

Leader's Guide

Facilitation tips are provided throughout in green. These do not appear on the participant handout.

Study: Freeing Jesus

Week 8: August 13 – August 19

Chapter: Conclusion

Study Big Idea: Freeing Jesus is an invitation to meet Jesus again for the first time by encountering many Jesuses. Regardless of your religious (or non-religious background) you'll be inspired to get Jesus out of the unhelpful confines you (or the religious traditions you've experienced) constructed for him. Allow yourself to rediscover Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence.

Chapter Big Idea: We all know Jesus through our experience. Diana Butler Bass has related her experiences of Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way and Presence while also alluding to Jesus as Lover, Word, Wisdom and Sustenance. In concluding, she affirms that Jesus is all of these and much more; Jesus is universal, welcoming and inclusive.

Icebreaker: Tell us about a friendship you've experienced as an adult that you never imagined possible as a child. (The barrier that made this seem unlikely or impossible in your childhood could be one of religion, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, vocation, language, or something else entirely.)

Opening Prayer: Jesus, we seek to know you and to experience your incredible and inclusive love. We offer this prayer in some of your all-inclusive names: Ground of Being, Heart of Creation, Universal Christ. Amen.

The names used here are from the list Diana Butler Bass provides on p.260.

Scripture Reading: When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:13-15, NIV)

Freeing Jesus Reading: This is the truth of Jesus. That Jesus – the one known intimately as friend and teacher, experienced as Savior and Lord, who guides on the way and inhabits the ordinary – is also the Universal Jesus, the welcoming and inclusive Jesus, the Jesus of the circle and in the circle, the all in all (p. 261).

Discussion Questions:

1. Diana Butler Bass succinctly states, “We know Jesus through our experience” (p.264). What has been our past experience with Jesus? What do you hope your future experience with Jesus will be like? How can this group support you as you continue on your journey?

This includes an important “what next” question. As people move on from this experience, how will it shape or inform their next steps. Take as much time as is needed here. It’s totally fine if this one question requires most of your time together.

2. In your opinion, where does Jesus most need to be freed? What might freeing Jesus from this look like?
3. All people have not been equally welcome to contributing their wisdom to the body of knowledge we call theology. For much of the 2,000 year history of Christianity groups have been excluded or made to feel less than, including “men and women of color, indigenous people, LGBTQ people, disabled people, working class people, laity, anyone outside the academy, the poor and outcast” (p.265). How has this impacted you? How can you be more intentional about modeling inclusivity now and in the future? How can your church?

We can’t change the past, but we all have a role in creating a future Christianity that truly welcomes all people in all kinds of ministry.

4. After reading this book and reflecting on your life experiences and encounters with Jesus, are there any you need to let go of? Cling to? Continue learning from?
5. What are the one or two names for Jesus that you currently find most relatable or impactful in your own life? Why? What are one or two names for Jesus that you don’t connect with easily or deeply? Why? Share one name for Jesus that you learned during this study or that you now understand differently because of this study.
6. You have now completed the first small group book study of a book chosen by your group. Take a moment to celebrate this milestone then share what you most appreciated about the experience and one thing you’d like to see go differently next time.

If new ideas emerge that might benefit the small groups ministry as a whole, please be sure to share those with your Small Group Ministry Team Leader.

For ideas specific to your group, be sure you socialize how these are utilized in future experiences. Group members are often the best source of ways to continue making the small group experience even more meaningful.

Reflection: Much has been written about Jesus, including this book. Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence are some of the ways to broaden our understanding and to open us to the possibility of a Universal Christ.

Closing Prayer: God of Many Names, we give thanks for the time we've spent meeting Jesus again over the last several weeks. Help us to appreciate our increased understanding of who Jesus is, continue on the journey of strengthening our relationships with Jesus and with one another, and widen the circles we find ourselves in so that all may know love. Amen.