

A man and a woman are standing under a large, light-colored umbrella in the rain. The woman is on the left, wearing a purple raincoat and a dark knit hat with a pom-pom. She is looking down. The man is on the right, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. He is looking towards the woman. The background shows a suspension bridge, likely the Golden Gate Bridge, in a hazy, rainy atmosphere. The entire scene is overlaid with a heavy rain effect, with vertical streaks of rain falling across the image.

A STEVE TAYLOR FILM

BLUE LIKE JAZZ

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
REV. ASHLEY-ANNE MASTERS

INTRODUCTION

Blue Like Jazz portrays Donald Miller's quest for meaning, a depth of faith, the realization that humanity is broken and imperfect, explorations of childhood misconceptions of faith, and the desire to live into his true identity. In many ways, it is about finding a faith of one's own, and not merely repeating what we have experienced in our upbringing or through a family tradition.

Don's faith journey is uniquely his, and yet expresses experiences that many of us identify as our own as we journey through our search for God, love, faith, and something bigger than ourselves.

His quest begins with the desire for answers and resolutions to life's questions, and it is only through living into the questions themselves that he realizes that faith in God is not about humans gaining answers. We learn alongside Don that much like the brilliant art of jazz musicians, a life of faith includes elements of improvising, deep sadness, overwhelming joy, and constant change. Thus, a life of faith, like soul-haunting jazz, can contain few resolutions. And, like jazz, you may not be able to adequately articulate what you feel in the song, but you are forever changed by the feeling.



So, wherever you are in this score known as life, join in as you feel led by the music, and improvise as the notes of your soul suggest. You are not alone in this concert.

The film has several "chapters" that are arranged by the traditional elements of story: **Setting. Conflict. Climax. Resolution.** This study and reflection on the themes in the film *Blue Like Jazz* are also structured in that way as we look at our own stories of faith.

SETTING

Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

-1 Corinthians 13:12 *New Living Translation*



Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms

or books written in a very foreign language.

Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now,

because you would not be able to live them.

And the point is to live everything.

Live the questions now.

Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

Begin your time together by listening to the opening section of John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, entitled, *Acknowledgement* (it's about six minutes long). Ask participants to pray as they listen to the music and the movements of it. Have paper, clay, paints, and various other art supplies available for students to create and interpret as they feel comfortable as they listen.

- What images come to mind in the music?
- What movement do you sense?
- How does the music make you feel?
- What story do you think the music is telling?

Read the Scripture verse from 1 Corinthians aloud three times, each time with a different reader.

- What words stand out to you?
- What about this Scripture gives you hope?
- How do you think your interpretation of this Scripture is different now than if you heard it when you were a freshman in high school?
- When Don arrives at Reed College, he is thrown into a world with a dramatically different setting than the one in which he was raised, and it is bewildering for him. Have you ever felt that way? Where? How?
- Did you feel that you were ready for a change in setting? Did you act differently? How?



CONFLICT

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in

your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.



“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”

- Luke 6:37-45

I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Read the Scripture from Luke aloud, with a different voice reading each section. Then read the Gandhi quotation aloud.

- How have you been disappointed or hurt by the Church or members of the Church? Note the use of capital “C” here, so not necessarily something that happened in your own church, though it may be. In the broader sense of Church and Christianity, when or who acted or spoke in such a way that you were disappointed or hurt?
- How did you or are you healing from that experience?
- When have you felt Gandhi’s quotation to be true?
- Don asks the question, “if the Setting in SCCR changes, does the Conflict?” What do you think? Does conflict follow us in different settings?
- Do you ever experience conflict about how Christians act and how you believe we are called to live? Discuss.

CLIMAX

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

-John 3:1-9

Jazz speaks for life. The Blues tell the story of life's difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph.

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Read the Scripture from John aloud with a different voice for each section. Wait until the discussion questions have been answered to read the quotation about jazz aloud.





- What misconceptions did you have, or are you now realizing you had about the Church? Certainly not everyone's experience is as significant as learning of your mother's affair with the youth pastor, as portrayed in the movie.
- When have you, like Nicodemus in this Scripture and Miller in the movie asked of God or the people around you, "How can this be?"

Read the quotation about jazz aloud.

- How have you or do you plan to move on from the painful experience or conflict of faith?
- How will you orchestrate your sense of hope?

RESOLUTION

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were
before you.*

*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness,
how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for
anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be
hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a
bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to
everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine
before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify
your Father in heaven."*

-Matthew 5:1-16

*In these bodies we will live, in these bodies we will die.
Where you invest our love, you invest our life.*

- Mumford & Sons, from "Awake My Soul"



• Think about a time you felt closest to God. Where were you? Who else was there? What do you remember? What had just happened in your life? Invite participants to share these experiences aloud as they are comfortable.

• Have you ever experienced resolution after a significant conflict? With a friend? An idea? A question? How did that resolution happen?

- Don confesses to the Pope for his misrepresentation of God. What do you think of the practice of confession? Is confession the same thing as an apology? Why or why not?
- It's been said that confession is good for the soul. What do you think about that?

Read the Scripture from Matthew and the quotation aloud together as once voice.

- What does it feel like to truly believe that we are free to be authentic?
- How can we embody our identity as light and salt in this world as we follow Christ?
- Don takes the bold risk of confessing to people. Are there risks that we can take that help us to bear witness to (tell the story of) or even to better understand our own faith?



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All Scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

Rainer Maria Rilke, [Letters to a Young Poet](#), 1903.

A [Love Supreme](#) is considered to be among John Coltrane's greatest works and is a studio album recorded by his quartet in December 1964 and released by Impulse! Records (catalogue number AS-77) in February 1965.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) Indian Philosopher, internationally known for his doctrine of nonviolent protest.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., [On the Importance of Jazz: Opening address to the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival](#).



STUDY NOTES:

