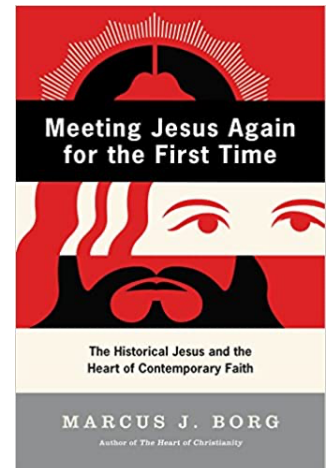


# Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time

by Marcus Borg

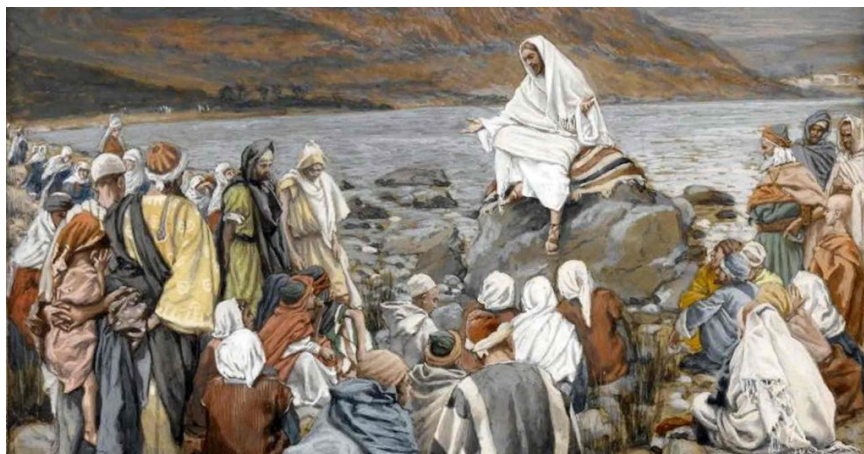
## Study/Preparation Guide: Session 4



1. Read the following pages from *MJAFT*
  1. Chapter 4: Jesus and Wisdom: Teacher of Alternative Wisdom [pp 69-91]  
—or—
  2. Summary on reverse – if you don't have the book
2. Check out this on-line reference for a biography of Borg, a list of his books, as well as some supplementary information for our discussions:  
<http://www.aportraitofjesus.org>

### Focus Questions for our discussion:

1. What are the different types of wisdom? [pp 69-70]
2. How did Jesus teach wisdom? [pp 70-75]
3. Discuss the importance of “seeing” on your own spiritual journey. [p 74]
4. What do you understand by a “way of transformation”? [pp 75-80]
5. What is the problem with conventional wisdom? [p 78]
6. What image of God goes along with conventional wisdom? [p 78]
7. What are the consequences of this image? [p 79]
8. Discuss the subversive and alternative nature of Jesus' wisdom teaching. [pp 80-82]
9. How do you relate to Borg's presentation of Jesus' image of God? [pp 80-85]
10. How have you experienced the “way less traveled”? [pp 85-88]



## Summary: Chapter 4

“Wisdom” critical for understanding New Testament’s teaching about Jesus:

- Jesus was a teacher of wisdom (this chapter)
- Jesus was embodiment/incarnation of divine wisdom (next chapter)

Wisdom concerns how to live; nature of reality and how to live one’s life in accord with that reality

Speaks of a “way” or “path” – right way vs. wrong way

Two types of wisdom; two types of sages:

Conventional wisdom & conventional sage

Mainstream wisdom of a culture: “what everybody knows”

Subversive/alternative wisdom & subversive sages (e.g., Lao Tzu, Buddha, Socrates)

Wisdom of subversive sages is “road less traveled”

### The How of Jesus’ Wisdom Teaching: Aphorisms and Parables

Jesus as oral teacher used aphorisms and parables

Aphorisms: memorable sayings/one-liners

Parables: short stories

Aphorisms and parables are invitational forms of speech; they tease the imagination, suggest more than they say, and invite a transformation in perception, e.g.

Aphorisms

- You cannot serve two masters
- Leave the dead to bury the dead
- You train out a gnat and swallow a camel
  - They need time for digestion.
  - They wouldn’t have been strung together
  - Some are arresting because of content
  - Some require reflection out of wonder as to why they were spoken
  - What is the metaphor being employed?

Parables

- Can be like aphorisms, but are narratives
- Full-fledge stories
- Probably told more than once, with variations
- As good stories, they pull the listener into the story
- They do not involve external authority; their authority rests within themselves.

Jesus invited audience to see in a racially new way, appealing to the imagination. “How we see determines the path that we walk, the way that we live” (74).

Jesus was not primarily a teach of information or morals, but a teach of a way or path of transformation . . . from a life in the world of conventional wisdom to a life centered in God.

### The Problem: Conventional Wisdom

Conventional wisdom is the dominant consciousness of any culture. The most taken-for-granted understandings about the way things are and about the way to live. It is the *enculturated consciousness*.

Conventional wisdom's features:

- Provides guidance about how to live; embodies the central values of a culture
- Intrinsically based upon the dynamic of rewards and punishments
- Has both social and psychological consequences
  - Creates a world of hierarchies and boundaries
  - Becomes the basis for identity and self-esteem
- Creates a world in which we live; it constructs a world
- Life may be grim; it is a life of bondage to the dominant culture
  - A life of limited vision and vileness
  - A world of comparisons
  - A life of anxious striving (i.e., performance principle)
  - A life of profound self-preoccupation
- Image of God goes with this wisdom: lawgiver and judge
- Christian life becomes a life of requirements
  - Even in Lutheranism, "faith" became a "requirement" – not a life of grace
  - Requirement of "faith" divides world into this who have it and those who don't

### The *What* of Jesus' Wisdom Teaching: Subversive and Alternative Wisdom

Jesus undermined conventional wisdom and spoke of an alternative.

#### *Paradox and Reversal*

Impossible combinations abound in his teaching (e.g., how are "Samaritan" and "Pharisee" used?)

"Kingdom of God" used in impossible combinations (e.g., "mustard seed" = small? Weed?)

Who does Jesus eat with?

#### *Conventional Wisdom as the Broad Way*

Jesus spoke of two ways: a wise way and a foolish way; narrow way and broad way

"For most sages, the wise way was the way of conventional wisdom, and the foolish way was the path of disregarding conventional wisdom. Jesus reversed this" (81).

He attacked the central values of his social world's conventional wisdom:

- Family
- Wealth
- Honor
- Purity

## *Jesus' Image of God*

Jesus invited listeners to see God, not as judge with requirements, but as gracious and compassionate

- Consider lilies of the field
- Workers in the vineyard
- Prodigal Son
  - Represent systematic subversions of the world of conventional wisdom

God at center of Jesus' teaching undermines the dynamic of requirements and rewards at the core of conventional wisdom

## The Way Less Traveled

Narrow way has two related dimensions:

- 1) Invitation to see God as gracious and womb-like
- 2) Invitation to a path that leads away from the life of conventional wisdom to a life more centered in God.

Uses language of the heart ("You shall love the Lord . . . .")

Uses imagery of "death" – dying to the world of conventional wisdom as the center of one's security and identity and a dying to the self as the center of one's concern

Death is a *letting go*, rather than a *grasping* (characteristic of conventional wisdom)

Way less traveled is life in the Spirit

Jesus knew God as the compassionate one, not the God of requirements and boundaries.

Jesus' wisdom challenges the values of our culture (achievement, affluence and appearance)

Jesus' wisdom challenge many common forms of Christianity – it points from "second-hand religion" to "first-hand religion" (living life in accord with the Spirit) – from hearing about God to beholding God.

It leads from life centered in culture to life centered in God.