation get excited as they discover—many for the first time—what the Bible really says about Jesus and who he really is.

### Some Tips To Help You Get Started:

- Develop Your Plan. When during the year will the program run? Will it run for 100 days, 20 weeks, during Lent or some other amount of time? Who'll lead it? Part of your plan will also include how you'll follow up after The Challenge. Scripture Union's daily Bible reading guides, *Discovery* and *Encounter with God* ([www.ScriptureUnion.org](http://www.ScriptureUnion.org)) are great follow up tools.
- Gather Your Resources. Most of what you need-- invitation cards, sign up sheets, posters, bulletin inserts, etc.-- are all downloadable from [www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com](http://www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com). And be sure to order sufficient copies of *The Essential Jesus* from the website or by calling 1-800-621-LAMP (5267). There are quantity discounts available.
- Promote, Promote, Promote! Start well ahead of "kick-off" to let people know The Challenge is coming and encourage them to sign up. Build excitement and encouragement for everyone to participate.
- Have a "Launch Sunday." That day, the service and the sermon can be built around discovering more about the most influential person in history. It's a great way to "kick-off" The Challenge together as a church.
- Periodically, "Pump Up the People." Plan to periodically remind the congregation of the on-going Challenge through newsletters, or having participants share during worship what they've discovered about Jesus so far. Countdown the days to the end. Keep the excitement building!
- Celebrate Reaching The Finish Line. Plan a special celebration event! Be sure to publicly affirm all who took leadership in planning and implementing The Challenge, but also recognize everyone who completed it. And announce the follow up plan at this time, too.

## **2. Small Groups**

You can take *The Essential Jesus Challenge* any number of ways but one of the best is in a small group, such as a Sunday School class or home Bible study group. Taking The Challenge this way provides you with a positive motivation to keep your readings "on track" with the others in the group and makes your experience more meaningful as you share and discuss what you've learned and discovered about Jesus.

You'll note that at the end of each block of 5 readings there are a series of questions designed to stimulate and guide a group discussion of those passages. Your group may already have a time and place to meet (in a Sunday School class or weekly small group, for example). You may already have a group leader, also, someone to organize

the group and lead the group discussion. If not, it's a good idea to get the group together once just to set the "game plan": who will lead or facilitate the group, what time, place and how often to meet, when The Challenge will end, and whether there will be child care provided.

After a time, place and group leader are set, everyone in the group will need at least three things: 1) an easy-to-read version of the Bible such as the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV), 2) a copy of *The Essential Jesus*, and 3) an open mind. *The Essential Jesus* tells you the passages to read and helps you reflect on and apply the main points, but it won't make sense unless you read the Bible passages themselves.

Taking *The Essential Jesus Challenge* in a small group needn't be difficult and it can be very rewarding as members develop not only a deeper understanding of Jesus but a closer relationship with each other, also.

#### Some Tips to Get You Started:

- Be Prepared. A successful group depends on every member having read the passages for that week and being prepared to discuss them. And part of good preparation is having someone (the leader or members of another group) praying for each member of the group before each meeting, also.
- Gather Your Resources. Have a couple extra Bibles on hand for folks who don't have one or forgot to bring one. And be sure to order copies of *The Essential Jesus* book for each member of the group. The books can be ordered at [www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com](http://www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com) or by calling 1-800-621-LAMP (5267). There are quantity discounts available, too!
- Create a Welcoming Atmosphere. In most cases, you'll want to start each session with singing and worship or a time for refreshments and fellowship. Have name tags and introduce everyone at the first session. Plan to leave time enough at the end for members to pray for each other.
- Invite and Encourage Discussion. The discussion questions in *The Essential Jesus* are meant to help you think about the passages and discover their deeper meanings. Everyone should be encouraged to participate in the discussion. No one should be allowed to dominate. Listen to everyone carefully. You'll be surprised at their insights.
- Stay Focused. Stick to the topic and passages for that session. That way, everyone will have read the same material and can participate in the discussions on an equal basis. No honest questions pertaining to the passages under discussion should be "out of bounds." But if especially difficult questions arise, it may be helpful to ask "What does the Bible say about that?"

- Learn and Live. Encourage group members to share how they've applied what they've learned about Jesus to their daily lives. Jesus will "come alive" in an exciting way as group members begin to apply and live out what they've learned about Jesus. Discuss any mission projects or further Bible study the group may undertake as follow up to The Challenge.

### 3. On Your Own

You may well be thinking something like this, "I'm interested in learning more about Jesus, but I don't want anyone pressuring me. I just want to see what the Bible says at my own pace so I can come to my own conclusions." If that's how you feel, don't worry: many people feel that way. That's why the book, *The Essential Jesus*, was designed to make a "solo journey" through the Bible easy and meaningful.

The 100 short passages trace the complete story line of Jesus that's woven throughout the Bible. The readings are undated so you can complete them at your own pace—in one hundred days, six months, a year or more. The readings are grouped into sets of five that begin with an introduction that alerts you to important themes. You'll want to have a copy of *The Essential Jesus* to guide you through *The Essential Jesus Challenge*.

Whatever schedule you pick (and picking a schedule is important), don't feel guilty if you miss a day now and then. Just do the next reading whenever you have time, and before you know it, you'll make it through all one hundred.

Also, even though you'll be reading the passages on your own, you might want to talk about what you're learning with a friend, perhaps someone who is a committed follower of Jesus. If you do, just make sure it's someone who will listen to you, not preach at you. But if you find the right person, you'll find that talking about what you're learning can make your journey through the Bible more meaningful.

But however you choose to take The Challenge, remember that your goal is not just to read through 100 Bible passages or gain more Bible knowledge. Those things are important, but your higher goal is get to know more about Jesus. With that goal in mind, your reading will be more than just a "challenge," it will become an exciting adventure of getting to know the most influential person in history: Jesus Christ.

#### Some Tips To Get You Started:

- Find a Bible Translation That's Easy to Read. There are many excellent, modern translations to choose from, such as the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV). *The Essential Jesus* tells you the passages to read and helps

you reflect on the main points, but it won't make sense unless you read the Bible passages themselves.

- Gather Your Resources. Get a notebook or journal to jot down any particularly meaningful insights about Jesus as you go along and be sure to get your copy of *The Essential Jesus*. It can be ordered at [www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com](http://www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com) or by calling 1-800-621-LAMP (5267).
- Set a Goal for Completing The Challenge. Will you do it in 100 days, 20 weeks, six months? Before you begin, it's helpful to have a clear goal in mind for when you want to complete The Challenge. That way, you can better mark your progress and keep "on track." And begin to think now about what you might do when The Challenge is over. There are other good Bible reading tools and other resources available at [www.ScriptureUnion.org](http://www.ScriptureUnion.org).
- Choose a Time and Place for Reading. Maybe you'll choose to do your reading in the morning before work over your cup of coffee, at your desk at lunch or in the evening before bed. Find a quiet place with minimal distractions so you can concentrate on discovering more about Jesus.
- Have a Regular Method. As you begin, follow the five steps for each reading in *The Essential Jesus*. Pray first, then read the day's passage from your Bible, reflect on what you've read using the comments in the book as your starting place, let the "Apply" section help you make practical what you've learned and then pray to close your time. Use the discussion questions at the end of each section for broader insights, too.
- Keep a Journal of Your Insights and Discoveries. Have a notebook near your Bible to record thoughts and insights from the passages that are particularly meaningful to you. It may be encouraging to go back and read your previous notes now and then to see how your understanding of Jesus has grown.

#### **4. One-on-One Outreach**

Perhaps you know people who are interested in Jesus but who aren't sure if they really believe in him or not. That's another excellent context for taking *The Essential Jesus Challenge*, one-on-one with a friend, work colleague or loved one. Together you can explore what the Bible says about Jesus and have plenty of time to answer questions and deal with issues in a non-threatening way.

Begin by praying for God to show you who to invite to join you in this adventure. Then, you'll want to find a time and place to offer the invitation. Be positive and gently enthusiastic. You might say something like this: "Jesus is perhaps the single most influential person in history. I want to get to know more about him. A program

called The Essential Jesus Challenge helps you see what the Bible says about Jesus so you can make up your own mind about him. Would you be interested in taking The Essential Jesus Challenge with me? We'd both learn a lot and it's more fun doing it with someone else."

Then, you're ready to discuss with your "Challenge Partner" a convenient time and place to meet—one that is comfortable and free of distractions. You'll both want an easy to read translation of the Bible, such as the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT) or the Contemporary English Version (CEV), and a copy of *The Essential Jesus*. Then, you can decide when you want to complete The Challenge. Meeting once a week for 20 weeks might be a good time frame.

And begin now to pray and ask God what he might have you and your friend or loved one do when The Challenge is over. Visit [www.ScriptureUnion.org](http://www.ScriptureUnion.org) for more good Bible related resources to use.

#### Some Tips To Get You Started:

- **Be Prepared.** Pray before each meeting, asking God to help you and your friend explore the Bible's story of Jesus together. Then, be sure to read the passages and the comments in *The Essential Jesus* (and review the discussion questions) before you meet. Also, it will be helpful to read the "For Small Groups" section of this guide for tips on having fruitful discussions with your friend.
- **Be Ready with Your Resources.** You may want to get a notebook or journal to jot down any particularly meaningful insights about Jesus as you go along. And be sure to get a copy of *The Essential Jesus* book for you and your friend. They can be ordered at [www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com](http://www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com) or by calling 1-800-621-LAMP (5267).
- **Be Consistent, But Flexible.** It helps if you and your friend can count on meeting at the same time and place each session. Then, it becomes part of your schedule. But be flexible, too. Sometimes conflicts are unavoidable.
- **Be Open and Honest.** Share any unresolved questions you have about Jesus and admit it when you don't know the answer your friend is asking. That will encourage them to be open and honest in their own seeking to know more about Jesus.
- **Be Accepting.** Don't be put off by honest questions, doubts or comments that may make you uncomfortable. Let the Bible speak for itself about Jesus. Your acceptance will help your friend be willing to listen and discuss. Keep focused on the topic and passages for that session, but be willing to discuss other questions over lunch or a cup of coffee after work, for example.

- Be Gentle. Keep your goal in mind. It's not to give your friend as much Bible knowledge as possible or just get through the 100 passages; your goal is that you both might get to know Jesus, the one loves you both and wants you both to have a relationship with him.

## 5. Neighborhood Outreach

*The Essential Jesus Challenge* can be a great tool for neighborhood outreach. Almost everyone knows people in their neighborhood who aren't believers but are curious about Jesus. Combine that interest with friendship, lively discussion and good refreshments and you have the recipe for a rewarding time of getting to know Jesus together.

The most natural "invitation list" will start with your own friends and neighbors. Perhaps you've already had some conversations about "church" or "religion" and can tell if they might be interested in (what you might call) "an informal group to learn more about what the Bible says about Jesus."

Perhaps the best place to meet at first is in your home. That says "neighborly" and "informal" to most folks. And you'll be able to insure they find a warm, comfortable, welcoming place in which to explore what the Bible says about Jesus and ask any questions that arise.

Pray about who to invite and, when you do invite them, suggest a time and place for the first meeting. Let people know that you have a certain time frame in mind for this group (weekly for 20 weeks, for example). People are often reluctant to make an open-ended commitment. But be open to changes if made necessary by the needs and schedules of those you've invited. If leading a group is new to you, it may helpful to ask your pastor for information on how to lead a small group or read the section in this guide called "For Small Groups." And begin thinking and praying about how to follow up after the Challenge is over. (There are some great Bible reading and other resources available at [www.ScriptureUnion.org](http://www.ScriptureUnion.org).)

Using *The Essential Jesus Challenge* as a neighborhood outreach requires some effort but needn't be a big "chore." All it requires is a little "neighborly hospitality" from you and a genuine interest in knowing more about Jesus from everyone!

### Some Tips To Get You Started:

- Decide Who and How to Invite. Pray about whom to invite. Think of neighbors you know who might be interested. Invite them personally (personal invitations are always more effective), if possible, with a phone call or face to face.

- Gather Your Resources. Have a couple extra Bibles on hand for folks who don't have one or forgot to bring one. And be sure to order copies of *The Essential Jesus* for everyone in advance of your first meeting. They can be ordered from [www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com](http://www.EssentialJesusChallenge.com) or by calling 1-800-621-LAMP (5267). There are quantity discounts available, too!
- Start and End on Time. It's important that people be able to depend on the group keeping to the announced starting and ending time. But that doesn't mean you can't have informal fellowship and discussion time after the meeting concludes!
- Create a Warm, Welcoming Atmosphere. Have light refreshments and a fellowship time to begin (15 minutes is enough). Greet everyone warmly when they come and be sure everyone has name tags (and introduces themselves) for the first meeting or two.
- Keep The Group Small. In a group of no more than eight, people will feel more comfortable discussing what they think and have discovered from the Bible. A smaller group is a safer place to explore Jesus' story together and, if appropriate, to pray for each other. You may find it helpful to read the section in this guide "For Small Groups," also.
- Provide Child Care if Necessary. Families with young children and single parents, especially, may find it a barrier to attending if there's no child care. Perhaps everyone can chip in to pay for a baby sitter on the premises—or someone who's not in the group might volunteer as a ministry of service. Make it as easy as possible for those you invite to attend.

**Download** FREE promotional resources, **CLICK HERE**

<http://scriptureunion.gospelcom.net/essentialjesuschallenge/ejcfreeresources.php>

- Poster
- Bulletin Insert
- Invitation Card

**Order** *The Essential Jesus* and receive discounts up to 40%. **CLICK HERE**

<http://scriptureunion.gospelcom.net/essentialjesuschallenge/ejcbuythebook.php>

### **About Scripture Union**

Since 1879 Scripture Union has helping people all over the world meet God every day in the Bible and prayer. Today, Scripture Union is involved in Bible engagement and children's outreach ministries in 130 countries worldwide.

In the United States, Scripture Union has several Bible engagement programs and publications for all ages, including *Encounter with God*<sup>®</sup>, *Discovery*<sup>®</sup>, *The Essential 100 Challenge*, and *The Essential Jesus Challenge*, as well as a variety of evangelism and discipleship programs for children, including *SuperKids*<sup>®</sup> outreach missions and *PrimeTime*<sup>®</sup> after school programs. For more information, go to [www.ScriptureUnion.org](http://www.ScriptureUnion.org) or call 1-610-935-2807. Thanks.