

Leader's Guide

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

Study: Freeing Jesus

Week 5: July 23 – 29

Chapter: Lord

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: When the first disciples declared "Jesus is Lord," they were making a political statement. In effect, they were saying Jesus is the one with the ultimate authority rather than Cesar. Jesus' kingdom is radically different from the kingdoms of this world, so much so, that we are called to think about it as a kin-dom (the liberating family of God working together for justice).

For the second week in a row we are exploring a theologically deep chapter that likely includes content new to many in your group. While we are very intentional about keeping partisan politics out of the small groups ministry, it is essential to recognize that Christianity is inherently political as is the title of "Lord."

Icebreaker: Titles are everywhere in our culture. Share the most unusual title you've ever heard someone use to describe you or a role you've had (or tell us about the most extra, one-of-a-kind, or unexpected title you've ever heard used for someone else). How do you think others perceived the person differently because of this title?

Opening Prayer: As a people of hope, we come together to grow in our faith. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us now and always. Amen.

Did you know? The final sentence of this prayer comes from Scripture (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Scripture Reading: Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. (2 Corinthians 4:5, The Message).

Most translations use “Lord” rather than “Master” here (ex: NRSV For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake). Keep the focus on who Jesus is – specifically, Jesus is Master and Lord (two valid interpretive options for translating this Greek word as everyone will learn in the Freeing Jesus reading below).

Freeing Jesus Reading: Early Christians often proclaimed their faith in three words: “Jesus is Lord.”” Historians refer to this as an early creedal affirmation, but it was really more of a theological slogan. At its simplest level, the Greek term *kyrios*, meaning “lord” or “master,” quite literally meant the one who owns you. Slaves called their masters “lord,” students often referred to revered teachers as “master,” and workers might call their employers “lord.”

In a world where millions were held in slavery and millions of others live in poverty and powerlessness at the bottom of a rigged social hierarchy, claiming Jesus as “Lord” announced one’s liberation from oppression.

. . . As Christians were baptized into their new master, Jesus, according to Paul, who includes an early baptismal creed in his letter to the Galatians: “There is no longer slave or free for you are one in Christ Jesus” (p. 120).

. . . But because Cesar was Lord of all, saying “Jesus is Lord” also carried political connotations. Especially when those who professed “Jesus is Lord” also refused to say “Cesar is Lord.” . . . “Jesus is Lord” meant far more than “Jesus is my personal master.” It meant, “If Jesus is Lord, Cesar is not” (p. 121).

The whole section from which these excerpts are taken provides scholarly insight that may be new for many people. It’s appropriate to pause and give some time for people to process. And, be aware that discussion about this is included in Q3 below.

Discussion Questions:

1. Prior to reading this chapter, when you thought of Jesus as “Lord,” what words, images, and phrases came to mind? What memory of “Jesus as Lord” stands out for you as you think back through your journey of faith?
2. In life, there are many things (other than Jesus) that we allow to function as Lord or Master. What are some examples of people, structures, or relationships that have been Lord or Master of your life at some point in time (this could be your life as a whole or some key part of it).

Be aware may surface topics like unhealthy relationships and addiction. Let people share their own stories, but be sure group members don’t press for more information than any person is ready to share. If someone identifies a current issue that is beyond what’s appropriate for care within your small group, know that there are resources through Cathedral of Hope, including Hope in Recovery small groups.

3. Reflect on this lesson's book reading, which includes several excerpts from Diana Butler Bass' exploration of the Greek term *kyrios* (Lord/Master). Given the radical, political, and personal components of declaring "Jesus is Lord," what is your comfort level with stating this as your own statement of faith?

The statement may feel heavier or more significant based on new knowledge.

4. Since Jesus' kingdom or empire looks so different from that of what his hearers were experiencing of earthly kingdoms in the first century or what we are experiencing of earthly empires in the twenty-first century, finding new language helps us imagine the possibilities of Jesus' proposal. Diana Butler Bass introduces the term "kin-dom," which she explains is all about "the liberating family of God working together for love and justice" (p.149). Is the idea of the kin-dom of God new for you? In what ways does this word "kin-dom" and the imagery it suggests enrich or expand your understanding?

The family element in kin-dom is about as different as possible from the relational element of a person to a kingdom or empire. It is intended to draw out the very best elements of life in relationship. In a kin-dom everyone matters.

5. Of the names we've explored so far – Friend, Teacher, Savior, and Lord – which one do you find most meaningful? Why? Is there one you'd happily remove from the list if given that option? What is it about the name that _____?

Reflection: Jesus is Lord. From the earliest days of Christianity, followers of the Way of Jesus have been asserting Jesus' Lordship. For many Mainline Christians, the names Lord and Master are not ones we use all that often. They do, however, provide insight about the importance and authority we ascribe to Jesus.

Closing Prayer: Reflecting on all we've learned and are learning, we pray these words from an ancient creed: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made." It is to this Jesus we pray, asking that through our faith and actions, we would co-create Jesus' endless kingdom – a kin-dom of love, justice, and peace. Amen.

The creed mentioned here is the Nicene Creed. The section of this creed that deals with Jesus concludes with the statement "his kingdom will have no end."