

A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life

Session 5: Rest Stops and Sacred Sites

Thanks for traveling with your small group through this season!

Today, you are invited to pause, be renewed and rest in God's grace and love. Where are the rest stops that give you a chance to catch your breath and notice how God is present in the world around you? How can you watch for the ways God shows up in everyday experiences – in conversations with others or in daily tasks and obligations or in setting aside your "to do" lists to pay attention.



God desires for you to be present – to let go of the things from yesterday that hold you back and to release the anxiety you feel about tomorrow to live into today. Watch for signs of God's creative activity all around you. Rest knowing you are loved by God.

Opening Questions *(select 1 or 2 questions)*

- Describe one of your favorite peaceful places.
- Do you have a favorite rest stop or restaurant to stop at, whether you are on a long road trip or simply around the Twin Cities?
- Just as a road trip is marked by mile markers and highway signs, life is marked by celebrations and milestones. Share one of the memorable milestones in your life.

In the Rearview Mirror

- What question or insight from an earlier session have you continued to think about or wonder about (if any)? Did you try any of the take-away actions? How did it go?

Opening Prayer

Ever present God, all of life comes from you – our bodies, our minds, our capacity to interact and relate. Help us to be more fully aware of the abundant blessings around us. Surprise us with extraordinary experiences of your grace and love and help us to savor the ordinary moments of goodness and joy. Amen.

What Does the Bible Say?

Luke 10: 38-42

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

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

- What did you notice in the Bible reading? What words or phrases stood out to you?
- When have you been in a circumstance similar to the story of Mary and Martha? How did it feel? What did you think about at the time?
- What is the "only one thing" that Jesus wants you to pay attention to today?

What Do Others Say?

Writer: Joel Vander Wal

WHAM! Thud . . . thud . . . thud. WHAM! Thud . . . thud . . . thud.

"JOEL! JOEL! You really should take a break. Drink some wa---"

WHAM! Thud . . . thud . . . thud.

"JOEL! Stop!"

I paused for a moment to look up. It was my Youth Director, Randy. He was attempting to get me to stop ripping apart the rocky ground next to the Refugio Internacional De Niños orphanage in Reynosa, Mexico. This was my third mission trip in as many years to Reynosa. One of the jobs we were given was to build a trench from their well to each of the six casas that the children lived in with two adults. We had started this project last year and had made some good progress, but this year it was slower going. The heat was in the high 90s that July day and most of the high schoolers with me were sitting in the shade taking a break. My blister filled hands were shaking from the repetitive motion of swinging the pickaxe and hitting rock.

"Didn't they understand?" I thought to myself. "There's work that needs to be done. We're only here for one more day and we still have at least 50 feet to go."

WHAM! Thud . . . thud . . . CRACK!

The handle broke. Again. This was the second pickaxe handle that had broken that day and the third of the week. Defeated, I walked over to the shade and drank some water. "Randy, we're not going to finish."

"That's okay, Joel," he said, looking empathetically into my eyes. "We're not here just to dig a trench. We're also here to play with kids, to sing songs in Spanish and teach them about Jesus' love for them." Standing up, he said, "Come on, let's go find some kids to play fútbol with."

Do you ever find yourself getting so distracted or worried about important tasks that you may neglect some of the relationships around you, as I did? This story of Mary and Martha highlights those dynamics in such powerful ways. Perhaps what is most interesting is verse 40, "Martha was worried and distracted by her many **tasks** . . ." In Greek the word translated as "tasks" can also be translated as "ministries." In Greek, it shares the same root word with "deacon." Martha is performing diaconal ministry. She is serving those around her through the ancient customs, rules and expectations of practicing hospitality.

Jesus' response to Martha is coming from a place of compassion, and gentle reproach. I imagine him closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. Meeting Martha's eyes with a gentle and concerned smile, and continuing, "Martha, Martha, you are **worried** and **distracted** by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (vv. 41) It amazes me, how quickly Jesus can deescalate a situation like this. He sees the frenzied look on his friend Martha's face, and the panicked look on Mary's face as she wonders if her Teacher is going to make her get up and join Martha in these acts of ministry. Through it all, Jesus recognizes "the better part" and that Mary has chosen it.

God is present with us no matter where we go, or what we do. God sees the frenzied pace with which we live our lives, doing acts of ministry. On our road of discovering the Jesus' shaped vision for our lives, there are parts of that journey we cannot do for ourselves and need to trust and rest in God. Maybe for you it's simply being reminded of that promise given in Baptism, "Beloved child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

As you continue in your time together as a small group, pause for a word of prayer and position your hands so that your palms are facing down. In this position invite one another to release to

God those things they are worried about or distracted with. Release them to God and trust God to hold those things for you. Next, have your palms facing up, and invite your small group to receive from God whatever it is that they stand most in need of at this time. Peace. Grace. Love. Assurance. Forgiveness. Whatever it might be, trust the Spirit of God to know and fulfill that in this time.

Stop.

Rest.

Be.

Before continuing, take a moment to pause and experience the prayer practice above.

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

- What did you notice in the reflection? What stood out for you?
- What makes it so difficult for us to stop and rest? What might be behind our reluctance to rest (for example, core beliefs, values, past experiences...)?
- When are you most likely to become distracted or worried about things you need to do, and thus set aside your relationships with friends, family or others? What have you done, once you realized this was happening?
- What has helped you to take time to rest? What gives you the kind of rest that is truly renewing (not just another way of being busy)?
- In Greek, the word tasks can be translated as ministries. How does that change how you think about the tasks you perform every day?
- What is the blessing that Mary brings? What is the blessing that Martha brings (maybe at another time or in other circumstances)? How do you discern when to be in Martha's role and when to be more like Mary?
- Are there times when you believe that rest isn't the best approach for you at that time? If so, what are the circumstances?
- What drives us to complete our tasks, even when we are tired and making slow or little progress, and rest could help us make more progress?
- What is something you'd like to remember from the theme, *A Jesus' Shaped Vision for Life* or from our small group time?

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

- At the end of the day today, take 5-10 minutes and reflect on: How was God present in my life today? How can I be God's presence to others this coming week?
- Draw a map of your faith journey up to today. Continue drawing the map, reflecting on what you think a Jesus' shaped vision looks like for you going forward.
- As you begin or end each day, slowly recite these words from Psalm 46:10:

Be still and know that I am God (pause for a moment)

Be still and know that I am (pause again)

Be still and know (pause)

Be still (pause)

Be (pause until your mind is more at peace)

Closing Prayer

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

For more on this prayer see:

<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2022/05/a-prayer-for-guidance/>

Blessing

May you experience the simple wonder of God's presence and love each day.

Thank you for being part of this small group!

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**Milner-White, Eric and G.W.Briggs, Daily Prayer (page 14). Oxford University Press. 1941. Also appears in the Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW) on page 137 and the Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) on page 317. www.augsburgfortress.org. CCLI: 404667.*

Road Trip Playlist – How Small Our Span of Life, ELW #636

We thank you, God, for kindling faith that lights our transient years, illumining our pilgrimage through mists of doubt and fears; for hope that sees a life beyond the swiftly passing days; for love, both human and divine, that lifts our hearts to praise.

As part of the group or on your own, read this hymn and a short reflection by Amy Maakestad and listen to recording.

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Road Trip Playlist

How Small Our Span of Life (ELW #636)

How small our span of life, O God, our years from birth till death:
a single beat within the heart, the catching of a breath,
a drop within the ocean's deep, a grain upon the shore,
a flash of light before we sleep to see the sun no more.

And yet our speck of life is spanned by your infinity;
our tick of time on earth is caught in your eternity.
While suns and stars spin endlessly through depths of cosmic space,
while aeons roll and ages pass, you hold us in your grace.

O Christ, you left eternity to plunge in time's swift stream,
to share the shortness of our span, our mortal lives redeem.
You filled your cross-closed years with love; you loved us to the end
and touch us with your risen life that ours may time transcend.

We thank you, God, for kindling faith that lights our transient years,
illuminating our pilgrimage through mists of doubt and fears;
for hope that sees a life beyond the swiftly passing days;
for love, both human and divine, that lifts our hearts to praise.

Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjw61loCG3o>

Search YouTube: *How Small Our Span of Life* with Mary Munson

Playlist Notes

Writer: Amy Maakestad

There is a colossal gap between the speck of time of humanity and the eternity of God. This gap is bridged by Christ, who came to us in love, that we might know everlasting life. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, met us in the messiness of life and showed us how to be with one another during all of it. On our faith journey, we are invited to reside in "hope that sees a life beyond the swiftly passing days."

This is not the most popular hymn text, only appearing in two hymnals. Even though it is paired with a familiar tune, the words go by so quickly that much of it gets lost when singing. Taking some time to thoroughly read this hymn reveals its depth.

Text: Herman G. Stuempfle Jr., b. 1923, © 1993 GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: KINGSFOLD, English traditional