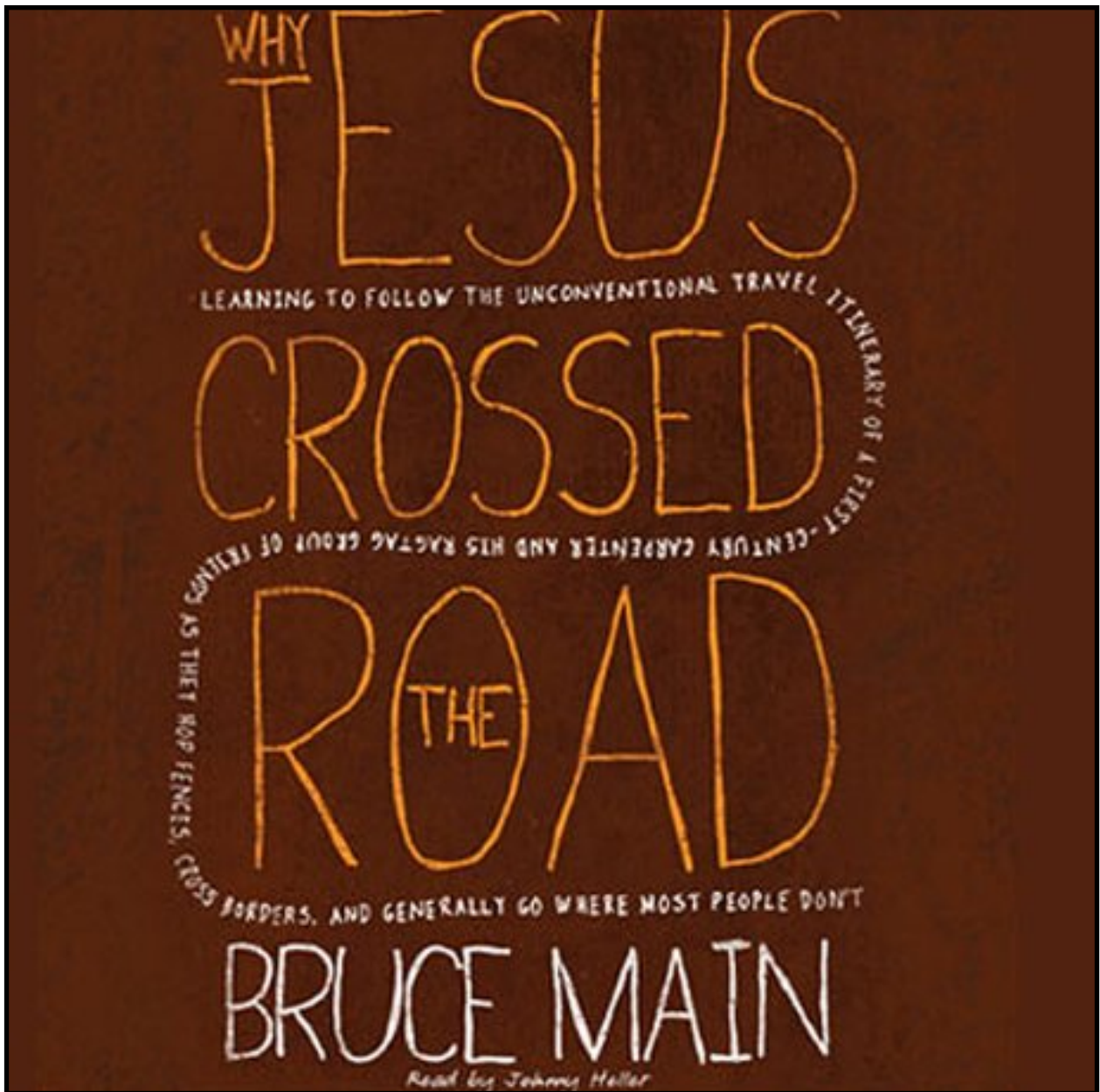


2023 LENTEN STUDY GUIDE



**First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown
101 Bridgeboro Rd.
Moorestown, NJ 08057**

INTRODUCTION

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for participating in First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown's 2023 Lenten study *Why Jesus Crossed the Road: Following the Unconventional Travel Itinerary of Jesus*. The people and places Jesus visited were not a product of happenstance, rather, Jesus intentionally chose to visit people from various walks of life — the poor, the marginalized, the sick, the religious and political elite, and those these institutions took advantage of or ostracized from society. Jesus went to the places most 21st century Christians would find difficult. Jesus refused to “tow the line” of the religious and social norms and instead chose love over social and religious apathy. Jesus saw all people, from all walks of life, as people created in the very image and likeness of God and thus people in need of redemption and healing.

As Christians we are called to be ambassadors of this good news. This requires us to go to the places and people we perceive as unlovable or beyond redemption. So, as you read *Why Jesus Crossed the Road*, I pray that the Holy Spirit will challenge you to look for opportunities to cross roads and build lasting relationships with people who look, think and act differently than you.

This guide is broken into five weekly studies. Each week is then broken into two subsections: personal reflection and group study. As you read *Why Jesus Crossed the Road* throughout the week use the personal reflection as a weekly or daily devotional tool to ground yourself in the Word of God. You may want to consider keeping a journal as you reflect and respond to what you are reading in the Word and in our Lenten book. Bring your thoughts, incites and ideas with you for your small group conversation.

The second subsection is designed for group reflection with your Lenten Small Groups. Each week you'll start with our corresponding Way of the Week and then move into a time of prayer and reflection on the text. To get the most out the group study allow your group about 60-90 minutes to go through this section. The questions are not exhaustive so feel free to add or subtract (again bring questions from your personal time into the group). You will also find questions for each chapter at the end of *Why Jesus Crossed the Road*. Questions in this guide that were borrowed from the book are marked with an asterisk (this thing *).

Finally, let us commit this Lenten season to be challenged by God in becoming the disciples he has called each one of us to be. Picking up the cross of Christ is not easy, as you'll see in reading the book, but I am convinced that together and aided by the Holy Spirit all things are possible.

In Christ,

Wes

Wesley R. Allen; Associate Pastor
First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown

WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

Week One - February 26 - March 04, 2023

Read:

- Introduction: *Open the Eyes of My Heart*
- Chapter One: *Where Did Jesus Travel?*
- Chapter Two: *Welcoming Disorienting Dilemmas*

Week Two - March 05 - March 11, 2023

Read:

- Chapter Three: *Can a Rock Really Change?*
- Chapter Four: *Crossing the Road to the Poor*
- Chapter Five: *Crossing the Road of Race*

Week Three - March 12 - March 18, 2023

Read:

- Chapter Six: *Crossing the Road of Spiritual Exclusivity*
- Chapter Seven: *Crossing the Road to Our Enemies*
- Chapter Eight: *Crossing the Road of Cultural Worldview*

Week Four - March 19 - 25, 2023

Read:

- Chapter Nine: *The Roadblock of Fear*
- Chapter Ten: *The Roadblock of Indifference*
- Chapter Eleven: *The Roadblock of Misguided Theology*

Week Five - March 26 - April 1, 2023

Read:

- Chapter Twelve: *Second-Floor Christianity & the Art of the Embrace*
- Chapter Thirteen: *Road-Crossing Adventures: A Businessman, A Pastor, A Lawyer, and a Veterinarian*
- Chapter Fourteen: *The Heart of the Travel Itinerary*

WEEK ONE

WEEKLY REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

Read the Old Testament story of Jonah; it is only four short chapters, and reflect on these questions. Consider journaling your answers and thoughts on the text.

- Why is Jonah resistant (the eyes of his heart are closed) to “cross the road” and go to Nineveh?
- How does fear influence Jonah’s ability to follow God?
- Have you ever had a “Jonah moment?” Has there been a time where God told you to go somewhere or do something and you resisted? Why did you resist?
- What are the ramifications of not doing what God commanded (see 1:7, 12, 17)?
- Jonah’s refusal to follow the Lord brings “calamity” to the sailors who unknowingly provide Jonah transportation. What calamities have been caused by your unwillingness to follow God?
- In spite of Jonah’s failures, God acts with grace and mercy. In what ways is God gracious to Jonah (1:17; 2:10)? Similarly, how is God gracious to the people of Nineveh (3:10)? Where have you experienced God’s grace and mercy?

GROUP STUDY

Way of the Week No. 16 — Give Cheerfully

Rejoice, you get to give! Think of giving as a privilege rather than an obligation, a joy instead of a burden. As you consider all that’s been entrusted to you — time, abilities and money — ask, “How is God calling me to share what I’ve been given?”

Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God; Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, as we gather together to reflect on what it means to follow you, equip and enable us to see the world as you see it. Through the power of your life-giving Spirit, fill our hearts with empathy and compassion. Send us out into the world and into our communities to share your love, mercy and justice as we seek to be ambassadors of the good news of salvation through you - our Risen Lord and Promised Savior - Jesus Christ! Amen.

Conversation

1. What are some of the roadblocks or barriers we have that prevent us from faithfully following the example instituted by Christ in God’s Word?
2. When is the last time you really changed a perspective, a habit, or an attitude? What instigated the change?*
3. In chapter one Bruce Main instructs us to “sit down and map out the journey of Jesus during his three years of public ministry.” Break into pairs or small groups and go through the passages below. Write down what “roads” Jesus crossed. Where did he go, with whom did he interact? This is not an exhaustive list, feel free to add to it!

| | |
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| Matthew 4:23-25 | |
| Matthew 8:1-17; Mark 1:40-2:17; Luke 5:12-32 | |
| Matthew 8:28-9:8; Luke 8:28-56 | |
| Mark 7:31-37; 8:22-26; Matthew 9:27-34 | |
| John 4:1-42 | |

4. How might we begin to practice “crossing the road” as a spiritual discipline? Do you consider it a spiritual discipline? Why or why not?*
5. At the end of chapter one entitled “Road Marker” Main says that going to uncomfortable places not merely “social action” or “Christian service” — it is not something Jesus “tacked on” to his ministry; rather it was an integral part of his ministry. How might you make “action” an integral part of your Christian identity?
6. In chapter two Main discusses Jack Mezirow’s theory of “real transformative learning” and its intimate connection to a “disorienting dilemma.” Can you recall a moment in your life where you experienced a “disorienting dilemma” that led to a “deeper kind of change” in your life? Take a few minutes and consider the details of that experience, what made this paradigm shift possible?
7. How does Jesus create “disorienting dilemmas” for his followers, religious leaders and others who had come from various places to hear and witness Jesus’ ministry? Where do you see change? Where do you see resistance?
8. Toward the end of chapter two Main discusses spiritual maturity and how it relates to Ronald Marstin’s concept of spiritual maturity as a type of change that pushes us out of our comfort zones toward “people unlike ourselves.” Using this definition of spiritual maturity, how would rate your own spiritual maturity, say on a scale of 1-10. Or, if you were to give yourself a Yelp! Review for spiritual maturity, how many stars would you rate yourself?

Close in Prayer

WEEK TWO

WEEKLY REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

Read 1 John 3:11-24

- What makes loving 'others' so difficult?
- How is Jesus' death an example of how we ought to love?
- What does John mean by loving with "truth and action" (v. 18)?
- What is meant by the phrase "our hearts condemn us?"
- Who would you associate with more, Cain or Abel? If you have time read Genesis 4. Is John correct in his interpretation of Genesis? What are the evil characteristics of Cain and the righteous characteristics of Abel?

GROUP STUDY

Way of the Week No. 17 —Show Who You Really Are

Our church is for "real" people. Bring your true self, including your joys, your sorrows, your fears, your strengths and your weaknesses. God loves you as you are. Don't hide your struggles, failures or problems.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we admit to attitudes that exclude rather than embrace. We prefer to associate with others who think and acts as we do. We turn away from those who are different from us. We identify some as enemies to be avoided or even destroyed. Forgive us, God, for seeking to limit your family. Enable us Lord to live lives emboldened by your witness, grace and mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Conversation

1. Can you share a situation where a firmly held conviction was changed because of a relationship with another human being? What was it about that relationship that provoked you to change?*
2. Read Acts 10:1-35. What stands out to you most in this text regarding Peter's change of perspective? How had God used Peter despite his shortcomings and how does God continue to use Peter after this paradigm shift?
3. As Christians, why is it crucial to understand the perspective of poor people?*
4. Discuss the story of Jesus' interaction with blind Bartimaeus. What other observations do you have about this road-crossing encounter?
5. Bruce Main says, "Sometimes we just need to do what we can do at the moment and not become paralyzed by the larger issues." Identify a time in your life where you overthought an important social issue and ended up missing an opportunity to make an

impact. Next recall a moment where you jumped in or “crossed the road” to make a lasting and meaningful impact on a person or community. What held you back in the one instance and what pushed you forward in the latter?

6. Reflect on John 4 and Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well. What new insights did Main’s interpretation of the story, including the historical background, bring to the surface for you? How does this story translate to your life as you attempt to faithfully follow Christ?

Close in Prayer

WEEK THREE

WEEKLY REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

Read John 13

- What moment in this passage resonates the most with you and why?
- Verse 1 says that Jesus loved all of the disciples “to the end.” Next John tells us in verse 2 that Judas’ heart had already turned to betrayal and later in the passage Jesus acknowledges that one of the disciples would betray him. Nevertheless, Jesus chooses to love in spite of this? Put yourself in Jesus’ shoes (or sandals), how would you respond in this situation?
- Jesus’ washing of the disciples feet was as shocking to the disciples as learning that at least one of them would end up betraying Jesus. Why do you think the disciples responded in this way?
- What must it have been like to be Judas at the Last Supper? What might it have been like to be Peter and be told that you were going to deny Christ three times? How do you think you would’ve responded?
- In verses 31-35, what is most surprising to you about this section as it connects to Jesus’ betrayal?

GROUP STUDY

Way of the Week No. 18 - Ask for Help

Part of being a real and authentic member of the church is to acknowledge your weaknesses and to be willing to ask for God’s help and the support of others. None of us go it alone. Vulnerability is a sign of strength and a gift to others.

Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit: We praise you for how wide, how high, and how deep Your vast love is for all people. Incarnate Christ, You offered Your life for the healing of the world through the forgiveness of all our sins. Your arms outstretched on the cross embrace us all as Your love transcends our divisions, our hate and our exclusiveness. Breaking out of the tomb, You broke the powers that enslave us and release us to live a new and free life in You. Your wide and welcoming love for all challenges us. Forgive us when we find it hard to love other, teach us to love where all we feel is pain and anger. Teach us how to value and respect one another. Give us the courage we need to reach beyond ourselves to those who are unfamiliar and different. Make our church a safe place of respite from this dangerous world and enable us to live with hope and to love as you love. Amen.

Conversation

1. At First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown who is “in” and who is “out?”

2. “We must realize that our churches will never become communities if people sense that moral failure means second - class citizenship.” What does this statement mean? Does it apply to First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown, why or why not?
3. Has anyone ever said something to you like, “If I walked into to church the place would burn down” or “I’d be struck by lightning?” What do you perceive a reason people talk in this way? What can the church do — what can you do differently to breakdown these barriers?
4. Is there a time in your life where you chose to love an “enemy?” What made choosing to love difficult for you? What was the outcome for you and for the other person?
5. What barriers or roadblocks make it difficult for you to love people you disagree with?
6. Is it difficult for you to talk politics with someone who votes differently from you? Why?*
7. What would be a modern day equivalent to Jesus’ responding to the Roman Centurion’s request for help? Who represents the centurion in your life?*

Close in Prayer

WEEK FOUR

WEEKLY REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

Read Exodus 2:11 - 3:22 & Matthew 5:38 - 48

- Where do you see indifference in the story of Moses? Where do you see fear?
- How does God respond to Moses' fear?
- Why does God harden the heart of Pharaoh and then attempt to kill the Pharaoh's firstborn son?
- How do you interpret Exodus 3 in light of what Jesus says in Matthew 5:38-48?

GROUP STUDY

Way of the Week No. 19 - Accept & Don't Cast Stones

God's love opens the doors of our church to all people. Just as Jesus did, welcome people as they are. It's not up to us to judge. Love unconditionally, as Christ has received you, receive others. Grant us a faith that endures the waiting. The grief of the now and not-yet and the ache of being trapped in the in-between. Your power and goodness are never finished. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Lord, there are so many things we do not understand. So many ways we long for change and closure. Help us to trust you even when the situation is desperate and out of control. Help us to follow you even when the way is unclear. Help us to wait and rest even when every bit of us screams to react. Build in us a faith that endures, even when we can't see you.

Conversation

1. "Fear is part of the human condition, a natural response when our lives are threatened or our identities challenged. But fear is not the whole problem. The problem is the influence fear has to change us." Over the course of your life how have you allowed fear to change you - to change your perspective, or your response or attitude?
2. In what ways do you allow fear to control your life? How has fear been a barrier to you crossing the road and going to the places and people Jesus visited?
3. Do you agree with the statement that a "*blessed life* is without fear?" Why or why not?
4. How can you respond to the "hell on earth" or "hellish" aspects of our world?
5. How are fear and indifference connected?
6. Do you agree with Elie Wiesel's assessment of indifference as being the antithesis of love? Why or why not?

7. Where have you seen indifference in the Church? Where have you seen compassion? How can the Church show greater compassion and less indifference?
8. Read Matthew 5:1-12 and then read 1 Kings 2:3 and Psalm 1:1-3; how do you reconcile these two perspectives on blessings?
9. What is misguided theology and where to you see it in our society?
10. How has misguided theology influenced and shaped American Christianity?

Close in Prayer

WEEK FIVE

WEEKLY REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

Read Luke 17:11-19

- What about Jesus' interaction with the ten lepers stands out to you?
- What boundaries or roads does Jesus cross?
- Why does Jesus tell the lepers to return to the city and visit the priest?
- In what ways does Jesus go against the religious and social norms of his day (see Lev. 13:46 and Numbers 5:2-3)?
- What is the significance of the one leper who returns to thank Jesus? How is his healing different from the healing of the other nine?

GROUP STUDY

Way of the Week No. 20 - Find Strength in Belonging

At FPC Moorestown, you're loved and valued. Claim us as your family. Rather than withdrawing, allow struggles and disappointments to deepen your sense of belonging. Pray for chances to bring healing to relationships. Please be patient! God isn't yet finished with us or with you.

Opening Prayer

Lord God, let us keep your Scriptures in mind and meditate on them day and night, persevering in prayer, always on the watch. We beg you, Lord, to give us real knowledge of what we read and to show us not only how to understand it, but how to put it into practice, so that we may deserve to obtain spiritual grace, enlightened by the law of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose power and glory will endure throughout all ages. Amen.

- Origen of Alexandria

Conversation

1. Reflect on a time where you reached the "second floor" - what enabled you to build a trusting relationship? What roadblocks or detours did you face along the way and how did you overcome them?
2. In chapter 12 Bruce Main references the life and work of theologian Miroslav Volf as a model for road crossing. Review the four stages of embrace and discuss as a group how they relate to Jesus' ministry, which Main develops throughout the remainder of the chapter. What can we learn from Jesus' example (Mark 10:49-52) and how can you begin to put it into practice? What additional examples can you come up with from scripture?
 - (a) Open arms
 - (b) Wait

- (c) Give and receive a hug
 - (d) Let go
3. The beginning of chapter 13 Bruce Main quotes Richard Rohr, as Christians “we must have one foot in our faith community and one foot in the larger world - or frankly we have little to offer either group ... Somehow we all must learn to love people, groups, and institutions that really turn us off — or love is not love at all.” How does Rohr’s assessment speak to the current state of the Church (globally) and First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown? Do you have feet in both places or firmly planted in one? Why or why not?
 4. Reflect on the story in chapter 13 of Maria Edmonds and her church loving crowds of kids “without strings attached.” What can we learn from this instance of road crossing? How would you respond and how might others in the church respond to a similar situation in Moorestown? How can First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown do a better job crossing the road to youth and young adults?
 5. Quoting Joan’s grandfather, Main writes, “When good people run, evil triumphs.” Think about that sentiment for a moment. As individuals and as a church, do we run from or toward problems? What problems is God putting on your heart to run toward?
 6. Outline a road-crossing travel itinerary for the next month. Build in authentic second-floor experiences and border crossings with people who live outside your comfort zone. Reflect on these experiences.*

Close in Prayer