

# ***A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life***

## ***Session 2: You Are Here on the Map***

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

*If you've ever taken a road trip, you know that the map begins with "you are here..." Today is a good time to take stock of where you are in your journey of faith and ask for God's guidance in taking the next step.*



*Jesus wants you to know that your starting place is as a beloved child of God. From that place, Jesus also wants you to know that you have unique gifts and experiences to share, a purpose to live out, and the potential to make a difference for others. How do you stay on course and continue to remember your value as beloved and your chance to show others God's love and grace?*

### **Opening Questions** *(select 1 or 2 questions)*

- What is a good thing happening in your life right now? What brings you joy?
- Share about a place where you feel at home.
- When you think about the road you are on right now, in your life, how would you describe it (scenic, curvy, bumpy, smooth...)?

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, thank you for meeting us right where we are, in our confidence and confusion, in our trusting and as we deal with temptation. Give us your grace as we travel through life. Be with us today and guide us to listen to one another with open hearts. Grant us the energy of hopefulness as we live each new day. Amen.

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

#### **Psalm 139: 7-16**

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and night wraps itself around me,  
<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup> For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

**Think About...** *(optional, depending on time)*

- What did you notice in the Bible reading? What words or phrases are you drawn to?
- What does the psalm tell us about God?
- What does the psalm tell us about our relationship with God?
- The psalmist tells us we are "wonderfully made" by God. What gifts has God given you? How are you, through your gifts, being a blessing to others?
- What emotions or feelings do you hear in this psalm?
- The psalmist describes God's presence as being inescapable – in heaven, in Sheol, in the farthest limits of the sea... What do you think about this?

## **What Do Others Say?**

*Writer: Janet Karvonen-Montgomery*

In the late 1970s, our small-town girls' basketball team from New York Mills (population 791) traveled to "The Cities" to play in the Minnesota State Basketball Tournament. In addition to winning state championships, we were also thrilled about going to the mall! With a few dollars in our pockets, our coach turned us loose at Southdale Center in Edina, America's first indoor shopping mall. So much to explore! We ran up the escalators marked "down". We ran down the escalators marked "up". Teenagers! (In our defense, we had never seen escalators before.)

Eventually, we'd regroup at the kiosk map, immediately finding the "You Are Here" locator. The "You Are Here" dot was important: to reorient ourselves in relation to the mall, to share information and tips we'd gathered, to catch our breath from the shenanigans, and to plot the next move. We were strategic to make the most of the time we had before loading up the school bus to return to the hotel.

Years later, when I had the opportunity to move to the Twin Cities for a job, I chose to live near Southdale Center. I was single and the familiar surroundings were comforting to me. It was an area I knew and from this marking point, I could figure out the next steps in my journey.

Time flies. Life goes fast. You are here.

Do you ever look in the mirror and wonder where you are or how you got here? Where did that gray hair come from?! Taking time to reflect can conjure up all kinds of feelings about what has brought you to this place in your life. Perhaps you recall a significant event like a relocation, an illness or death, a marriage or divorce, the birth of a child. Sometimes, this type of experience can mark the timeline of your life in a defining way.

Other milestones like retirement or even a class reunion can bring you to a reflective place where memories flood your mind, sending you into a state of joy, disbelief, wondering, regret, sadness, gratitude, or other emotions.

The apostle Paul named his own inner turmoil as he reflected on how he couldn't avoid the sinful actions he had taken in his life. He wrote of the intense struggle between his desire to live a God-honoring life and the sinful nature that caused him to do otherwise. Paul knew he could not win this battle through his own efforts. His only hope was through the freedom already won through Jesus Christ.

*Romans 7: 15-20 (NRSV)*

*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

As people of faith, we have been given a lens, to look at our lives through God's profound love for humanity. Like Paul, we acknowledge that we fall short of following God's commands to love our neighbors as ourselves. Yet, created in God's image, we are saved by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and given the Holy Spirit to accompany us on our journey. We are never alone. Each day is a new opportunity to start again, washed by the gift of grace. This perspective changes everything.

In the times we feel most alone, it is important to remember God's promise to be with us. It really doesn't matter where we are physically located or what our history has been. We have an eternal vantage point: God, you are here with me, with us.

God is omnipresent, present everywhere all the time. The God who created all there is—including us—has promised to be with us on every step of our life journey.

Read Psalm 139 again, this time from *The Message*, a paraphrase for contemporary readers.

*Psalm 139: 7-16 (The Message)*

*Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?  
to be out of your sight?*

*If I climb to the sky, you're there!*

*If I go underground, you're there!*

*If I flew on morning's wings*

*to the far western horizon,*

*You'd find me in a minute—*

*you're already there waiting!*

*Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!"*

*At night I'm immersed in the light!"*

*It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;*

*night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.*

As we acknowledge where we are, we can be honest about our lives and our need for God. Left on our own, we can forget the promise of God's presence with us. Connecting with others in faith reminds us of our faithful God who created us, loves us, and promises to be with us always.

*"I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us." Annie Lamott*

God, you are here with me, with us! What an amazing realization to cling to and embody as we reflect on our mountain tops and darkest valleys. Knowing this truth can help us find where we are on the map of our lives. Then, with God's presence, love, and grace, we can find a new way forward.

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

- What were you drawn to in the reflection? What did you resist?
- What important events or experiences have helped to define where/who you are today?
- What events or experiences have helped to define where you are in your faith? What are the marking points in your faith journey?
- Who reminds you of God's love for you today? Who has helped you along the way in your faith journey? How?
- What is something that serves as a compass for you or grounds you in your life or faith? (For example: a core belief or understanding about faith, Bible verse, line from a hymn, person, sacred symbol, sacred place or a faith practice...).
- When do you feel most present to God? Are there times when God has felt far away? What helped you through those times?
- Where do we find comfort, as Christians, when we stumble and fall?
- Read the quote from Ann Lamott again. How does grace propel you forward?
- Where or when do you feel you are following a Jesus' shaped vision for life? What would it look like to move closer to a Jesus' shaped vision for life?

**Road Trip Playlist – Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song, ELW #808**

Lord Jesus, you shall be my song  
as I journey;  
I'll tell ev'rybody about you  
wherever I go:  
you alone are our life and our  
peace and our love.  
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song  
as I journey.

*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.*

**Take Away** *(for individual or group action & reflection)*

- Reflect or journal, using these questions... If you could be honest with Jesus about where you are on your journey, what would you say? If you could be hopeful about moving forward, how would you ask Jesus to help and guide you? Add this to your prayers.
- At the end of each day this week, take 5-10 minutes and name three things you are grateful for today. Be present to the simple gifts of this day and give thanks to God.
- Ask God to help you to discern the gifts you have to make the world better – gifts to use in the next steps of your faith journey.
  - Ask a friend or family member to tell you something you are good at.
  - Use a spiritual gift assessment to learn about your gifts:  
[www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Spiritual-Renewal/Assessment-Tools?\\_ga=2.137161656.928782658.1692320246-1273495918.1692320246](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Spiritual-Renewal/Assessment-Tools?_ga=2.137161656.928782658.1692320246-1273495918.1692320246)

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

May God's grace meet you where you are today in helpful and hopeful ways. Amen.

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*For more on Bible translations:*

*<https://www.thenivbible.com/bible-translation-chart/>*

# ***A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life***

## ***Session 2: You are Here on the Map***

### **Road Trip Playlist**

#### **Lord, Jesus, You Shall Be My Song (ELW #808)**

Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey;  
I'll tell ev'rybody about you wherever I go:  
you alone are our life and our peace and our love.  
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.

Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.  
May all of my joy be a faithful reflection of you.  
May the earth and the sea and the sky join my song.  
Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.

As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant,  
to carry your cross and to share all your burdens and tears.  
For you saved me by giving your body and blood.  
As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant.

I fear in the dark and the doubt of my journey;  
but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side.  
And with all of the fam'ly you saved by your love,  
we'll sing to your dawn at the end of our journey.

*Text: Les Petites Soeurs de Jésus and L'Arche Community; tr. Stephen Somerville © 1970 Stephen Somerville  
Tune: LES PETITES SOEURS, Les Petites Soeurs de Jésus and L'Arche Community, text and music © Les Petites Soeurs de Jésus*

**Listen:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFxmIT\\_NJyo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFxmIT_NJyo)

#### **Playlist Notes**

*Writer: Amy Maakestad*

With a perfect pairing of beautiful melody and text, this hymn feels like a big hug. It frames personal faith as a lifelong journey, accompanied by song, with Jesus at the center. That is a comforting perspective! Everything in nature joins together in a chorus of praise: the earth,

the sea, and the sky. In addition, there is a community of believers at different points on the same journey and all the saints who have completed it. The whole of creation is connected.

The fourth verse begins with outright honesty: acknowledgement of fear and doubt. How many times have we felt this on our own journey? The text then immediately pivots to courage with the assurance that Jesus is always present, walking alongside us.