

## Leader's Guide

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

Study: Freeing Jesus

Week 3: July 9 – 15

Chapter: Teacher

**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:** The pages of the Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus teaching. His favorite way to teach was not to lecture on doctrine, but rather to tell stories called parables. Jesus invited his original followers and now invites us to listen and learn in order to find meaning – a discovery that shapes the ways we live and love.

**Icebreaker:** Tell us about one of your favorite teachers (from childhood or from your adult years). Why do you have such fond memories of this teacher? How did they positively impact your life?

**Opening Prayer:** Teacher, Rabbi, Storyteller, Sage, you come bearing good news of God's beautiful, diverse, upside-down, inclusive kin-dom. Rather than merely hearing and affirming your message, may we be transformed by it and empowered to live boldly as your disciples. Amen.

**Scripture Reading:** You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. (John 13:13, NRSV)

**Freeing Jesus Reading:** Jesus tells stories called parables. They are not rules, commands, or doctrine. Instead, they are open-ended tales that invite us to struggle with their meaning, to wonder, to see the world from unexpected angles. Amy-Jill Levine says that they are “mysterious,” in that parables “challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, our own lives. They bring to the surface unasked questions, and the reveal the answers we have always known, but refused to acknowledge” (p.43).

## Discussion Questions:

1. What is the first (or one of the first) of Jesus' many stories or parables you remember learning? Who introduced you to this story? What did you think about it back then? How do you understand it now?

If folks don't immediately call to mind stories or parables, offer up some examples: Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, Lost Sheep, Mustard Seed, Hidden Treasure, etc.

2. According to Diana Butler Bass, "of the ninety or so times Jesus is addressed in the New Testament, roughly sixty refer to him as 'teacher,' 'rabbi,' 'great one,' or 'master.'" Why do you think this is the most common way people referred to Jesus? What kind of teacher do you consider Jesus to be?
3. Share something from this week's reading that captured your attention – a passage that provided you with new insight, an idea that you're struggling with, something that is unclear or just doesn't make sense, or a concept you'd like to hear more about from the perspective of another group member. What about this passage interests you?

This is the second of six core chapters in *Freeing Jesus*. This chapter and the next four are around 40 to 50 pages in length (much longer than the readings for weeks one and two). Discussion questions will touch upon big ideas from the chapter, but won't be able to address each subsection or idea presented. This open-ended question both enables group members to contribute personal learning and reinforces the value of completing the assigned reading.

4. As Christians, we seek to learn from Jesus' teachings. What does being a "good student of Jesus" look like in your life?

If no one mentions small group, consider asking a follow up question such as "How does our small group help you in your quest to be a good student of Jesus" or "Are there ways our group might adapt a bit that would better assist you in becoming a better student of Jesus?"

5. Which of the teachings of Jesus is the most compelling or attractive to you? Which teaching is the most challenging or frustrating? Why?

**Reflection:** Jesus is a master teacher. He intentionally communicated through timeless stories or parables that require listeners to discern their meaning and apply it in their own lives. Jesus' key message was that God's love is for all and that God's empire (or, if you prefer, kingdom, kin-dom, realm, or reign) is unlike any earthly empire.

Each lesson concludes with a reflection. Even if you don't have time to discuss all of the questions in the guide, be sure to end with the reflection to help people connect with the session's big idea.

**Closing Prayer:** Loving God, we are grateful for the life and ministry of Jesus. In times when life is going well and everything is stable, use these stories to challenge and disorient us. In times of crisis and instability, use these stories to reassure and comfort us. And, at all times, use these stories to shape us more and more into the image of the Storyteller. Amen.