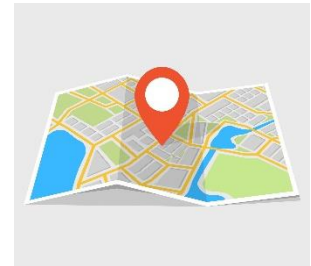


A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life

Session 1: What is the Jesus' Shaped Vision?

Welcome to your small group and to the faith study, A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life!

This season focuses on the life of Jesus and his way of love. This starting place offers us a chance to find a "true north" to orient our own journeys. We'll use the images of a road trip and a map as we move along. You might think about any road trips you've been on and how you found your way from the starting place to your destination. Along the way, we'll ask ourselves questions about what makes life meaningful – what gives this journey purpose and direction – specifically from our perspective as followers of Jesus.



Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- Did you take any road trips as a child (or more recently)? What is something you remember about the experience of traveling?
- Describe an act of kindness that you recently experienced.
- What intrigues you about the theme *A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life*? What do you think about when you hear that theme?

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, you invited us to a way of living that is generous in giving, compassionate in relating, and sacrificial in loving service to others. Grant us the desire to explore your life more deeply, gratitude to receive your love more freely, and courage to offer it to others more willingly. Amen.

Group Covenant

A group covenant guides our time together and helps us to stay focused and to have healthy conversations as a group. It is also a chance to share logistical details. The covenant is also a reminder that everyone in the group makes the group a great experience for the others. We each have roles to play as we attend, listen with an open heart, reflect and engage in dialogue.

What Does the Bible Say?

Matthew 25: 31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.' ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life."

Think About...

- As you read this text, what are you drawn to? What do you resist?
- What other words or phrases jump out for you today?
- What does this text tell us about the vision Jesus has for living life? What is your reaction to that vision?

What Do Others Say?

Writer: Kai Nilsen

What guides your life? What gives it shape? What leads to a life of flourishing?

This first session is about finding your center, your true north. The Judaic-Christian tradition insists that you are both created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26). The image of

God is who you are. You are image-bearers of the eternal God. For the moment, simply pause and say that to yourself, "I am made in the image of God!" What does that feel like? Can you believe it? Can you receive it?

The likeness of God is what you are becoming as you, over and over again, reflect the image of God in the world. You become more like God.

In the Christian narrative that emerged post-Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus was believed to be the ultimate "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1: 15). When Jesus spoke, we trust it was the voice of God. When Jesus acted in compassion, we trust it was the act of a compassionate God. When Jesus loved, we trust it reflected the love of God.

As a Jewish rabbi, Jesus would invite people to "follow." Following a rabbi didn't just mean learning what they had to teach. It also meant living the life that they led. In the case of Jesus, it was a life that reflected the nature of God.

I'm guessing in your life you have many responses to those first questions about what guides, gives shape to, and leads to flourishing. There are many paths that are good and life giving in this world.

But, for the sake of our conversation over the next few weeks, let's wonder what it would be like or look like to let Jesus be our guide, the one who gives shape to our lives, and leads to flourishing. If that is the case, where to start.

Sometimes it's helpful to begin with the end in mind. At the end of Jesus' ministry, in Matthew's Gospel, he gives us a vision of a Jesus' shaped life. Read Matthew 25: 31-40. What seems obvious is that following Jesus leads us to offer ourselves to others, particularly others in need.

What I also love about this text is that those who are following didn't even realize they were doing anything for Jesus. They were just living.

How does that happen? It happens when living for others is practiced in our lives, over and over again, to the point that we reflexively respond in the way of Jesus, even without thinking. Will it be perfect? No. Never. We need to give perfection up as a category of a Jesus shaped life.

But, it's what we were made to do (image of God) and who we were made to become (likeness of God).

You remember that phrase, "If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck."

Let's rephrase it, "If it looks like a Jesus life and feels like a Jesus life, it's probably a Jesus life."

And in our case, it's a life worth living.

In the words of the authors of the book, *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most*, "Your life is worth living. It is valuable. In fact, it's beyond valuable. It's invaluable. And precisely because it is so truly worth living, your life is worth living well. Your life is too valuable to be guided by anything less than what matters most."*

So, what matters most to you as you seek to "follow" Jesus, the image of our invisible God?

Think About... (select one or more questions)

- What did you notice in the reflection? What stood out for you?
- When you hear, "I am made in the image of God," what is your first reaction?
- What are some of the guiding forces in your life? Who or what helps you find your center or your "true north"?
- What are some characteristics for you of a Jesus' shaped vision for life? What do you think it looks like?
- Who is someone you know, who is an example for you of living out Jesus' vision?
- We all act like goats sometimes and sheep at other times. When are you more likely to act like a goat? Like a sheep? What might help you act as a sheep more consistently?
- If you could ask Jesus any question about living out a Jesus' shaped life, what would it be?

Take Away (for individual or group action & reflection)

- As you think about the life of Jesus, what one characteristic would you most like to emulate? What specific action can you take to embody that characteristic this week?
- Find out more about Incarnation's ministry partners. Check the Incarnation website (see the last

Road Trip Playlist – *Be Thou My Vision*

(ELW #793)

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art:
thou my best thought both by day and by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

As part of the group or later on your own, look at the text for this hymn and read a short reflection by Amy Maakestad. There is also a link to a recording. See the Road Trip Playlist Notes at the end of this guide.

page). Select one or two organizations and look at their webpage too. What kinds of volunteer roles happen in this place? Select one organization to pray for this week.

Blessing (*share the date and location for the next gathering*)

Remember that you are a child of God, chosen and marked by love, the pride of God's life.

-Mark 1:11 from *The Message*

Learn about Incarnation's Ministry Partners:

Ministry Partners: <https://www.incarnationmn.org/ministries/ministry-partners/>

Faith and Social Justice: <https://www.incarnationmn.org/ministries/faith-and-social-justice/>

Serve: <https://www.incarnationmn.org/serve/>

*Volf, M., Crossmun, M. & McAnnaly, R. (2023). *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most*, The Open Field. p. 283.

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A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life

Session 1: What is the Jesus' Shaped Vision?

Road Trip Playlist

Be Thou My Vision (ELW #793)

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art:
thou my best thought both by day and by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord,
Thou my soul's shelter, and thou my high tow'r,
raise thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always:
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.

Light of my soul, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

*Text: Irish, 8th century.; verses by Eleanor H. Hull, 1860-1935, alt.; translated by Mary E. Byrne, 1880-1931.
Tune: SLANE, Irish traditional.*

Think About... What word or phrase from this hymn speaks to you today?

Playlist Notes

Writer: Amy Maakestad

Be Thou My Vision is a prayer. There is an expectation present throughout this hymn that prayer will be answered. The hymn writer knows that God of heaven and God the powerful Ruler is the source of light and joy. In addition to a plea for God's constant presence, petitions are made for wisdom, truth, and protection. The entire text is a vision of life and

the afterlife when Christ is at the center of all things. Especially paired with the familiar, inspiring tune, this Irish text from the 8th century still resonates centuries later.

A very wealthy blind man, known as Dallan Furgail, wrote this poem that would eventually be translated to the hymn we know today. Does knowing this about the poet change the way you think about this hymn?

Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myPtTzwHofQ>

Search YouTube: Be Thou My Vision with Catholic Music Initiative

Listen in Irish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJ0aINUzMSU>

Search YouTube: *Be Thou My Vision* with Tallyn Prescott

Listen with Violin and Harp: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZfD5KrH5d8>

Search YouTube: *Be Thou My Vision* with Webb Family Music