

Jesus in the Air

Facilitator Guide

Quick Start

You do not need to master every page to lead well. Start here.

1 Choose your program and meeting length

Meet once with the Excerpt Pack, or once or three times with the book (coming March 28, 2027). See [Program Options](#) (page 4). Review the relevant [Content Note](#) (page 7) before choosing; before assigning the book, review [Is the Book Right for Our Group?](#) (page 5).

2 Invite the group and assign reading

Share the dates, time, place or joining link, and meeting length. Send the [Excerpt Pack](#) or [Book Discussion Guide](#). Excerpts need no advance reading. For one book meeting, assign the whole novel; for three, one titled part before each meeting. Allow time to get a copy and read it.

3 Read and plan the discussion

Read the material beforehand. Use or adapt a [session plan](#) (page 2), or make your own. The full [discussion question sets](#) (page 10) offer more choices; select a few questions and leave room for the conversation.

4 Welcome the group

Read the [Discussion Guidelines](#) (page 7) and the [Content Note](#) (page 7) for your reading. Make passing, pausing, stepping out, and rejoining ordinary options.

5 Follow the conversation, then close

Stay close to the text and make room for different readings. End with a [closing question](#) or brief silence (page 8); no shared conclusion is required.

See the **Guide Map** (page 2) for everything this guide offers. 

Guide Map

1 Choose & Prepare pages 3–6

Materials · Program Options · Book fit · Leader Preparation

2 Lead the Session pages 7–8

Read-aloud guidance · Redirects · Closing

3 Care & Safety page 9

Breaks · Follow-up · Immediate support

4 Links & Shortcuts page 10

Documents · Readings · Questions · Content Notes

5 Session Plans

Suggested durations

Excerpt Pack 1-session program	• Two-excerpt plan 60 or 75 minutes		page 11
	• Four-excerpt plan 90 minutes		page 12
Book 1-session program	• Whole-book plan 75 or 90 minutes		page 13
Book 3-session program	• Book Part 1 plan 60 or 75 minutes	MEETING 1	page 14
	• Book Part 2 plan 60 or 75 minutes	MEETING 2	page 15
	• Book Part 3 plan 60 or 75 minutes	MEETING 3	page 16

Overview & Materials

About This Reading Group Kit

This kit supports group discussion of *Jesus in the Air* by J. D. Landis. It includes three documents, all designed for print and digital reading:

- **Book Discussion Guide:** with discussion questions for groups reading the book.
- **Excerpt Pack:** a free set of selected scenes with discussion questions. No book or advance reading required.
- **Facilitator Guide** (this document): for running discussions based on either the Book or Excerpt Pack programs.

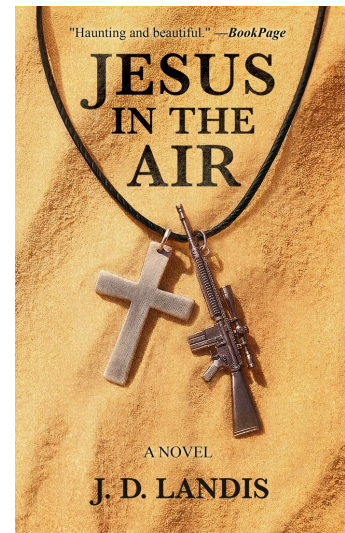
In the online Kit Reader, switch between this guide and either participant document while keeping your place in both—useful when leading from a single device.

About *Jesus in the Air*

Before dawn on the New Hampshire coast, Warren “War” Pease meets a barefoot stranger in jeans and a T-shirt. He says to call him Ray. Warren knows him as Jesus.

Warren is a young U.S. Army sniper newly home from Iraq. In his plainspoken, eloquent first-person voice, he tells the story of one summer day: a walk with Jesus, memories of Iraq, and a return to the people his absence has affected—his great love, their daughter, his best friend, and his grieving father.

The encounter can be read literally, symbolically, or psychologically; readers may also leave its meaning open. Different readings can remain in the same conversation.



Content Notes (page 7): The Book and Excerpt Pack have separate Content Notes. Before choosing material for your group, review the Content Note for the reading you are considering.

Program Options

Choose the format that matches what participants will read.

Excerpt Pack

1
MEETING

A free set of four scenes from *Jesus in the Air*. Choose the excerpts that fit your time and interests.

What happens in the meeting?

Participants read selected excerpts aloud, then discuss. No advance reading is required.

What does each participant need?

- the **Excerpt Pack**

Which questions should we use?

The questions immediately following each chosen excerpt in the Excerpt Pack. Select the questions most likely to open a useful conversation for your group.

Content advisory: What should the leader review?

- **Excerpt Pack Content Note** (page 7)

Book

1 or 3
MEETINGS

For participants reading the complete novel. Meet once for a whole-book discussion, or three times, one per titled part.

What happens in the meeting?

Participants discuss their advance reading: the complete novel for one meeting, or the relevant part for each of three meetings.

What does each participant need?

- the book - details at jesusintheair.com
- the **Book Discussion Guide**

Which questions should we use?

- Use the Part 1, Part 2, or Part 3 question sets in the Book Discussion Guide.
- If meeting only once, use the Part 3 question set for the discussion.

Content advisory: What should the leader review?

Before assigning the full book, review:

- **Book Content Note** (page 7)
- **Detailed Content Advisory**

See the **session plans** (page 2) for both options.

Is the Book Right for Our Group?

What kind of book is this?

Jesus in the Air is literary fiction, with Jesus as a character—not a devotional. Warren Pease, a young Army sniper home from Iraq, spends a summer day with Jesus, reconnecting with the people he left behind. Humor, tenderness, and the possibility of forgiveness run through his story; so do violent memories of war.

Who is likely to enjoy the full novel?

It may especially appeal to readers who enjoy emotionally involving stories about love, family, and friendship, told in a conversational, often poetic voice. Warren's exchanges with Jesus bring warmth and humor to the story. Reading the full novel means following his relationships and wartime experiences as they unfold and come together. Readers do not need to share one religious outlook—or agree with every idea in the book—to find it worth discussing.

How do I judge whether it is too intense?

The full novel contains a considerable amount of violence, including graphic wartime scenes. A reader can be drawn to its themes and still prefer not to read that material. Before assigning it, review the [Book Content Note](#) (page 7) and the [Full-Book Detailed Content Advisory](#).

Could the Excerpt Pack be a better fit?

Yes—particularly when the story interests your group but the novel's violence does not. The Excerpt Pack omits the graphic wartime scenes and offers four excerpts with discussion questions. Read through the selections and their brief [Content Note](#) (page 7), then choose what suits your readers. You can lead a complete discussion without anyone needing to read or buy the novel.

Leader Preparation

1 Choose your program and meeting length

Excerpt Pack · one meeting

No advance reading. Read selected excerpts together.

Book · one or three meetings

Meet once after the whole novel, or three times, once after each titled part.

See [Program Options](#) (page 4). Review the relevant [Content Note](#) (page 7) before choosing; before assigning the book, review [Is the Book Right for Our Group?](#) (page 5)

2 Invite people and make the reading clear

Give the dates, time, place or joining link, and meeting length. Send the [Excerpt Pack](#) or [Book Discussion Guide](#).

For excerpts, say “No advance reading.” For one book meeting, assign the full novel. For three meetings, assign Part 1, “The Isles of Shoals,” before the first meeting, then one part per meeting.

If participants will read the book, allow time for them to get a copy.

3 Read ahead and think about the group

Read the assigned material. For excerpts, use the Excerpt Pack’s descriptions and reading times to choose scenes; read any Context notes and share that background before reading together.

Think about differing views and sensitive topics. Review the [Discussion Guidelines](#) (page 7). Invite volunteers to speak or read, and make it easy to pass or take a break.

4 Choose a few questions and a flexible plan

Adapt a [session plan](#) (page 2), or build your own. The [book question sets](#) (Book Discussion Guide, pages 3–5) and the questions after each excerpt offer other choices. Mark a few priorities; leave room for the conversation.

5 Keep what you need within reach

Print or save the pages you will use. Bookmark [Guide Map](#) (page 2) and your plan. Check that the reading and questions open on your device. When directing the group, name the document and excerpt or book part as well as the page.

2 Lead the Session

Discussion Guidelines (read aloud)

Welcome. We're discussing *Jesus in the Air*. Here are a few guidelines to help make this a good conversation:

- **Participation is voluntary:** share only what you want. You may pass on any question, decline to read aloud, ask for a pause, step out, and rejoin later—no explanation needed.
- **For war-related passages:** stay with the scene and its human consequences. Avoid gratuitous detail or tactical digressions.
- **Speak from your own reading:** say what you think, notice, or wonder rather than speaking for others or telling them what they should think.
- Keep turns reasonably brief so more people can speak.
- Warren is the narrator of this novel. We can ask what he notices, what he misses, and what the scene reveals beyond him without assuming every sentence is what the author—or anyone here—believes.

Content Notes

For the leader • **Read aloud only the Content Note** for your group's reading.



Excerpt Pack Content Note

These excerpts include non-graphic war memories, firearms, and references to death and grief.



Book Content Note

This novel portrays wartime combat and aftermath (graphic in places), injury and death involving adults and children, handling of human remains, suicide references, briefly reported sexual violence, animal harm, and racist and religiously demeaning language.

2 Lead the Session

If Disagreement Arises

- When disagreement appears, slow the pace and name what is actually disputed: a detail in the scene, an interpretation, or a larger belief. Ask, “Which lines support each reading?” If the disagreement remains, let the readings remain and move on without forcing a conclusion.

Redirect Prompts

<i>If war talk strays beyond the scene into tactics or graphic detail:</i>	“Let’s return to the scene and its human consequences.”
<i>If it turns into politics/culture-war debate:</i>	“Let’s pause broad policy debate for now and return to the page. What is Warren experiencing in this scene?”
<i>If the room gets stuck on Ray/Jesus:</i>	“Different readings can stay in the room. What does the Ray/Jesus encounter change for Warren here?”
<i>If theology debate heats up:</i>	“Let’s not force a theological verdict. What does the scene show, and what does it leave open?”
<i>If someone dominates:</i>	“I’m going to pause us so we can hear two or three more voices.”
<i>If the room goes silent:</i>	“Silence is all right. Let’s take a moment, then name one image, line, or question—or pass.”
<i>If emotion rises:</i>	“Let’s slow down for a moment. We can take our time and stay with the scene.”
<i>If someone shares personally:</i>	“Thank you. We can let that stand without asking you to say more. When we’re ready, let’s return to the scene.”

Close the Session

- **Option:** 30 seconds of silence, then invite one word or phrase each person is taking with them (passing is always allowed).
- **Option:** “What is one humane, doable action this conversation invites this week?”
- Prayer can be offered if the group wants it; never assume, require, or single anyone out.

○ When Someone Needs a Break

If someone becomes distressed, overwhelmed, or needs a break, with no indication of immediate danger: Normalize passing or stepping out without asking for an explanation; offer a brief break, and let the person decide whether to return.

○ When Follow-Up May Help

If someone appears safe but would benefit from follow-up: Offer a private check-in rather than questioning the person in front of the group. Ask what support would be useful, use the setting's established pastoral, chaplaincy, organizational, or professional-care route, and remain within your role. Do not turn the reading group into therapy, spiritual diagnosis, or an improvised debrief.

○ When Someone May Not Be Safe

If someone says they may harm themselves or cannot stay safe:

“Let’s pause. I’m glad you said something. I’m going to stay with you while we contact immediate support.”

Remain with the person, or arrange responsible immediate support, while crisis or emergency help is contacted.

In the United States, call or text **988** or chat at **988Lifeline.org**. If there is immediate physical danger or a medical emergency, call **911**. If your setting has an established emergency or care protocol, follow it without delaying crisis support.

Links & Shortcuts

Reading Group Kit

Kit homepage

Learn about, get or share the kit.
jesusintheair.com/reading-group-kit

Kit documents

Book Discussion Guide PDF

jesusintheair.com/reading-groups/kit/book-discussion-guide.pdf

Excerpt Pack PDF

jesusintheair.com/reading-groups/kit/excerpt-pack.pdf

Facilitator Guide PDF

jesusintheair.com/reading-groups/kit/facilitator-guide.pdf

Content advisory

Excerpt Pack Content Note
(page 7)

Book Content Note
(page 7)

Detailed Content Advisory

About *Jesus in the Air* - one-sheet PDFs

General One-Sheet

Church / Ministry One-Sheet

Military / Chaplain One-Sheet

Website: jesusintheair.com

Email us: contact@jdlandis.com

Author website: jdlandis.com

Book details: jesusintheair.com

Excerpt Links

Excerpt 1

(Excerpt Pack, page 2)

Excerpt 2

(Excerpt Pack, page 7)

Excerpt 3

(Excerpt Pack, page 13)

Excerpt 4

(Excerpt Pack, page 20)

Discussion Questions

Excerpt 1 questions

(Excerpt Pack, page 6)

Excerpt 2 questions

(Excerpt Pack, page 12)

Excerpt 3 questions

(Excerpt Pack, page 19)

Excerpt 4 questions

(Excerpt Pack, page 24)

Book Part 1 questions

(Book Discussion Guide, page 3)

Book Part 2 questions

(Book Discussion Guide, page 4)

Book Part 3 questions

(Book Discussion Guide, page 5)

5 Session Plans

Excerpt Pack • One meeting

Two Excerpts

60 or 75 minutes

This sample uses Excerpts 1 and 2. If you choose different excerpts, use their questions and adjust discussion time to allow for their reading times. Choose fewer questions to suit your group.

Read the excerpts beforehand; reading times are estimates. Allow passing and pauses.
For 60 minutes, skip the extension and go to the closing.

8 min
open

Welcome

Read the Discussion Guidelines (page 7) and the Content Note (page 7).

6 min
read

Excerpt 1 Footprints in the Dawn

(Excerpt Pack, pages 2–5)

Read the excerpt together as a group.

13 min
discuss

“What first pulled you into this beach scene—the dark, the sand, the islands, Jesus coming out of the light, or the footprints?”

“Jesus knows Warren’s name and also knows he wants to be alone. How does Warren respond to being known before he explains himself?”

2 min
pause

Pause before the next excerpt.

8 min
read

Excerpt 2 At Least to Pray Is Left

(Excerpt Pack, pages 7–11)

Introduce its Context first; then read the excerpt together as a group.

16 min
discuss

“How do Warren and Jesus understand the distance between Warren and his father differently?”

“When Mr. Smith reads Dickinson and the room falls silent, what can the poem hold that ordinary talk cannot?”

15 min
discuss

Optional extension • 75 minutes total

“Warren is told he may have a role in his father’s return to life. Where is the line between responsibility and burden in this scene?”

7 min
close

Close

“By the end of the excerpt, how do you hear the line ‘At least to pray is left’?”

End with a brief silence and thanks; agreement is optional.

Four Excerpts

90 minutes

A sample plan for all four excerpts. Choose excerpts and questions to suit your group.

Read the excerpts beforehand. Reading times are estimates, including Context introductions and transitions. Allow passing and pauses; use fewer questions if needed.

8 min
open

Welcome

Read the Discussion Guidelines (page 7) and the Content Note (page 7).

6 min
read

Excerpt 1 Footprints in the Dawn

(Excerpt Pack, pages 2–5)

Read the excerpt together as a group.

12 min
discuss

“What first pulled you into this beach scene—the dark, the sand, the islands, Jesus coming out of the light, or the footprints?”

“Jesus knows Warren’s name and also knows he wants to be alone. How does Warren respond to being known before he explains himself?”

9 min
read

Excerpt 2 At Least to Pray Is Left

(Excerpt Pack, pages 7–11)

Introduce its Context first; then read the excerpt together as a group.

8 min
discuss

“How do Warren and Jesus understand the distance between Warren and his father differently?”

10 min
read

Excerpt 3 A Mother in Mansour

(Excerpt Pack, pages 13–18)

Introduce its Context first; then read the excerpt together as a group.

8 min
discuss

“What does the exchange of peace and mercy give Warren, and what does it not resolve?”

6 min
read

Excerpt 4 The Piping Plover

(Excerpt Pack, pages 20–23)

Introduce its Context first; then read the excerpt together as a group.

18 min
discuss

“The plover risks herself by drawing danger away from the egg. What kind of protection does the scene honor, and what does it refuse to guarantee?”

“What would it mean to leave the egg where it belongs and still care?”

5 min
close

Close

Keep 30 seconds of silence, then invite one word or phrase each person is taking with them. Passing is always allowed.

Whole Book

75 or 90 minutes

Discuss the complete novel using the **Part 3 question set** (Book Discussion Guide, page 5), after everyone has finished reading.

Before the meeting: Leader Preparation (page 6).

For 75 minutes, skip the extension. Use fewer questions; allow passing and silence.

10 min
open

Welcome

Read the **Discussion Guidelines** (page 7) and the **Book Content Note** (page 7).

8 min
discuss

Warm-up

“After finishing the novel, what was your first response?”

“At the kitchen table, Dodie says ‘Hello,’ calls Warren ‘Daddy,’ shares yogurt with him, and clears the table. What does Warren receive from her before he can give anything back?”

48 min
discuss

“In the Iraq account, how are duty, conscience, and love of neighbor brought into conflict? What responsibilities remain when obedience and moral judgment do not line up cleanly?”

“The notice of Warren’s death states that he was killed in Iraq and follows his body home to burial beside his mother. How did that public record change the way you heard Warren’s voice?”

“Looking back on the whole book, what is the difference between Warren coming home, being brought home, and being returned?”

15 min
discuss

Optional extension • 90 minutes total

“The wedding scene lets Warren bless Bethie and Ryan; the wedding notice shows their life continuing without him. How did those two versions of the wedding affect your sense of the ending?”

9 min
close

Close

“What image, scene, or relationship from the whole novel will stay with you longest?”

End with a brief silence and thanks; agreement is optional.

Part 1: “The Isles of Shoals”

60 or 75 minutes

Participants read Part 1 before meeting.

Before the meeting: Leader Preparation (page 6).

Use fewer questions if needed; allow passing and silence.

For 60 minutes, skip the extension and go to the closing.

8 min
open

Open the conversation

Read the Discussion Guidelines (page 7) and the Book Content Note (page 7).

7 min
discuss

Warm-up

“How did Warren’s way of telling the story affect your trust in him?”

“The man Warren meets is narrated as Jesus and asks to be called Ray. How does that double naming shape your reading?”

36 min
discuss

“Bethie is angry, funny, wounded, hospitable, and guarded in the kitchen scene. Which response from her felt most truthful to you?”

“Warren says he sent money but did not call or write Bethie. What does the story show about the cost of silence?”

15 min
discuss

Optional extension • 75 minutes total

“How do Warren’s memories of Iraq change the meaning of ordinary home scenes? Where did that collision hit hardest?”

9 min
close

Close

“What do you most want Warren to face next?”

End with a brief silence and thanks; agreement is optional.

Part 2: “Jesus in the Air”

60 or 75 minutes

Participants read Part 2 before meeting.

Before the meeting: Leader Preparation (page 6).

Use fewer questions if needed; allow passing and silence.

For 60 minutes, skip the extension and go to the closing.

8 min
open

Re-enter the conversation

Renew the participation permissions (page 7) and preview the part’s animal, cemetery, and grief material as needed.

7 min
discuss

Warm-up

“When Warren reaches his father’s house, what first stood out to you about his father?”

36 min
discuss

“Jesus’ first meeting with Warren’s father begins with a weapon and ends with Warren in his father’s arms. What makes that turn feel believable, strange, or both?”

“The doe and Dippity sit close together in the reading: one animal is killed for testing; another is bought, housed, and healed. What do those two scenes show together that neither scene would show alone?”

“At the cemetery, Warren hears his mother through the earth while Ryan hears only Warren. What kind of neighbor-love does Ryan offer in a moment he cannot fully enter or verify?”

15 min
discuss

Optional extension • 75 minutes total

“Warren expects the cemetery to give him one kind of reunion, but it gives him several different encounters instead. What does he receive there that he did not know to ask for?”

9 min
close

Close

“By the end of the cemetery scene, what has changed in Warren’s sense of home?”

End with a brief silence and thanks; agreement is optional.

Part 3: “How I Got Here”

60 or 75 minutes

Participants read Part 3 and finish the novel before meeting.

Before the meeting: Leader Preparation (page 6).

Use fewer questions if needed; allow passing and silence.

For 60 minutes, skip the extension and go to the closing.

8 min
open

Re-enter the conversation

Renew the participation permissions (page 7) and remind participants that this session includes the novel’s ending and fuller Iraq account.

7 min
discuss

Warm-up

“After finishing the novel, what was your first response?”

“At the kitchen table, Dodie says ‘Hello,’ calls Warren ‘Daddy,’ shares yogurt with him, and clears the table. What does Warren receive from her before he can give anything back?”

36 min
discuss

“In the Iraq account, how are duty, conscience, and love of neighbor brought into conflict? What responsibilities remain when obedience and moral judgment do not line up cleanly?”

“The notice of Warren’s death states that he was killed in Iraq and follows his body home to burial beside his mother. How did that public record change the way you heard Warren’s voice?”

15 min
discuss

Optional extension • 75 minutes total

“The wedding scene lets Warren bless Bethie and Ryan; the wedding notice shows their life continuing without him. How did those two versions of the wedding affect your sense of the ending?”

9 min
close

Close

“What image, scene, or relationship from the whole novel will stay with you longest?”

End with a brief silence and thanks; agreement is optional.