

## Leader's Guide

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

Study: Freeing Jesus

Week 6: July 30 – August 5

Chapter: Way

**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:** Jesus is the Way. While the Bible verse in which Jesus proclaims that he is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) has been used by some to create an image of Jesus that is exclusive and limited, the meaning of "way" is far more complex. At its core, the "way" is the way of love. And, Jesus invites us to follow him on this way – a journey filled with mystery, surprise, and unexpected turns.

**Icebreaker:** Tell us about one of your all-time favorite road trip experiences. What did you enjoy about this journey?

**Opening Prayer:** Loving One, help us to stop focusing on the destination and to begin being fully present to the possibilities of each step on our journey. May we be agents of love in ways beyond our own expectations and with people we've grown to like and those we seek to avoid. And, may our time together be blessed with more questions than answers. Amen.

Many people are used to inquiry that results in a correct answer. In the life of faith, inquiry can be as, or, at times, even more important than answers. Help create a safe space in your group for people to struggle, to learn, to grow, and to ask hard questions – including ones without easy answers.

**Scripture Reading:** All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master's disciples, out for the kill. He went to the Chief Priest and got arrest warrants to take to the meeting places in Damascus so that if he found anyone there belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he could arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem.

He set off. When he got to the outskirts of Damascus, he was suddenly dazed by a blinding flash of light. As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you out to get me?" He said, "Who are you, Master?" "I am Jesus, the One you're hunting down (Acts 9:1-5, The Message).

The Apostle Paul started out as the hateful persecutor Saul. He was utterly transformed by what we now call his Damascus Road experience – the very experience that happens here in Acts 9 (and continues in the following verses). What’s key here is that by this time those who follow Jesus are being identified as followers of the Way. Jesus’ followers were known as people or followers of the Way before later becoming known as Christians.

**Freeing Jesus Reading:** The way of Jesus is the way of love. It is also a labyrinth, a “meandering but purposeful path from the edge to the center and back again”

. . . Jesus is no interstate to glory, as I had thought in high school, college, and seminary. I had been so certain. Then I was not certain anymore. Everything fell to pieces. And new life began, and love. The Jesus way is full of switchbacks, spirals, and unexpected turns; mystery, paradox, unknowing, unsaying. Whenever you think you are near the center, the path suddenly veers off in a different direction and you find yourself again at the edge of the way. No wonder Jesus says, “Follow me” and “I am the way.” But for a guide, you might never find a path, even if sometimes you are only following bread crumbs he left behind (p. 213-214).

Have you ever walked a labyrinth? The pattern is obvious before beginning, but the experience is often far more meaningful than the lines might suggest. Each person’s path for following Jesus is unique, yet we share elements of that journey with others.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. One of the most popular metaphors for the Christian life is “journey.” In two minutes or less, how would you describe your journey of faith?

Encourage wider participation with this question than you normally would. Talking about our lived experience of following Jesus and relating some of the twists, turns, or transitions helps reassure others that no two experiences are alike but that nearly all include detours.

2. “[Jesus] not only taught a way inviting the curious to follow him, but said he was the way” (p. 165). According to Diana Butler Bass, what does this mean? Do you think of Jesus as “the way”? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to you to be part of the “way” if the way is defined as “The way is the way of love, as Jesus himself said, ‘Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35)’” (p. 201). How have you experienced the way of love through Cathedral of Hope?
4. “Being Christian is about finding and getting found by Jesus” (p. 170). Do you agree or disagree with this remark? What has your experience of finding Jesus looked like so far in life? In what ways have you been found by Jesus?

5. In this chapter, Diana shared how her own understanding expanded and how she escaped a “cage” with the help of a few key people, including Will and Gary. Who has been most helpful to you as you’ve sought to expand your understanding of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him?

As people share their stories listen closely to the “how” component. If someone shares Name of Person really helped me see this aspect or element of Jesus differently, follow up with “how did they help you” or “what about your relationship with that person helped open the door to this new understanding?”

**Reflection:** In a culture enamored with goals and status, we are presented with a Jesus who is as focused on the journey as the destination. Jesus is the Way. The Way is a path that isn’t fully clear but becomes clear with each step we take. And, it’s a path that is covered with love.

**Closing Prayer:** Help us to be people of love remembering the part of the Bible some call the Great Commandment or Greatest Commandment and others call The Jesus Creed:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Love. The way of Jesus is the way of love. Help us be people who live according to this way. Amen.

New Testament scholar Scot McKnight is credited with popularizing the term “Jesus Creed” as a way of helping people from creedal traditions (denominations that rely on the historic Christian creeds) and non-creedal Christians unite around what mattered most to Jesus.