

8-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

KRISTI MCLELLAND



*Jesus
& Women*

for teen girls

IN THE FIRST CENTURY AND NOW

KRISTI MCLELLAND

*Jesus
& Women*

for teen girls

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KRISTI MCLELLAND is a speaker, teacher, and college professor. Since completing her Masters of Arts in Christian Education at Dallas Theological Seminary, she has dedicated her life to discipleship, teaching people how to study the Bible for themselves and writing about how God is better than we ever knew, explaining the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens. Her great desire for people to truly experience the love of God birthed a ministry in which she leads biblical study trips to Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

For more information about Kristi and what she's up to, visit: NewLensBiblicalStudies.com.

INTRODUCTION

**“A BIBLE WITH ITS JEWISHNESS WRUNG OUT
OF IT IS NO BIBLE. A CHRIST WITH HIS JEWISHNESS
OBSCURED IS NO CHRIST AT ALL.”¹**

—DR. RUSSELL MOORE

Every adventure begins in a moment, and the best ones come to us. In 2007, an adventure found me. The Lord opened the door for me to go study the Bible in Egypt and Israel.

At the time, I was teaching the Bible in the Biblical Studies department at Williamson College. I went to the Middle East in a spirit of professional development, just to learn. But God had other plans—much better plans.

In Israel, I was amazed to see how different the Middle Eastern culture was and is from our Western culture. I started noticing how I was approaching the Bible as a Westerner, seeing it with Western eyes and asking Western questions of the biblical text. In Israel I learned the Bible through a cultural lens, the Middle Eastern lens.

In these early days of my Middle Eastern study, God totally and thoroughly wrecked me in the best of ways. He completely transformed me.

Learning the Bible in its original historical, cultural, linguistic, and geographic context allowed me to get to know Jesus in *His* Jewish world. I didn't just fly over to Israel; it felt almost as if I went back in time to learn about the first-century world of the Bible, the world Jesus lived in two thousand years ago.

**“WE HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT WE READ THE BIBLE AS
FOREIGNERS, AS VISITORS WHO HAVE TRAVELED NOT ONLY
TO A NEW GEOGRAPHY BUT A NEW CENTURY. WE ARE
LITERARY TOURISTS WHO ARE DEEPLY IN NEED OF A GUIDE.”²**

—GARY M. BURGE

You may be wondering about the meaning behind the cover of our study. The vessel pictured there is a tear jar, an archaeological artifact dating back to the first or second century AD. It was uncovered in Israel where one of my professors gave it to me as a gift.

This tear jar most likely belonged to an ancient Jewish woman, maybe even in the lifetime of Jesus's earthly ministry. In the ancient Near East, Jewish women collected their tears in a jar like this and poured them out to God in worship as a sign of faith, embodying God's message in Psalm 56:8, where He says He keeps our tears in a bottle. I look at the tear jar often and wonder what the original owner's story might have looked like—what she experienced, her highs and lows. I wonder where she kept her jar and how often she pulled it out to collect her tears before the Lord.

To me, the tear jar represents some of what a woman in Jesus's first-century world would have experienced. She was not always valued by society; she was often marginalized. Yet God saw her grief and her struggle. He encouraged her to bring her pain to Him in worship and prayer. Then, through Jesus, He worked to restore the woman and show her His redemptive purposes in her life. He valued her; He lifted her up out of shame. He set her on the path to life. And He desires to do the same for you and for me, as followers of Christ.

I went to Israel and learned that God is *better* than I ever knew.

This understanding of who God is has changed me, and it's changing me still. I believe it will do the same for you. My time in Israel marked my life and shifted its direction entirely. I've been taking teams to Israel for Bible study trips since 2007. The gift given to me has become my gift to give others. My hope is for this study to be that gift to you.

The Bible was primarily written by Middle Easterners in a Middle Eastern context. Deeper insight into the Middle Eastern culture and historical context of the time in which the Bible was written will greatly add to our understanding of what the biblical authors meant by what they wrote and what the people described in the Bible did.

One of the major differences between Western and Eastern culture is *how* we teach and *how* we learn. We, in the West, are more of a Greco-Roman culture.

We prize literature. We read sitting at desks, study with books in our hands, take notes, fill in the answers, and finish our workbooks.

Teaching and learning are different in the Middle East—they're different now, and they were different for Jesus in His time on earth. Middle Eastern teaching is visual; a rabbi teaches on the go. When Jesus taught, He could usually see the object of His lessons, and His disciples could see it too. This teaching style wasn't just philosophical. It was not “up there;” it was “down here.”

Jesus's style wasn't to provide a syllabus or a workbook. He was more likely to walk through a field of mustard plants while sharing a parable about how the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

In the Middle Eastern style of learning, the student wants to stay very close to the rabbi so as not to lose any of their rabbi's words. And the student never knows when or where the rabbi will begin teaching! In the Middle Eastern way, students learn through discovery rather than the acquisition of knowledge. This is how a rabbi teaches—they guide you into discovery. And this is how I want to guide you through our eight weeks together.

We are going to strive to view the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens and, at the same time, study a few Bible passages in a traditionally Jewish way, the way rabbis still teach the children in Israel today. We will walk into discoveries together rather than simply being taught the content or lesson.

This eight-week feast is my attempt to set a biblical table around which we can come together and discover Jesus's heart for women in His first-century world. At this table, we take off our Western lenses and put on our Middle Eastern lenses. I'll continue to share bits and pieces along the way to guide you in shaping your Middle Eastern lens.

I'm so honored and expectant to share in this eight-week biblical feast with you. In some ancient way, the Lord saw this for us before the foundations of the world were ever even laid. He's drawing us to this table, and He will do the feeding. Posture yourself to receive.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristi V. McLeod". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

In our time together, we're going to study God's Word in a way that might seem a bit different from what you've experienced in the past. As I mentioned in the introduction, we are going to strive to view the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens and, at the same time, study a few Bible passages in a traditionally Jewish way—the way the rabbis would have taught the Bible to Jesus, and the way some rabbis still teach the children in Israel today.

With that in mind, let's discuss a bit of the framework for our study:

We approach the Scriptures as children expecting to be fed by our Father.

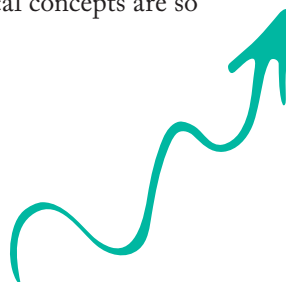
It can be easy to sit down with our Bibles and think something like, *okay, let me figure out some application from the passage I'm reading today*. I have good news for you—we are not spiritual orphans. We have a gracious heavenly Father who feeds us to the full with His Word; He gives abundantly. As we read the Word, we do our part by being open to what God will teach us. We posture ourselves to obey and to be gratefully fed by the Living God through His Word and by the power of His Spirit. But ultimately, God is in charge of feeding us.

We're not looking for the "right" answer.

Though it may sound strange to our Western ears, in Judaism, the student with good questions is better than the student with all of the right answers. We never just read the Bible; we interact with it, asking questions of the text. We want to know what a text teaches us about God before we ask what it teaches us about ourselves. In our time together, we're going to focus on interacting with the biblical text in community, and we're going to learn to be okay with questions that cannot be easily answered and even questions that may leave us scratching our heads.

We want God's Word to become a part of who we are.

The Middle Eastern way of learning involves more of an oral teaching tradition, rather than the more formal learning style of our Western world. In our study together, we want these concepts in God's Word to get into our hearts and minds so much that they become a part of who we are, changing the way we see God and interact with the world. You'll notice we will revisit some of the same concepts each week. The study is designed this way on purpose. By the end of our time together, I hope these biblical concepts are so clear and familiar they are almost second nature to you.



Learning will be done inside community.

In the Middle Eastern, learning is very communal. Here's what I mean: in a Middle Eastern context, it would be common to see rabbis teaching students as they walk down the road. This teaching tradition places significant value on students discussing an issue with one another. Rabbis often instruct their students to "go first" and discuss what they believe about a teaching before the teacher explains the concept to them. We're going to adopt some of those ideas in our time together. In many cases, I'll "go first" in our feast teaching times. But you'll notice group times that I've crafted especially for you to use as you *yeshiva*, or discuss biblical texts together, after we begin unpacking them in our video teaching times.

Note that terms in the text marked with *this style* are explained in further detail in the glossary on pages 142–151.



BEFORE YOU GET STARTED, MAKE SURE YOU DOWNLOAD THE TEACHING VIDEO BUNDLE AT [LIFEWAY.COM/JESUSANDWOMEN](https://www.lifeway.com/jesusandwomen). SCAN THIS QR CODE TO GET STARTED.

Throughout our sessions together, you'll find these sections:

WITH YOUR GROUP

- The **FEAST** section includes questions to begin your time together and a space to take notes as you watch the video teaching as a group.
- The **YESHIVA** section includes questions for your small group to explore together. We'll dive into further insight on a topic we discussed in our feast teaching times.

ON YOUR OWN

- In the **LOOK** section, we'll highlight a Middle Eastern insight or cultural emphasis more in-depth to further your understanding of Jesus's first-century world.
- In the **LEARN** section, we'll take a passage of Scripture and consider it through a Middle Eastern lens.
- In the **LIVE** section, we'll take some time to help you apply the concepts you're learning to your own life.

The **LOOK**, **LEARN**, and **LIVE** sections are for your personal study time. Instead of labeling them by days of study, we've labeled them by sections. Feel free to complete each between our weekly group times as you see fit throughout the week.

Are you ready? Let's go!

Session One



MEETING
THE MIDDLE
EASTERN
JESUS



THE FEAST

For me, the best meal is one I don't have to cook. When we come to the Word of God, that's absolutely true for all of us—God prepares this feast for us. We come to this moment and to this table believing the Living God will feed us. We are not orphans, and we are not fatherless. We don't have to scrounge, strive, or strain to feed ourselves the Word of God. We can simply, yet profoundly, posture ourselves to receive the feast the Lord has prepared for us—for you.

BEGIN

As we begin our feast, take a few moments to answer the following questions before you watch the video teaching.

How would you describe the world's view of a woman?

Do you think God's view of women is similar or different? Explain why you think that way.

Are you familiar with any stories of Jesus interacting with women in Scripture? If so, which story are you hoping we learn more about?

What do you think would have made Jesus seem different to the people of His day?

What are you asking the Lord to do in your life through this eight-session feast?

Use the following space or the blank pages at the back of this book during our feast teaching time to add your own notes as you watch.



THE TEACHING SESSION BUNDLE IS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT [LIFEWAY.COM/JESUSANDWOMEN](https://lifeway.com/jesusandwomen)

WESTERN LENS	MIDDLE EASTERN LENS
Form	Function
How? <i>How did it happen?</i>	Why? <i>Why would God do that?</i>
Understand → Believe	Believe → Understand
Law, Rule, Principle	Story, Narrative
What does it teach me about <i>me</i> ?	What does it teach me about <i>God</i> ?
Dig deep, get down in it . . . <i>(Analysis—pick it apart)</i>	Read through it . . . <i>(Synthesis—bring it together)</i>
Study to acquire <i>knowledge</i>	Posture to be <i>fed</i>

YESHIVA

As we discussed in our first “biblical feast” together, Middle Easterners most often learn and cultivate spiritual growth within the context of community and group conversation. With this cultural difference in mind, each week we’re going to practice *yeshiva* together—what we might call “workshopping” or “brainstorming” around a topic in our Western culture—dialoging openly about a biblical concept and walking together as a community with Jesus as our rabbi. Discuss the following questions with your group.

What did you just *hear* or *see* in our feast together that you want to remember?

How does the concept of *eating* the Word of God differ from *reading* the Word of God?

Describe your posture towards God's Word. Do you want to see that posture change in any way? If so, explain why.

Yeshiva

Stemming from the Hebrew verb that means “to dwell,” *yeshiva* occurred when students would discuss or debate questions or comments from a teacher.¹ This means a community would determine the validity of a biblical teaching through *yeshiva*.



Have you ever thought about the differences between reading the Bible through our Western lens versus a Middle Eastern lens? Why do you think it's important to see the differences?

We're going to engage with the Western versus Middle Eastern lens chart (p. 13) during each of our eight feasts together. This session isn't going to cover the chart exhaustively, but I do want us to familiarize ourselves with two ways our culture as modern Westerners differs from that of the ancient biblical world.

Like the story of the dentist in Israel that was shared in the video, what is the difference between form and function?

The second part of the chart highlights the differences between the questions asked. Oftentimes when we read the Bible, we ask the question, *What does this teach me about me?* We go in and down. But in the Middle East, they read the Scriptures and they ask a different question. They ask, *What does this teach me about God, about who He is and what He's like?* This kind of question lifts us up, gets our gaze focused outward on Him.

If you stare at yourself for too long, you'll get depressed. But staring at God will change your life. My prayer is that through this feast we will stare at God, who sees our lives through His perspective, through who He is.

What are the dangers of approaching Scripture with a "me" focus?

As we make our way through our first feast, as we are learning a little bit better to take off our Western glasses and to put our Middle Eastern glasses on, I want you to turn now in your Bibles to the final chapter of the final book of the Old Testament.

READ MALACHI 4:2.


Malachi was the last writing prophet of the Old Testament. These would be some of the last words that the Jewish people would hear from God before heading into the four hundred years of the intertestamental period.

Do you think the Israelites remembered what Malachi said? Based on the verse you read, what do you think they would be looking for in a Messiah?

I can imagine the Jewish people having conversations during that intertestamental period asking things like: “When Messiah comes, what kind of things will He be saying, what kind of things will He be doing? How will we recognize Him?” But because they are a people of remembrance and a people of the Scripture, they’d go back to this verse in Malachi 4:2, and they say, “Ah, that’s right. When the Son of Righteousness comes, when Messiah comes, we will know it because He will have healing in His wings.”

This was their hope. Next session, we are going to fast forward to the New Testament to see how one woman would not only know Malachi 4:2, but experience "healing in his wings" firsthand.

Take a look at Psalm 63:7 below, then read it aloud as a group together before heading into the final section of your group time.



*Because you
are my help,
I sing in the shadow
of your wings.*

PSALM 63:7

LIVING LIKE A RIVER, NOT A LAKE

I've been taking team members to the Jordan River for eleven years now. The Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee into the Dead Sea. The water moves, flows—it's living water, *mayim chayim*.² I've also floated in the Dead Sea. The water in the Dead Sea is still, motionless—it's dead water.

As a college professor, I tell my students all the time, “You haven't learned a thing when you've seen it. You haven't learned a thing when you've heard it. You haven't learned a thing when you have seen and heard it. You've learned a thing when you can give it away.” We want the Word of God to travel through us to others, moving freely as a river would. We are not supposed to hold what God is teaching us to ourselves, motionless like the Dead Sea.

The things the Lord reveals to you—what He feeds you in this feast—are meant to travel through you to others. We want to live like rivers, not lakes.

Consider the following questions and record your answers below:

How can this feast travel through you this week?

Who needs to hear the truths you've learned at this week's feast?

Who can you be a river for this week?