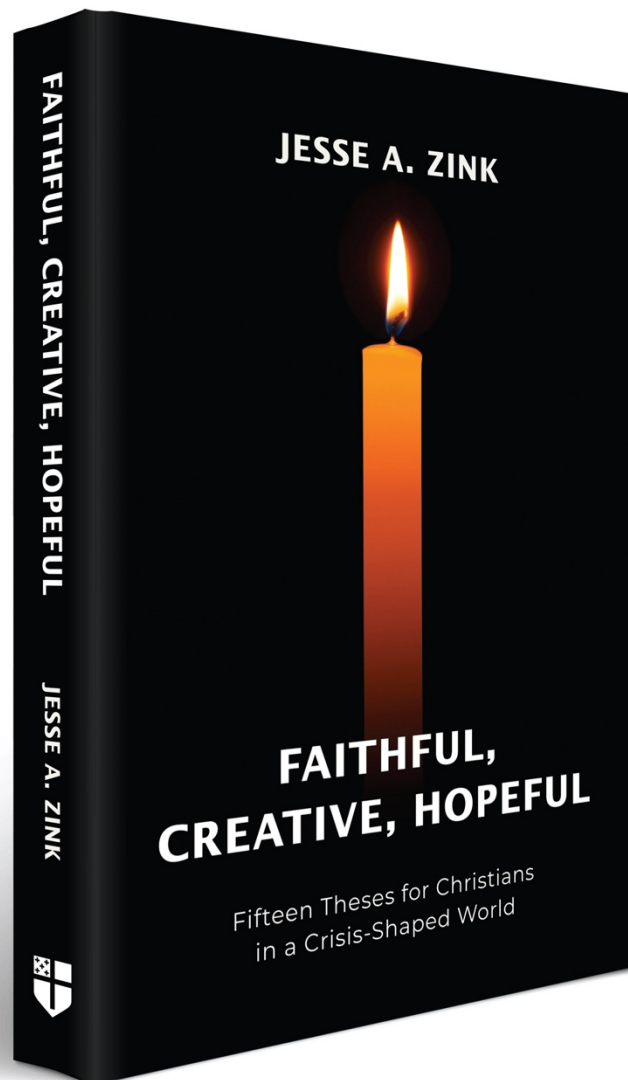


DISCUSSION AND STUDY GUIDE



Version 2.0

July 2025

Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in this discussion and study guide for *Faithful, Creative, Hopeful: Fifteen Theses for Christians in a Crisis-Shaped World* by Jesse Zink. This guide is designed as a resource for groups who wish to read and reflect on this book together.

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Book Summary

Faithful, Creative, Hopeful: Fifteen Theses for Christians in a Crisis-Shaped World begins with the idea of “polycrisis”—the idea that we live in a world shaped not by one crisis but by many. Specifically, the book focuses on the interweaving crises of climate, economics, and migration. It uses the structuring device of a thesis as a way to touch on and introduce a range of topics in an accessible fashion and as an invitation to discussion and response.

The first section of the book, *Apocalyptic Clarity*, introduces the idea of living as a Christian in a way that is attentive to the powers and structures that shape the world. In particular, the second thesis explains and dwells on the power of neoliberal economic forms to show how these economic structures have come to function like a religion and in so doing undercut Christian witness. The third thesis builds on this by demonstrating that when we are aware of these structures we can see that the success (or failure) of our ministry is not due to ourselves alone but is conditioned in important ways by these structures. To see and minister apocalyptically means that we are called to live in Christian community in ways that resist the powers of this time.

The book’s second section, *Resistant Ethos*, builds on the idea of resistance by presenting five different manifestations of life in a world shaped by neoliberalism and the crises it engenders. For instance, modern society is dominated by what it is known as an attention economy but which actually leads to indifference and distraction. By investigating such ideas as body posture, it becomes clear that attentiveness is part of our calling as Christians in a crisis-shaped world because it is central to how God relates to human beings. Likewise, there are theses that look at our constant desire for more and the Christian response of enough, globalization and homogenization, rage and mercy, and where hope can be found when life in a world in polycrisis seems so overwhelming. Ultimately, what this section aims to do is offer a more detailed look at some aspects of a crisis-shaped world and offer new ideas and new ways of thinking about what a resistant Christian-response looks like in our time.

The third section, *Resistant Practice*, builds on the second section but focuses on particular practices. A key theme of the first theses in this section is about the interplay between being rooted in a particular place (and the natural world in that place) and seeing oneself as a Christian pilgrim in a world of migration, both offering hospitality to others while also receiving it often from the most unlikely places. This leads to the theme of hospitality, which connects to a thesis about food and the way that food practices help Christians move beyond the identity of consumer in a neoliberal economy towards an understanding of oneself as both giver and receiver in God’s economy.

The final section, *Renewed Church*, offers three theses that consider the church in particular. Key themes include how the church is called to exist in a world in which societal trust is in such short supply as well as the importance of ecumenism, though understood differently than it has been recently. The final thesis gives fuller consideration to a theme that appears in passing in several earlier theses by arguing for the centrality of the Eucharist for a changing church in a challenging world.

The conclusion sums up the themes of the book by asking what it means to live as a Christian without the security and stability that some Christians have come to take for granted and with a reminder of God's enduring presence even and especially when God's followers feel alone and afraid.

How to use this guide

There is no right or wrong way to read *Faithful, Creative, Hopeful* but here are some possibilities to consider. Which option is best for you will depend on the nature of your group, what they are looking for, and the time you have to meet together. This list assumes that groups meet once per week.

- A five-week study: In the first week, read the introduction and talk generally about the setting of Christian ministry in a crisis-shaped world. In each of the subsequent weeks, read one of the four sections (apocalyptic clarity, resistant ethos, resistance practice, and renewed church). Depending on the length of each of your sessions, it will probably be necessary to choose only one or two theses from each section to focus on.
- A six-week study (such as during Lent): Much like the five-week study, only add an additional session focused on the conclusion and the application and extension of these ideas to your own context.
- A longer study: Read one thesis per week (or per session of your group) and use it as a point of departure for a broader conversation about the social and cultural themes in the thesis as well as the theological and Biblical material in the thesis.
- Pick-and-choose: Take the theses that are particularly relevant to your group and talk about only those. This requires a group leader who can read the book in advance and pick out what seems most important.

How to buy the book

Faithful, Creative, Hopeful is published by Church Publishing and distributed around the world by Ingram Publisher Services, a major book distributor. This means it may be purchased wherever books are sold, including from major online retailers as well as at local bookstores. Simply tell the book seller the title, author, or publisher, or quote the ISBN number: 978-1-64065-738-0. If you are in the United States, you can [order directly from Church Publishing](#) at a price competitive with other major online retailers, and, if you spend more than \$40 (i.e. two copies or more), you receive free shipping in the United States. This helps support the publisher and ensure they can keep offering resources like this to the church.

Questions for discussion

These questions are meant to be conversation starters. Not every question may be relevant to every group and not all need to be used. The general purpose of these questions is to help readers connect the themes of this book with their life of faith, the life of their local church community, and the city, town, or neighbourhood in which they live.

Introduction

- In the introduction, Jesse introduces the idea of “polycrisis” to describe the current state of the world. What do you make of this word? Is it a fair description of how you understand things? What does it feel like to live at a time of polycrisis?
- Jesse writes that his focus in this book will be “on the braiding together of climate, economics, and migration” because they are central to how he understands this moment of polycrisis. What is your own experience of these crises? How have you encountered them in your life?
- Jesse writes that the gospel message Christians have to share is “both deeply and profoundly good and excitingly and disturbingly new.” (p. xvii) From your perspective, what is the message of the Christian gospel? When have you been excited or disturbed by this gospel?

Thesis 1: A crisis-shaped world requires apocalyptic clarity.

- This thesis introduces the idea of apocalyptic clarity, which will be important throughout the book. Jesse writes at length about the book of Revelation, which is “likely the book that has caused more interpretive angst than any other in the Bible.” (p. 7) How have you heard words like apocalyptic used in the past? How is this similar or different to how Jesse uses this word?
- To see with apocalyptic clarity, Jesse writes, “Christians need to pay attention to power.” (p. 6) Where is power located in your community? Who has it? Who doesn’t? How can we tell?
- In this thesis, Jesse describes hope as “a countervailing power to the powers of this world.” (p. 11) In what ways is hope a power? In what ways does it work against the powers of this world?

Thesis 2: Economic structures are the greatest obstacle to Christian witness.

- This thesis is centred on a set of economic structures called neoliberalism. Where, if at all, have you heard this term before? What are your reactions to how Jesse describes it?
- This thesis puts economics at the centre of its discussion of Christian witness. In your experience, how and how often does the church speak about economics? What message would you like to hear from the church about economics?

- Jesse argues that neoliberal economic structures are “taking on the role of a religion.” (p. 23) What do you make of this claim? In what ways do you see our economic life taking the place of our religious life?
- Jesse says that in our neoliberal world “the only value that matters is price.” (p. 22) Where have you seen this logic at work? What other values do you think Christians should be talking about? Why is it difficult to talk about values?
- Jesse concludes this chapter by introducing the idea of resistance as the proper response to a crisis-shaped world. In your mind, what is it that needs to be resisted? How can this resistance best be enacted?

Thesis 3: Christian formation is not failing. It’s being defeated.

- This thesis distinguishes between failure and defeat. As Jesse uses the terms, what is the difference between the two?
- When is a time that you have failed? When is a time that you have been defeated? After reading this chapter, are there any moments in your life that you thought were failures but might now be best understood as defeat?
- In this thesis Jesse writes, “Sometimes when I look—lovingly but honestly—at the church I know and care so deeply for trying its best to share its message in a crisis-shaped world, it seems like the church doesn’t even know what game it is playing, let alone what arena it is taking place in.” (p. 36) What does this mean? What do you make of it?

Thesis 4: Christians offer attentiveness to a distracted people.

- Jesse introduces the idea of the attention economy in this chapter. How do you experience the attention economy? How does it make you feel?
- This thesis spends a lot of time on physical posture, both the posture of the attention economy (curved in on itself) and the posture of attention (stretching out). How are your body and your physical reactions part of how you follow God?
- This chapter concludes in the garden with the idea that the way in which plants grow—stretching out towards the sun—is a model for how humans are called to live—stretching out towards God, towards one another, and towards creation around us. What helps you stretch out? What else can we learn from watching how plants live their lives?

Thesis 5: Enough is a response to a world of more.

- This thesis is built around the “appetite for more” as one of the defining features of a crisis-shaped world. Where do you see this appetite for more in your own life or community?
- Jesse cites Biblical passages in which Jesus and New Testament authors warn of the dangers of the “appetite for more” (Luke 12:15) and describe it as idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Why do you think Biblical authors were concerned about this?

- This thesis introduces the idea of satisfaction, which literally means to have done enough. When is a time in your life that you have felt satisfied, like you have done enough and don't need to do more? What is this feeling like? Why might it be hard to reach this point?

Thesis 6: The catholicity of the Christian community is its response to a globally-connected world.

- This thesis talks about the globally-interconnected nature of the world we live in. How have these global interconnections affected your life? How has this been positive? How has it been less good?
- The thesis discusses the idea of how in a global world there is a tendency towards homogenization. What does homogenization mean in this context? When have you seen this homogenization at work?
- Jesse writes, "Imperialism, colonialism, and racism have compromised and comprise today the church's affirmation of its own catholicity." (p. 72) What does this mean? Have you seen it to be true in your own church context?
- Jesse argues that the church's response to globalization and homogeneity is heterogeneity and diversity, while also acknowledging the challenges that this raises. How does your church embrace diversity and difference? Where is it being called to grow in this regard?

Thesis 7: In an angry world, the Christian answer is mercy.

- Jesse begins this thesis with a story of getting upset at someone at the bank and then seeing a sign at the subway reminding him to be kind (pp. 75-76). When is a time that you've seen anger and outrage in society? How did it make you feel?
- Jesse draws on the theologian Walter Wink's idea of "the myth of redemptive violence" and illustrates it with reference to some animated Disney movies (pp. 77-78). What does this idea mean? Where do you see evidence of it in the cultural messaging around you?
- Jesse argues that Jesus' answer to rage is mercy, which is characteristic of God in Christ. What does mercy mean to you? When is a time when you have seen mercy in action? Jesse also writes, "Sometimes, the most important person we can receive mercy from is ourselves." (p. 85) When is a time you've had to show mercy to yourself? What made it challenging or difficult?
- Jesse distinguishes mercy from justice. Justice, he writes, is rooted in an idea of "giving to each what is his or her due" (p. 82) whereas mercy is unearned and not about what is due to people. What do you make of this distinction? How have you heard the language of justice used in the church? How would it be different if the word mercy was used instead?

Thesis 8: Christian witness is rooted in hope—even if we don't want it to be.

- In your mind, what is hope? How is it different from optimism?
- Jesse that for Christians to live in hope we need to "reclaim our eschatological inheritance" (p. 89) and focus on the future of God's action in the world. What

have you learned or what do you believe about how God will act in the future? How, if at all, does that give you hope?

- Jesse contrasts hope with optimism and cynicism and despair. Which of these are you prone to you? How do you combat them?
- Jesse gives an extended analogy from the book and movie *Children of Men* (pp. 92-94), which is based in the idea that the human race does not have a future. What do you make of this analogy for our own time?
- Jesse concludes that Theo Faron's actions in *Children of Men* were similar to those of Jesus: recognize there is a future, engage in the messy reality of the world, move away from isolation and into deeper relationships of mutuality with other people (p. 96). What would this pattern of living look like in the life of your community?

Thesis 9: Place matters: Christian witness begins in particular and specific locales.

- This thesis is rooted in the idea of place. What is a place that is significant or important to you? What makes it so?
- To complement the idea of place, Jesse draws on indigenous thinking to introduce the idea of land. What is your relationship with the land and the natural world like?
- How is your Christian community related to the place and land where it finds itself? How could it deepen these relationships?
- This chapter concludes with practical steps to connect with place and land, including the practice of the offering of bread and wine by a congregation. What do you know about where the bread and wine your congregation uses in Eucharist come from?

Thesis 10: In a time of widespread migration, Christians must embrace their identity as wanderers as well.

- Jesse begins this thesis with a story about receiving hospitality (p. 113). When is a time that you have received hospitality that felt uncomfortable? What was it like?
- Jesse writes at length in this chapter about global migration. How has global migration affected your community and your church? How do you feel about this?
- Jesse writes that in a time of global migration Christians are called both to welcome others and allow ourselves to be welcomed. What is one way your community offers welcome to newcomers? What obstacles do you experience in offering this welcome? How can you overcome those obstacles?
- Likewise, what is one way that you or the members of your community have allowed yourself to be welcomed by others? What obstacles do you experience in allowing yourself to be welcome by others? How can you overcome these obstacles?

Thesis 11: Public, shared places resist the dominance of the market. Building them up is part of Christian ministry.

- Jesse introduces the idea of the public sphere in this thesis (pp. 126-127). What is an example of the public sphere in your community? What do you value about the public sphere?
- This thesis gives a handful of examples of the ways in which the market has displaced decisions made in the public sphere, such as ride-sharing companies and the minimum wage (pp. 128-129). What do you make of this diagnosis of society? Where have you seen the market displace the public sphere in your own life?
- This thesis concludes with the idea that church communities are vital to building up the public sphere. How can your church community be part of reclaiming public, shared experiences and places?

Thesis 12: Food is at the center of the church and must be at the center of Christian witness.

- This thesis is all about food. Share a story about a time when food has been important to you in asserting your identity or claiming your place in a community.
- What practices around food does your church community have? What is important to you about these practices? What would you like to change?
- Jesse distinguishes between the identity given to people in our modern economy—that of consumers—and the identity given by God—that of givers and receivers, of people who create, produce, and receive from others (pp. 144-145). When is a time that you have felt yourself to be creative or a producer of something new, whether food or not?
- Jesse writes, “If Christians are called to resistance in a crisis-shaped world, then that resistance will necessarily challenge the reduction of human identity to that of consumption. Food practices are a vital place in which to enact this resistance.” (p. 145) What are some ways in which your community can resist the identity of consumers when it comes to your community’s food practices?

Thesis 13: In a mistrusting world, the church is called to be a community of responsibility and solidarity.

- This thesis begins with the decline of trust in many western societies. How have you seen this decline of trust in your own community? How have you responded?
- In this thesis Jesse discusses God’s faithfulness or trustworthiness at length (pp. 154-157). When is a time that you have experienced this in your own life?
- Jesse writes that he understands “solidarity to be the act of treating the needs and concerns of another person as if they were your own, that is, to take responsibility for those concerns” (p. 160). What do you make of this definition? Where else have you heard the word solidarity used?

Thesis 14: The church's future is an ecumenical one—but a very specific kind of ecumenism.

- This thesis introduces a part of the church's history in the 20th century that may not be well known. What new things did you learn about the church's history from this thesis? What seemed particularly important or noteworthy?
- Jesse centres the argument of this thesis on the phrase "all in each place" (pp. 169-170). What does this phrase mean? What are the obstacles to realizing this vision in your community?
- What do you know about other Christians who are in your community with you? How, if at all, are you in relationship with them?

Thesis 15: The Eucharist sets the agenda for the church.

- This thesis is centred on the Eucharist, which is sometimes also called mass, communion, or the Lord's Supper. What is your relationship with the Eucharist like? What are some differences you have observed in how different groups of Christians practice the Eucharist? How do you understand the Eucharist?
- Jesse gives several examples of the way in which the actions of the Eucharist can shape Christian living in the world, including passing the peace, confession, and remembering. Which of these, if any, seemed compelling or interesting to you? Which seemed less so? What other actions from the Eucharist do you think can guide your living in the world?

Conclusion

- Jesse quotes the Scottish theologian Donald MacKinnon who said, "To live as a Christian in the world today is necessarily to live an exposed life; it is to be stripped of the kind of security that tradition...easily bestows." (p. 188) What is your reaction to this? In what ways has security shaped your community's witness? What would it look like to lose this security?
- When you think about all of the ideas in this book, what ideas particularly stand out to you as being helpful for thinking about Christian witness in your community? What is one idea from this book you would want to share with a friend?
- In the introduction, Jesse wrote that the book is meant to be a "contribution to a discussion and an invitation for response." (p. xiv) After reading this book, what is one question you would like to ask the author? What response would you like to offer to him?
- If you were to add a 16th thesis for this book, what would it be about? In other words, what topics were not addressed in these theses that you wish had been?

Other material

An online book launch was held in November 2024, featuring discussion with the Most Rev. Anne Germond, Acting Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Rev. Michael Blair, General Secretary of the United Church of Canada and Moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. A recording of the book launch is available online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDk93K9LSk>.

A Q&A about the book with Jesse appeared in various Canadian Anglican publications in December 2024: <https://montreal.anglicannews.ca/christianity-in-a-crisis-shaped-world-new-book-from-dio-principal-jesse-zink/>.

The Faith and Leadership publication published an excerpt of *Faithful, Creative, Hopeful* in November 2024: <https://faithandleadership.com/faithful-creative-hopeful-fifteen-theses-christians-crisis-shaped-world>. The *Church Times* published an excerpt in February 2025: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2025/14-february/features/features/christians-in-a-crisis-shaped-world-less-a-failure-than-a-defeat>.

Podcast Interviews

Jesse Zink has appeared on the following podcasts to speak about *Faithful, Creative, Hopeful*

- Future Christian, December 2024: <https://futurechristian.podbean.com/e/jesse-zink-on-charting-realistic-hope-for-the-church-s-future/>
- Spade, Spoon, Soul, episode 46, January 2025: <https://spadespoonsoulpodcast.podbean.com/e/episode-46-jesse-zink-principal-at-montreal-diocesan-theological-college/>
- The Leader's Way, episode 47, February 2025: <https://theleadersway.podbean.com/e/47-apocalyptic-clarity-with-jesse-zink/>
- The Living Church, episode 147, April 2025: <https://livingchurch.org/podcasts/christian-witness-in-polycrisis-with-jesse-zink/>

About the author

Since 2017, Jesse Zink has been Principal of [Montreal Diocesan Theological College](#), or, as it is widely known, "Dio." Dio is an ecumenical theological college serving the Anglican and United Churches of Canada and is affiliated with McGill University. Jesse is a priest in the Anglican Church of Canada and also serves as canon theologian in the Diocese of Montreal. Born in Vancouver and raised and ordained in The Episcopal Church in the United States, Jesse also served in ministry in South Africa and England before his arrival in Montreal.

In addition to *Faithful, Creative, Hopeful: Fifteen Theses for Christians in a Crisis-Shaped World*, he is the author of four other books about Christian theology, Christian mission, and Christianity in the non-western world, including [Backpacking through the Anglican Communion](#) (2014), [A Faith for the Future](#) (2016), and [Christianity and Catastrophe in South Sudan: Civil War, Migration, and the Rise of Dinka Anglicanism](#) (2018). More information about Jesse and about his writing is available at www.jessezink.com.

Feedback about the book and this study guide may be sent to Jesse Zink directly at jessezink@montrealdio.ca.