

A BACK PORCH *Theology* STUDY

Lisa Harper

A Jesus Shaped Life

How Biblically Sound Theology Deepens
Our Relationship with God and Each Other

Seven Sessions with Video Access

A Jesus-Shaped Life Bible Study Guide

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How to Use This Study Guide

Group Sessions

A *Jesus-Shaped Life* study is designed to be experienced as a group in settings like Bible studies, small groups, or Sunday school classes. Each group session starts off with a welcome to be read aloud to the group and a prayer. Then, the group will watch a video together with Lisa Harper and move into a time of small group discussion. Notes outlines are provided for group members who wish to take notes during the video. Leaders can decide, based on the needs of the group or the direction of the conversation, how many questions to engage during the group discussion time. Not all questions need to be discussed or answered.

Materials

Instructions for video viewing can be found on the inside cover of this study guide. The video is available via streaming or a DVD is available for purchase. Each participant should have a copy of this study guide in order to follow along during group sessions and in order to complete the solo study days in between group sessions. Participants will also, ideally, have a copy of the book *A Jesus-Shaped Life* so that they can read chapters of the book alongside this study.

Leader Guidance and Timing

This study guide includes notes for the group leader that instruct them on which sections to read aloud and how long they should aim for each section to last. Timing is flexible, and the timing notes are included as a general guide. If the group does not have sufficient time for the entirety of the group session, it can be helpful to ask group members to view the week's video before meeting together to save time during the group session.

Solo Study

Because each group member should have their own study guide, they can work through the solo study days in between the group sessions. These solo study days are designed to supplement the conversation that occurred during the previous group session and to invite participants into additional Scripture study and personal reflection. Participants will be guided through each day to examine their orthodoxy, orthopathy, and orthopraxy in light of the content of the day. This will allow the participant to reflect on their own beliefs, practices, and heart posture as the study moves from topic to topic. The solo study is designed to invite the participant to reflect on what it means to live a Jesus-shaped life!

The solo study days are not designed to be shared in the group sessions, so participants can feel free to reflect on the content in ways that work best for them. The weekly solo study should take about two hours to complete, so participants can plan accordingly. If a participant cannot complete the solo study days (or only completes part of them), they should still plan to attend the next group session! Solo study is meant to supplement the experience and should not be treated as mandatory homework.

Thriving Groups

Group study can be incredibly rewarding as group members are invited to learn together and grow in their faith in community. In order to create a group space that facilitates this kind of growth, be mindful of the kind of environment you want to create. Group members should be encouraged to attend each session in order to create consistency and build trust.

Additionally, be intentional about creating safety in conversation by listening well, validating the responses of others, and encouraging each member to contribute to the discussion. Participate in the group with benevolent assumptions, which means assuming good intent in someone else's statements or actions unless given reason to believe otherwise. Work to help each person feel heard and seen,

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

and try to resist the temptation to “fix” someone’s thoughts or ideas (even if they seem a little confusing or theologically off). Consider articulating a group agreement at the start of the study so that all members are on the same page and are committed to creating a space that will lead to friendship, growth, and community.

Note: If you are leading the group, there are additional resources in the back of this study guide to help you lead a discussion.

SESSION

1

Why Theology Matters

GROUP SESSION

Welcome and Prayer | 3 min |

Leader: After extending a warm welcome to everyone, ask a volunteer to read the introduction below aloud in order to open the session.

This seven-week Bible study, called *A Jesus-Shaped Life*, is an invitation to explore the depths of God’s character, God’s love for us, and how our relationship with Him transforms us. Ultimately, this study aims to explore (and accomplish) just what the subtitle reads: *How Biblically Sound Theology Deepens Our Relationship with God and Each Other*.

Before we jump all the way in, let’s dip our toes in a bit. Think of a favorite recipe you like to bake (or eat). Imagine for a moment how good that food tastes. The chocolatey fudge of those brownies. The tart and sweet of that perfect apple crisp. The melt-in-your-mouth chocolate chip cookies. Feeling hungry yet? Now think for a moment of the recipe. Each ingredient plays an integral role in the baking process. Knowing the recipe is essential to baking your favorite treat to perfection. But knowledge of a recipe alone does not match the experience of actually *tasting* those baked goods.

Theology is a lot like that! Theology, or conversation about God, invites us to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8) and to *experience* God in all His fullness rather than just *memorizing facts* about God. In this first session we will dive into “why theology matters” to get our bearings and prepare us to explore the relationship between knowledge of God and experiencing God’s presence more intimately through that knowledge. In other words, we will make sure we study the recipe, but we will *also* experience the gift of putting those ingredients together and feasting on the results!

WHY THEOLOGY MATTERS

Whether you feel excited, overwhelmed, uncertain, or ready to go, for the next seven weeks we will discover together how incredibly accessible and real God is in our daily lives by learning the truth of who He is and His intention to shape our lives to look more like Him.

Prayer

Leader: read aloud over the group.

God, thank You for the ways You have chosen to reveal Yourself to us. We are grateful that You chose to enter into relationship with us and that You invite us to plumb the depths of Your goodness and Your character through study. We step into this time together with varying familiarity with the term “theology” and with different emotional responses to it. Help us, with that in mind, to lay all of that humbly at Your feet, so that we might grow together to know You better. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Warm Up | 5 min |

Leader: Ask this warm-up question to the group. Instruct participants to write down their answers, and then choose two or three participants to share their answers with the group.

What is a subject (unrelated to this study) that you could simply go “on and on” about for days?

What is it about that subject that just gets you going?

VIDEO

Watch Session 1 Video

Why Theology Matters | 16 min |

Leader: Play the video (via streaming or on DVD) for session one and invite the group, as you watch the video together, to use the outline below to take notes on anything that stands out.

Scripture Discussed

John 5:39–40

Outline for Notes

- The feeling of an unrequited crush emulates our desire to chase after God and get as close to God as we possibly can.
- God is not a proposition to be studied, He is a Triune person with whom we get to engage.
- Theology is not simply a subject—it's a relationship.

Theology: A belief system and worldview based on the promises and parameters found in God's Word.

- **Theos**—God
- **Logos**—words or conversation

(Theos and Logos both come from the ancient Greek language.)

- Theology, at its core, is conversation about God.
- Jesus implores the Pharisees not to study Scripture for its own sake but to instead study Scripture in order to grow in relationship with Him.
- Cognitive truth or theoretical language is not sufficient on its own. Instead, theology compels us to respond to God's invitation into relationship and transformation.
- The image of a mother reaching her hand back is an apt description of God reaching His hand out to us.
- Theology is not a purely academic subject only to be studied by theologians and PhDs.
- Theology is how we connect with our God and remember we are His.

WHY THEOLOGY MATTERS

GREAT QUOTES

From Great Theologians

We were made to crave God with our whole being, to be compelled to get close to God. That has to be the impetus for us diving into theology. It's not simply theoretical, it has to be relational and experiential.

—Bruce Demarest¹

¹ Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (NavPress, 1999), 52.

GROUP 30–50 min DISCUSSION

Leader: Now it's time to discuss the questions below together. As the leader, you can decide which questions to discuss, allowing flexibility for conversation and group interest.

1. What initial understanding or ideas about “theology” did you bring into this study? In what ways does the word or even idea of “theology” sound intimidating, complicated, or daunting?
2. Select a volunteer to read **John 5:39–40** ESV.

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

What do you think Jesus is saying about Himself in this passage? What do you think He is saying about people? How do you think we might respond?

WHY THEOLOGY MATTERS

3. Compare and contrast these four definitions Lisa gives for theology. Circle the words or phrases that stand out to you and discuss why. Which definition resonates most deeply with you? Why?


Theology is . . .	a belief system and worldview based on the promises and parameters found in God's Word.
	a belief system and worldview based on God's promises.
	the investigation of the contents of belief by means of reason enlightened by faith.
	conversations about God.

4. The Latin phrase *fides quaerens intellectum* can be best paraphrased as “enlightened by faith” or “faith seeking understanding.” What do you think it looks like for faith and study to work together instead of in opposition?
5. Select a volunteer to read **Matthew 14:25–33**.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

SESSION 1

Reflect on the image of God reaching toward us as seen in this story of Jesus in the midst of the storm with Peter. Lisa uses a similar image when describing reaching out her hand for her daughter, Missy, to grab during a storm. What do you think it might look like for theological study to create that kind of connection between ourselves and God?



Just as the thought of food will not satisfy an empty stomach, cognitive truth alone is not sufficient to form and nourish the Christian soul.

—Bruce Demarest²



6. Where does your knowledge of and relationship with God come from?

Think about: spiritual practices you participate in, your church community, family traditions, mentors, friends, teachers, and even cultural traditions.

² Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 52.

7. Select a volunteer to read **John 15:12–15**.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

How do you envision studying theology *together* as a fulfillment of Jesus' command to love God and love one another?

8. Describe one aspect of your relationship with Jesus you hope to grow in throughout this study. What would it look like for you to live a Jesus-shaped life right now?

Closing Prayer

Creator and loving God, You have invited us to know You better through a shared heart and community experience. We pray You would infuse our time together with a desire to chase after You with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Help us to grow deeper in relationship with You. Show us what You want us to know of Your heart and character and love for us. And help us to act on what we learn as we participate in Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

SESSION

1

Why Theology Matters

SOLO

STUDY

Welcome To the BACK PORCH



Let's be honest! Have you ever sat in a classroom listening to a teacher and wondered to yourself, "But why does this matter?" As a student, it helps us to know *why* something we are learning is worth our time! Multiplication tables feel lifeless until it's time to guesstimate quickly whether the 20 percent off a new shirt makes it worth purchasing. Anatomy class feels pointless until you're sitting in a physical therapy office wondering why your knee hurts so much. And sometimes in church, we have moments when we wonder while we listen to a message, "Okay but why?"

Theology can feel super intimidating. It conjures images of theologians using complex words, often in Latin or Greek, and books as dense as a thick fog. But theology, when we ask the question "Why does this matter?" comes alive! So, for our solo study this week, we are going to look at "Why theology matters" in order to lift the fog and help theology feel easy to understand. What we will find is that theology is for all of us!

This week, in between your weekly group sessions, you will find four days of solo study content. You can use the solo study days to reflect on the group session content and to spend additional time meditating on the ways you are learning and growing through *A Jesus-Shaped Life*.

Book chapter this week: If you haven't had a chance to read **Foreword** and **Chapter One** of *A Jesus-Shaped Life*, I invite you to do so this week.

DAY 1

What Is Theology?

Exploring My Orthodoxy

On this first day of solo study this week, we will focus on the question “What is theology?” During the group session, you talked together about the ways using the word “theology” can sound intimidating, complicated, or daunting. However, theology is simply having a conversation about God.

When we commit to studying the Scriptures in order to draw closer to God, we invite God to show us the ways our thinking, actions, and life are shaped by who we understand God to be.

— Lisa Harper

Over time, we will begin to notice how our theology shapes our very essence. Throughout our time together, we will learn to ask the question, “What does this mean theologically?” In other words, anytime we study Scripture or discuss important topics about life and faith, we can examine the ways in which our understanding of God informs our lives. In other words, we can begin to answer the question, “How does our faith show us how to live?”

Reflect

Circle any of these statements that resonate with you when it comes to your initial response to the word “theology.”

I am incredibly intimidated.

Theology is something I feel ready to explore.

I am pumped! Let’s go!

It sounds like an adventure.

It sounds a bit boring.

Isn’t that something only scholars and theologians care about?

I don’t really feel like I understand what it is yet, but I’m game.

Bonus: write your own response. _____

Helpful Handlebars

Theology—This term is derived from the Greek word θεολογία (*theologia*), a belief system and worldview based on the promises and parameters found in God’s Word.

When we break this word apart, we get:

- **Theos**—God
- **Logos**—words/conversation

Fides quaerens intellectum—Best paraphrased as “enlightened by faith” or “faith seeking understanding”

Hermeneutic—At first, we might hear the word and say, “Herman who?”

But it's simply a word that means "the lens through which we see and understand."³

As we study Scripture, our hermeneutic is how we approach studying and interpreting the Bible. Our life experiences, upbringing, beliefs, and identity all shape the lens through which we read the Bible, and knowing that helps us to take a step back and allow the Bible to speak to us on its own terms.

The next set of three vocabulary words (all of which derive from ancient Greek) will come up again and again in this study, so let's define them here:

Orthodoxy:

- **Orthos**—right
- **Doxa**—belief

Ask yourself, is what I claim about God in line with Scripture and the core beliefs of the Christian faith?

Orthopraxy:

- **Orthos**—right
- **Praxis**—practice

Ask yourself, does what I claim compel me toward right ways of living?

Orthopathy:

- **Orthos**—right
- **Pathos**—feeling

Ask yourself, is my heart and emotion attuned to God in light of my theology?

3 Lisa Harper, *A Jesus-Shaped Life* (Baker, 2025), 97.

Whew, that's quite a few vocabulary words! But these important concepts will set the stage for the rest of this study. Earmark this page. Throughout the study, you will probably find yourself referring back to these definitions, but eventually these words will roll off your tongue easily.

Reorient Yourself to Scripture

John 1:1–5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Notice in this Scripture passage that the word “Word” is capitalized. It’s actually the same word from our vocab box above! “In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God.” In other words, **Jesus is the *Logos*** in John 1!

In **John 1:14**, John goes on to say:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So John 1:1–14 poetically draws our attention to the reality that all of our knowledge, all of our words for and about God, and all of our conversations are centered on the person of Jesus. What a beautiful way to understand theology.

In light of John 1, we might say that theology is a Christ-centered study of the character of God.


Exploring My Orthopathy

- Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you as you meditate on John 1:14 above. Go slowly as you read that verse. Read it several times, noticing the words that stand out to you. Jot those words down below and reflect on why they seemed to stand out.
- Use the chart below to list all of the things we learn about the *Logos* (who we now know is Jesus) from John 1.

The <i>Logos</i> is . . .	
The <i>Logos</i> is . . .	
The <i>Logos</i> is . . .	
The <i>Logos</i> is . . .	

- What changes in your perception about your life when you consider Jesus at the absolute center of it?

SESSION 1



When John declares that “in the beginning was the word,” he does not reach a climax with “and the word was written down” but “and the word became flesh.”

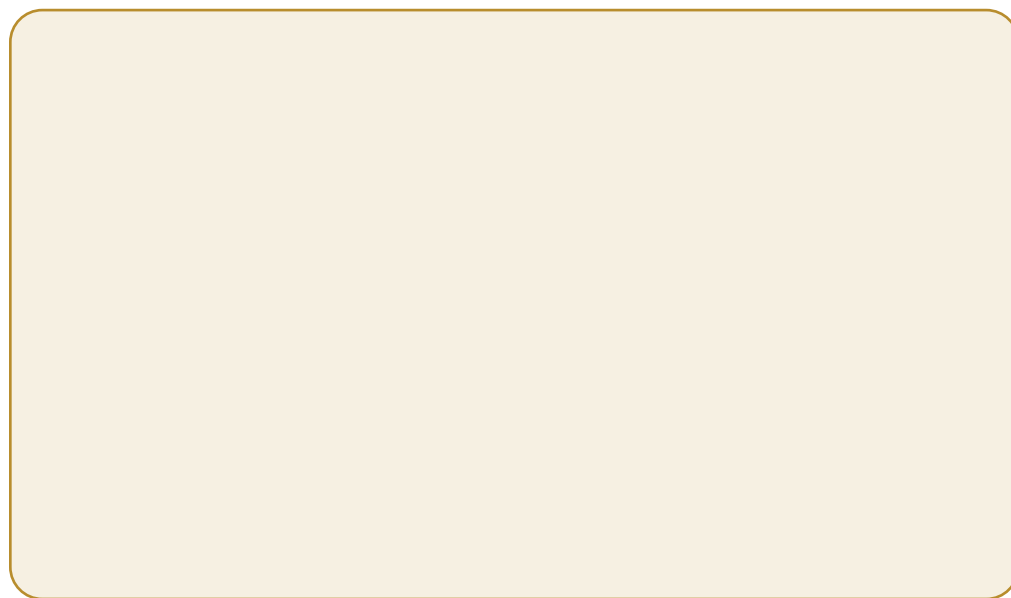
—N. T. Wright⁴



Exploring My Orthopraxy

At this point, hopefully, you are feeling more familiar with the idea of “theology” as simply “conversations about God.” Theology, when practiced the way Lisa describes it, must not only inform our beliefs but also our actions. So, each day we will meditate on ways to put our theology into action. The fancy Greek term for “theology in action” is *praxis*, but more on that tomorrow. For now, journal below in response to this question:

What is one conversation you have had about God that brought you joy this week?



4 N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (HarperOne, 2013), 22.

DAY 2

WHY THEOLOGY?

Exploring My Orthodoxy

God bless you as you dig in to day two of your solo study. Yesterday we talked about what theology is. We offered a definition, along with some clarifications about what that definition means. Theology, we said, is conversation about God. Today, we will dig into the question: “Why theology?”

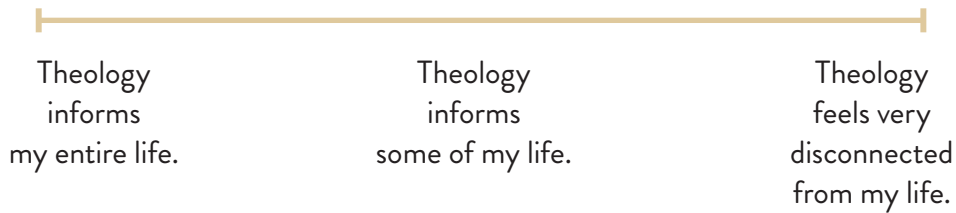
So, let’s think a little about this: Why does theology matter?

The way we talk about someone reveals our relationship with them. You can hear the love in a husband’s voice when he describes his wife to a friend. You can hear the respect in a coworker’s voice when she describes her colleague to a new hire. You can hear the pride in a parent’s voice when he describes his daughter’s accomplishments to his neighbor. Likewise, the way we talk about God reveals our relationship with Him. We talk about God, we study theology, and we meditate on His Word because it deepens our relationship with Him. But our theology *also* affects our relationships with others and with the world around us. It affects, in short, our actions. Lisa teaches us that this is *Christoformic* orthopraxy. God anchors our reality and our theology, and therefore He influences our entire lives.

Why theology? Well, it matters. It influences how we live!

Reflect

Place an X on the continuum, indicating your experience with the following statements:



Utilize the space below to reflect on where you fall on the continuum. What are the areas of your life that feel heavily influenced by your conversations about God (theology)? Which areas feel disconnected?

Helpful Handlebars

Christoformic orthopraxy—a way of right living that is rooted in our transformation into the likeness of Christ

Can be broken down into these roots:

- **Christo**—Christ or Christ-centered
- **Formic**—form

Christoformic, adj.—refers to the ways in which we are shaped into the likeness of Christ

Reorient Yourself to Scripture

James 2:14–17

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

In this passage, James is describing Christoformic orthopraxy! He is describing the outcome of the transformative nature of our theology. If you are shaped into the likeness of Christ, then you ought to demonstrate that through practice. The example he uses sounds like Jesus, right? For James, the Christ-follower also serves others, loves well, and practices radical hospitality, just like Jesus.

In **James 3:13**, James makes this statement:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

In the verse above, circle the two circumstances through which wisdom and understanding are shown.

It is important to note here that James is not talking about earning favor with God. There is no amount of orthopraxy or “right living” that could alter God’s love for us. However, James is emphasizing the very reality that our theology *must* affect the way we live. The character of God, revealed to us in the person of Jesus, compels us toward spiritual transformation. This transformation is evidence of our faith.

SESSION 1

Read the latter part of verse 13 again in reverse and fill in the outflow of wisdom below:

Wisdom leads to _____ that inspires _____
which demonstrate a _____.

(Wisdom leads to humility that inspires deeds that demonstrate a good life.)

Exploring My Orthopathy

- One of James's central messages in his letter is "faith without deeds is dead." He is describing how our relationship with God influences our behaviors, our actions, and our relationships with others. Why do you think Christoformic orthopraxy (see vocab box) is so important for James to emphasize here?

- Read **Philippians 2:1–14**. Notice how many examples Paul gives us of Jesus' character and teachings as it relates to how we behave, act, and treat others. List two or three examples of Jesus' actions and what we are invited to join Him in doing:

Jesus is/does/teaches . . .

So I am invited to . . .

WHY THEOLOGY MATTERS

Jesus is/does/teaches . . .

So I am invited to . . .

Jesus is/does/teaches . . .

So I am invited to . . .

- Why do you think James draws out the qualities of humility and wisdom when describing formation into the likeness of Christ in James 3:13?

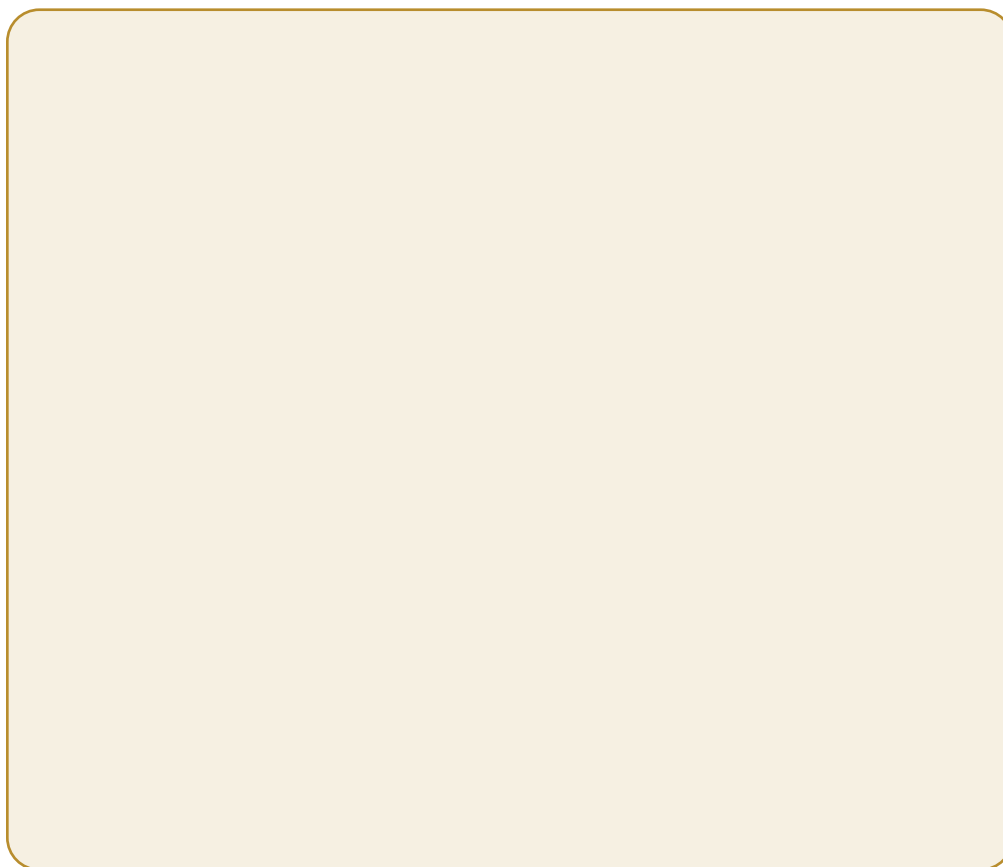
If our pursuit of biblically orthodox theology doesn't ultimately have a Christoformic effect on us thereby drawing others toward Jesus Himself, then our pursuit is at best shallow, at worst sabotaged by self-serving motives.

—Lisa Harper

Exploring My Orthopraxy

Today's emphasis was "Why theology?" We asked the question, "How does theology inform my life?" Theology is unique because it is not something meant to be studied in a way that is disconnected from our lives. Some subjects can be simply learned and retained, like files stored away for later. But theology says, "Okay, so now what?" It is meant to transform us! Now that you have gone through today's study, particularly looking at the Scripture passages in James and Philippians, journal below and reflect on this question:

What is one area of your life you clearly see your theology transforming you into living a Jesus-shaped life?



DAY 3

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Exploring My Orthodoxy

Let's talk a little about the Christian Scriptures. Our Bible is a collection of sixty-six books (comprised of the Old and New Testaments). Each of these books points us toward the character of God and tells the story of God. The Bible is a grand narrative that points us to Jesus as the ultimate embodiment of God Himself. These books offer us a beautiful picture of God's longing to be with us in a more full and intimate way. So much so that in Jesus Christ, He would condescend to become a human and walk and talk with us. The Bible is an incredible, rich story of pursuit, love, and redemption we just can't compare to anything else.

Think of one of the most beautiful places you can imagine. Maybe it's a snow-covered forest. Maybe it's the beach. Maybe it's a bustling city with a magnificent skyline. Now, imagine you are inside, looking out of a window at that beautiful place. If you're in the forest, maybe you're in a cabin, peering out at the beautiful pine trees. The window is ornate with clear glass that lets you look at every angle of that view. When you lean up against the window, you can see your soft breath on it. But the view is the breathtaking, captivating part of this experience. The view is what you're there for.

The Scriptures are like that window. They allow us to see the character and magnificence of God. They reveal to us the image of Christ. We glimpse the beauty and majesty of God, His whole heart for us, and we are compelled to seek His face. Notice, however, that the Scriptures are not in themselves God! The Scriptures illuminate Jesus for us, but they are not Jesus. They are the miraculous window through which we come to know Him more truly.

SESSION 1

More often than not, the phrase “word of God” in the New Testament isn’t used to describe a physical Bible; instead, it’s referring to Jesus.

—Lisa Harper⁵

Reflect

Utilize the image of the window below to draw or write about the ways the Scriptures have revealed Jesus to you:



⁵ Harper, *A Jesus-Shaped Life* (Baker, 2025), 20.

Helpful Handlebars

Bibliology—a field of theology all about the Bible; the study of one’s belief about the Bible. Theological study of, or conversation about, our collection of holy books known as the Bible.

- **Biblio**—from the Greek word *biblos* meaning “scroll” or “book” (from this root we also get the English word “bibliography”)
- **Logy**—from the Greek word *logos*, meaning “word” or “study”

Reorient Yourself to Scripture

John 5:36–40

*I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. **You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.** (emphasis added)*

SESSION 1

In the Four Gospels, Jesus is often getting into disagreements with religious leaders. In His time, one group of these leaders was called Pharisees. The Pharisees were extremely committed to studying Scripture and following God's law. This, they reasoned, would help them find favor in the eyes of God. Can you imagine the irony? Jesus, God in the flesh, telling these teachers that the Scriptures they read so closely are actually testifying to His life-giving gift!

In John 5:36–40, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and tells them that they must come to *Him* for eternal life. Notice Jesus does not tell them Scripture is unimportant. Nor does He tell them to abolish the law. Instead, He challenges them to allow the Scriptures to point them to Him. In Him the Pharisees can find life. In this passage, *the study of Scripture is an invitation into relationship with Jesus*.

We all study Scripture differently. Maybe you're a methodical student who gets out the rainbow array of highlighters and pens. Perhaps you're a journaling student who writes long responses to each verse that jumps off the page. Maybe you're the type of student who uses biblical dictionaries or commentaries to seek further insight from the historical context and ancient languages of the Scriptures. Maybe you're the underliner, circler, and in-text responder who covers your Bible pages with emphatic responses. It does not matter how you approach Bible study. Your engagement and reciprocal pursuit of a relationship with Jesus is all that matters. The Word was made flesh, and in the Word you will find Him.

Exploring My Orthopathy

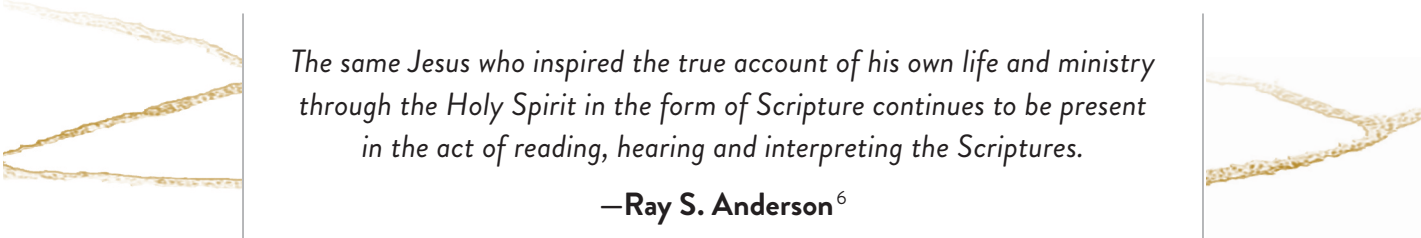
- Jesus tells the Pharisees that the Father sent Him and that Jesus’ life and ministry testify to that fact. Look up and read details of some of Jesus’ life and ministry (His miracles, teachings, or actions) that testify to that reality. Then list what those details reveal about the character of God.

Scripture	Example of Jesus’ Life & Ministry	Example of the Character of God
Mark 6:30-44	Jesus feeds the five thousand.	God is generous.
Luke 4:31-36		
Luke 7:11-17		
Matthew 8:23-27		
Mark 1:29-34		
Matthew 17:14-20		
John 4:1-26		
Luke 5:17-20		

SESSION 1

- Why do you think the Pharisees searched the Scriptures yet did not see how the Scriptures testified about Jesus?
- What might it look like to study Scripture *without* finding life in Jesus (think about the Pharisees and Jesus' criticism of them)? What does it look like to study Scripture *in order to* find life in Jesus? Compare and contrast.

Studying Scripture <i>Without</i> Finding Life in Jesus	Studying Scripture <i>in Order to</i> Find Life in Jesus



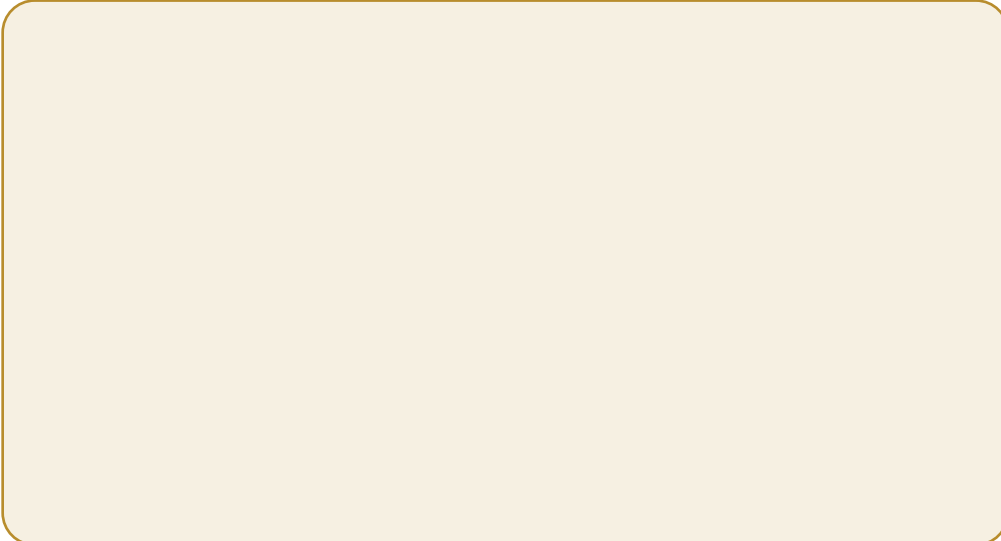
The same Jesus who inspired the true account of his own life and ministry through the Holy Spirit in the form of Scripture continues to be present in the act of reading, hearing and interpreting the Scriptures.

—Ray S. Anderson⁶

Exploring My Orthopraxy

Let's return to the picture of Scripture as a beautiful window that allows us to see Jesus more clearly and fully. The study of Scripture is a wonderful Christian spiritual practice that can draw us deeper into relationship with Jesus and is a way we can participate in our own spiritual formation. Spend some time journaling about your own practice of reading and studying Scripture. (You can reflect on your time studying Scripture in this study or outside of the study.)

In what ways has studying Scripture brought you life and drawn you closer to Jesus? Who in your life can you share the experience of Scripture study with?



⁶ Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (IVP Academic, 2001), 55.

DAY 4

AN INVITATION INTO RELATIONSHIP

Exploring My Orthodoxy

Today, the last day of solo study, we will prepare to dive into the various theological topics Lisa will present to us each week moving forward. To help us feel ready to jump into these topics, let's return to the invitational nature of theology. Theology, a conversation about God, is an invitation to deepen our relationship with Him as we grow in our knowledge and experience of Him in our lives. This relational way of approaching theology helps ground us as we tackle different topics together.

Seeing theology as an invitation into relationship with God and one another also allows us to wrestle with big ideas and even big questions about our faith and our lives. We can do this exploration safely within the love of God. This loving relationship allows us to approach these big topics without fear, even when our study challenges us to grow in areas of struggle, shift our thinking on certain ideas, or generously allow differing approaches to a topic or passage.

Reflect

Throughout this study, each week you will have the opportunity to dig into a theological topic and formulate your own response to that topic. Some might call that response “forming your theology” on a certain aspect of faith or attribute of God.

Complete the following statements and use the space below to reflect on your responses:

I feel _____ when I think about the ways this study may challenge me to grow in my faith.

WHY THEOLOGY MATTERS

I feel _____ when I think about forming my theology on various topics.

Theology as an invitation into relationship means _____ to me.

As we dive deeper into biblically orthodox theology, it's likely that most of us will have to jettison theology we've inherited along the way and sincerely thought was true.

—Lisa Harper⁷

Helpful Handlebars

Biblically orthodox theology:

- **Biblically**—rooted in Scripture (See yesterday's solo study.)
- **Orthodox**—from the Greek roots *orthos* (straight) and *doxa* (belief or opinion), in other words, something that is grounded in correct Christian faith and tradition
- **Theology**—a belief system and worldview based on the promises and parameters found in God's Word

So, biblically orthodox theology refers to developing our own theological views that are (1) rooted in Scripture, (2) grounded in historical Christian truth, and (3) based on our study of God.

⁷ Harper, *A Jesus-Shaped Life*, 20.

Reorient Yourself to Scripture

John 15:1–8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Jesus in the Gospel of John makes several statements (these are sometimes called the “I am statements”) that help us understand His identity as the Son of God. This particular “I am” statement uses the metaphor of a vine with branches that produce fruit. Jesus, as the true vine, is the source of all of our nourishment and allows us to flourish. “No branch can bear fruit by itself,” Jesus teaches, acknowledging the deeply relational component of a Jesus-shaped life. If we are able to see theology as an invitation into relationship, we can remain connected to Jesus, the true vine, and we can bear spiritual fruit.

This invites the question: What kind of relationship is this between the vine and the branches? In John 15:9, Jesus tells us: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”

The invitation into relationship here is infused with the love of God. Remaining in the love of Jesus, then, is vital to our theological study.

Exploring My Orthopathy

- In this passage, Jesus teaches that remaining attached to the vine (that is, remaining in relationship with Him) will lead us to bear fruit. Galatians 5:22–23a says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Circle the three fruits that you see most clearly in your life right now and write down one example for each.

Put a box around the three fruits you would like to see grow in the coming weeks.

Love

Forbearance

Faithfulness

Joy

Kindness

Gentleness

Peace

Goodness


Self-control

- John 15:9 mentions love three times. Underline each time the word “love” is listed and then label each underlined word with the source of that love. Then journal below about how you see God’s love as the source of the spiritual fruit circled in question 1.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

SESSION 1

- Part of being connected to the vine (in relationship with Jesus) is to experience pruning for the sake of the health of the fruit. Think back to the quote from John 15:1–8 (pg 46). How might the process of wrestling with some of your inherited theology be used by God for pruning in your life? Write a prayer below asking God for His love and wisdom in that process.



What the inner man longs for is knowledge of God that comes from encountering, grappling with, participating with God in all levels of human experience—mind, body, and spirit. We were made to crave God with our whole being.

—Bruce Demarest⁸



Exploring My Orthopraxy

It is important to see theology as an invitation *into* relationship with Jesus. This relationship is fueled by the expansive and infinite love of God. Like a vine, Jesus provides us, the branches, with all nourishment for living a life bursting with spiritual fruit. As we grow in faith and learn more together, we can expect to experience some spiritual pruning (see question 3 from today.). This may necessitate what Lisa describes as a need to “jettison theology we’ve inherited along the way”⁹ and may challenge us to wrestle with ideas rich in theological

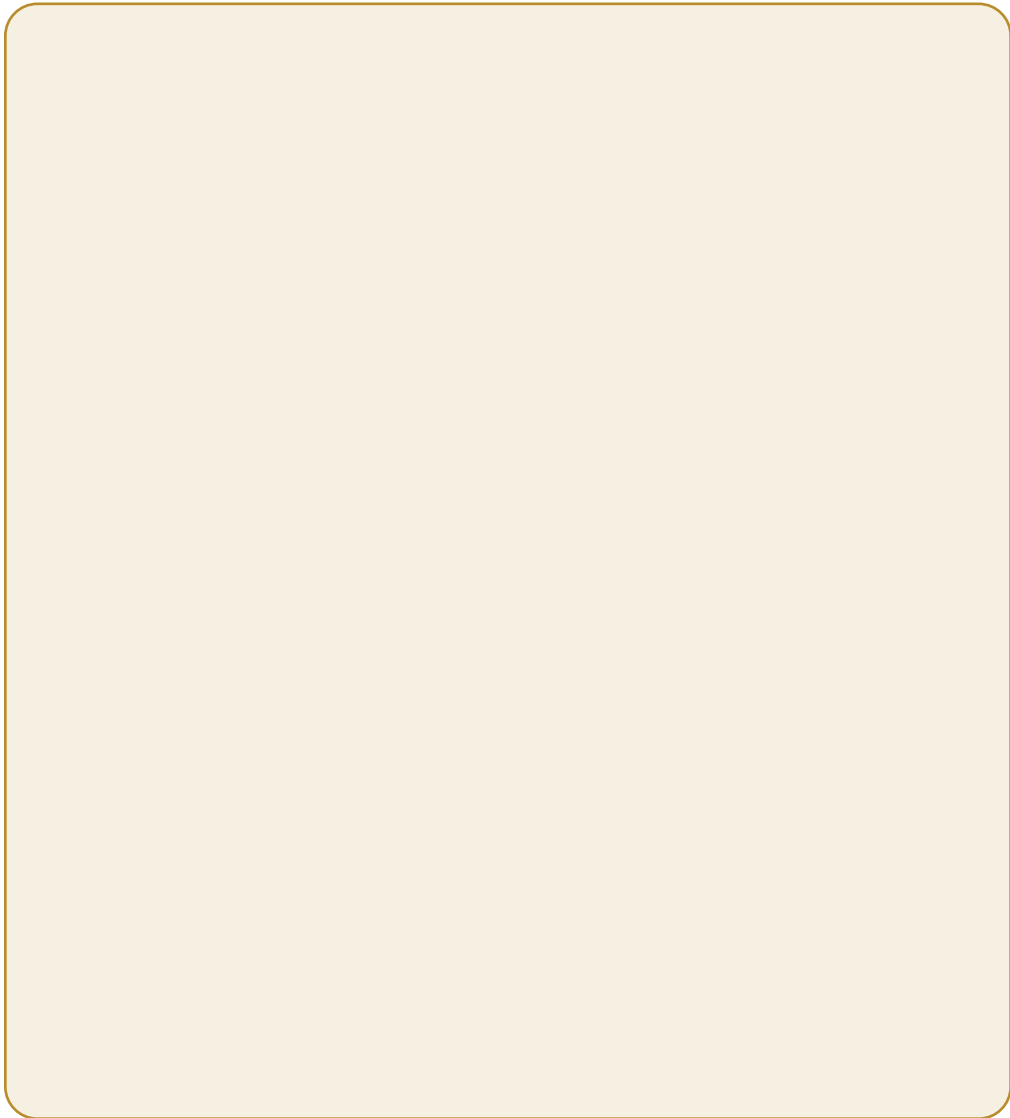
⁸ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 52.

⁹ Harper, *A Jesus-Shaped Life*, 20.

WHY THEOLOGY MATTERS

depth. With that in mind, journal below about a time in your life when you experienced spiritual growth or felt challenged in an area of faith. If an example does not readily come to mind, instead imagine what that might look like during this upcoming study.

How did you see God show up, in love, during that time of growth?

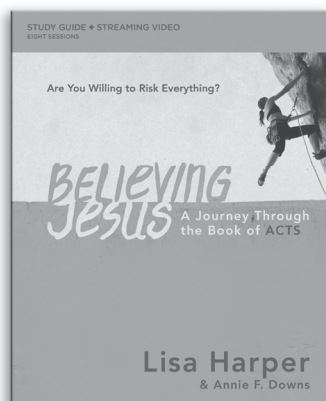


About the Author



Lauded as a “hilarious storyteller” and “theological storyteller,” Lisa Harper is anything but stereotypical! She is known for emphasizing that accruing knowledge about God pales next to a real and intimate relationship with Jesus. Lisa has 30+ years of church and para-church ministry leadership, as well as a decade speaking on-tour with Women of Faith. She holds a Master of Theological Studies from Covenant Seminary and is in the thesis stage of an earned doctorate at Denver Seminary. She is a regular on TBN’s globally syndicated *Better Together* show and has published multiple books and Bible studies. Lisa has also been leading the same weekly Bible study in her neighborhood for fifteen years. The most noticeable thing about Lisa Harper is her authenticity and love for Christ. But her greatest accomplishment to date is getting to become Missy’s mom through the miracle of adoption in 2014!

Also Available From Lisa

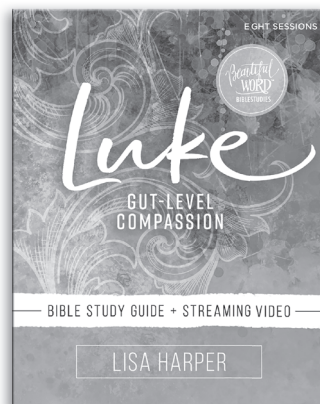


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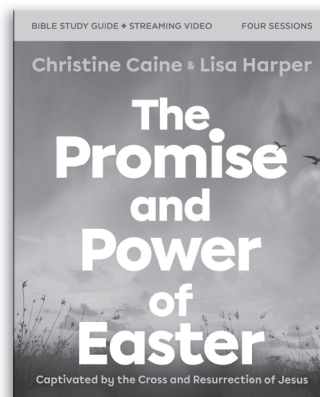


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