

# Exploring Your Future

## A Youth Bible Study with Jean Vanier



Leader's Guide

To be used with the DVD-ROM

*Choosing Our Future*

**by Amy Bunce**

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Copies of this booklet, including a set of 20 quotation cards for each session, and the accompanying DVD-ROM *Choosing Our Future* (which contains also the *On Becoming Human* audio clips) may be ordered for \$15 plus taxes and shipping from Daybreak Books and Media: [pubs@larchedaybreak.com](mailto:pubs@larchedaybreak.com) or 905-884-3454 ext. 234 or 1-800-853-1412. (A separate CD of the *On Becoming Human* audio clips only is available for \$7.50.)

Inquiries: [education@larche.ca](mailto:education@larche.ca)  
This booklet may also be downloaded from the  
Education section of [www.larche.ca](http://www.larche.ca)

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## About this Youth Bible Study

This leader's guide is to be used with the DVD-ROM *Choosing Our Future*. It contains a short video of students in conversation with Jean Vanier and a series of audio clips from his CBC Massey Lectures, *Becoming Human*. (Information for obtaining these items is on the opposite page.)

**This 8-session Bible Study is intended for young people aged approximately 14 to 17.** It introduces youth to Jean Vanier, an inspiring Canadian spiritual leader and humanitarian who is a magnet and model for young people today. Vanier speaks to the hearts of young people about loneliness and belonging and becoming the kind of people they long to be. He invites them to have a dream for their lives, and to help build a world where everyone belongs.

**As leader, please adapt the language, the questions and the reflection material** as you see fit, according to the make-up and interests of your group. Try to find a balance between being flexible and allowing sessions to move out to related topics and completing the session. Sessions are intended for a class time of 30 to 40 minutes, but if your group engages well in discussion or if you include the "Going Deeper" options, you will need a little longer.

You may want to ask someone to open and/or close with a prayer. You may want, together with the group members, to establish a few ground rules; for example, respectful listening, giving time for each person to speak, confidentiality—what is said in the group stays in the group. At the same time, some of the questions are very personal and can lead participants to a deep place within themselves. No one should be pushed to share beyond their comfort level.

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## Using this Leader's Guide

**Preparation:** A few days before each session, as leader, read carefully through the upcoming session and pray for your group members with the themes of the previous session and the upcoming one in mind. Gather the items listed under "Preparation."

**For all the sessions you will need:** the DVD-ROM *Choosing Our Future* and a computer with a DVD player. PLEASE SEE THE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE BACK OF THE DVD BOX for how to open the DVD fully in your particular computer. If possible, use an LCD projector to show the video on a wall or screen.

### Each session has 5 elements:

**1. Introductory Content:** A quotation from Jean Vanier and questions to engage the group in thinking about the session's theme. Write the Vanier quote on a flip chart or board and ask someone to read it aloud. Invite sharing, first with an elbow partner and then with the larger group. Then invite members to share their experience from the previous session's Action Ideas. Make a link to the theme for the new session.

**2. A Scripture passage** to read aloud, and questions to stimulate thought about the passage. You will need Bibles or photocopies of the entire passage. (Usually only an excerpt is included in this guide.) We generally used the NRSV but you may want a different translation.

**3. Jean Vanier content**—a video or audio clip and Questions for Reflection. Choose among the questions. Begin the sharing in twos or threes so everyone can participate. A brief bio of Jean Vanier is provided at the back of this booklet for your use.

**4. Action Ideas** for the coming week and **a wallet-sized card** with one of the session's quotations and a reminder of one Action Idea. Read the Action Ideas aloud so people can choose. The Action Ideas should not be seen as homework but as an opportunity to carry the insights and good experience of the session into the coming week in some creative way. (Packets of cards for each session for a group of 20 youth are provided with this booklet. Additional cards may be ordered from [education@larche.ca](mailto:education@larche.ca).)

**5. Going Deeper** The audio content suits groups that are a little older and able to grasp the more challenging ideas from the CBC Massey Lectures.

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## Building the Dynamism of the Group: Sharing and Using the Action Ideas

Key to the effectiveness of this Bible Study will be the sharing and the Action Ideas and the subsequent reporting and reflection on them. Young people today want experiences, but experiences that transform them, and they want to connect with other youth.

Help each person to be able to participate. You may want to set up sharing groups of three. (Usually, put those who do not know each other together.) These triads could stay together for 3 or 4 sessions and connect during the week, becoming mini-communities. Move to whole group sharing after everyone is talking.

### Social Networking as Central to Youth Today

You may encourage group members to exchange contact information, or you and your group may want to create a Facebook group to be in touch during the week. Consider calling your group "Jean Vanier Youth Bible Study + your locale." This may enable groups to find one another. The basics of respect and privacy should apply.

### Other Resources from L'Arche

You may want to obtain the popular 50-minute video *Belonging: The Search for Acceptance*, on the social vision of Jean Vanier, or one of the 10-minute L'Arche DVDs: *Prophets of Peace*, or *Building a Compassionate Society*. (Please see back of the title page for ordering information.)

### A Note about L'Arche

L'Arche is faith-based, inspired by Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes. Communities are ecumenical or interfaith depending on their locale and composition. L'Arche seeks to help each member grow in his or her own faith tradition. It also welcomes those with no faith tradition.

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“An inspiration or a call to trust comes often in a moment of grace, in a gentle ray of light, in a moment of awareness of who we really are. Then we must walk forward and strengthen this awareness by making clear choices and a commitment.”

~Jean Vanier



## Session 1 Belonging Living in unity with others

“I belong to my family...my culture...my religion. But I belong to something even more than that, which is humanity. Belonging is to be part of humanity, but to make a conscious decision to be part of a group of people with a vision of truth and of justice and of love.”

~Jean Vanier

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### Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of Psalm 133, DVD ready to play, quotation cards to distribute.

### Engaging Today's Theme

- Why do you think Jean Vanier suggests we should be “part of a group” rather than working alone?
- Think of some place or group of people where you really belong or fit in, and some place or group where you feel that you don't belong.
- What qualities need to be present in a group of people for you to feel you belong?

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## Scripture – Psalm 133

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity!... For there the Lord bestows His blessing....”

Read the whole Psalm.

When we live in unity, we experience God’s blessing. But we need only to listen to the news or look at our schools and families to see that although we do live together, we often have a very hard time being united.

- How does competition at school—for friends, marks, sports awards, etc.—contribute to or take away from students’ sense of belonging?
  - Describe an experience when you were able to live or work in unity with somebody who was different from you, someone you wouldn’t normally associate with.
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## Jean Vanier

Jean Vanier is a Canadian humanitarian and spiritual leader who changed the lives of thousands of people by starting to live together with people who have intellectual disabilities. This small action of Jean’s grew into an international federation of communities called “L’Arche” (French for “the ark”) and a international movement for families of people with disabilities called “Faith and Light.” When Jean invited the first two men to share a home with him, barren and dehumanizing institutions were the norm for people with disabilities. They were kept away from society and regarded as strange and even dangerous. What Jean did was radical. Most people were unable to imagine living in unity with people who were seemingly so different. But as Jean came to know these men, he discovered that they were not so different, and that he himself could learn from them—from their values and the way they approached life.

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Wyndham Thiessen



Today we will watch most of a short video called *Choosing Our Future*. You will see a brief glimpse of a L’Arche community and then hear Jean Vanier responding to questions from young people. We will return to portions of this video in the coming sessions.

**Watch the DVD** from the beginning to 11:07 (the point where Jean says good-bye to the students).

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## Questions for Reflection

- How does Jean say that we are all alike?
- Are there “in” groups and “out” groups at your school? Describe them. Is it possible to reach out from one group to another, to risk being friends?
- Jean Vanier suggests that the first reaction to somebody who is different from us is fear. Do you agree? Are there other feelings we experience in this situation?
- What can help us live in unity in our world, our school, our homes?

In discovering friendship with people with disabilities, Jean’s own sense of who he is as a human being and a follower of Jesus has become deeper. Living together was not easy, but God blessed their efforts. God will bless our efforts as we face the challenges in loving people who are different from us and as we learn to see ourselves as brothers and sisters who are not so different in the ways that matter. We all have vulnerable hearts. We all want to be loved, and we all have the ability to love.

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## Action Ideas

1. Think of somebody at your school who is difficult to be with because they are different from you. How could you move closer to living in unity with them? Write down their name and pray for them this week. Try to find a way to connect with them. Do you notice any change in your feelings about this person?
2. Think of somebody you get along well with. Write their name down and give thanks daily for this person and your unity.
3. This week, ask three people what, in their experience, has broken down and what has built up unity in some situation.

*Be prepared to share about one of these Action Ideas at the next session if you wish.*

## Going Deeper

- Listen to audio track #7 of *On Becoming Human*, "Belonging: Its Importance and Its Pitfalls." What strikes you in what Jean Vanier says?



"How can we create situations where we can discover that our greatest gift is to help each other to be? ... to help those who are the powerful ones to discover that there is something more beautiful in them—their capacity to love—and to help those who have been pushed down to discover something more beautiful in them?"

~Jean Vanier

## Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of Matthew 5: 1-11, *On Becoming Human* audio track on DVD-ROM ready to play, quotation cards to distribute.

## Engaging Today's Theme

- Share an experience from last week's Action Ideas if you wish. Did you learn anything new about God, yourself or others? Can you connect it with today's Vanier quote?
- In the quotation, Jean Vanier suggests that "being" is the most important thing. We often spend most of our time "doing." Why do you think he stresses "being"?

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Today's scripture is called "The Beatitudes"—literally "the blessings." It is at the heart of Jesus' message.

Some questions to think about before you read the Beatitudes:

- Do you ever feel "pushed down," to use Vanier's words—perhaps unattractive, dumb or not respected? How do you cope with this?
- Recall a time when you felt comforted because someone showed mercy to you. (It may help to think of "mercy" as "kindness.")
- Recall a time when you comforted someone, or when you were a peacemaker.

Now, take turns reading the verses.

### Scripture – Matthew 5: 1-11

#### The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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 receive 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 for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

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This Scripture can be puzzling. Jesus suggests that blessings are often hidden in small, weak and unexpected places, and because of this we may not recognize them. This is true both in society and within ourselves: For instance, when we feel inadequate or "poor" we are often more open to the blessing of God's loving presence.

- Who are the blessed according to Jesus?
- Which group (those who mourn, the poor, the meek, the peacemakers...) do you relate to most?
- What would change at school, work, or in society, if we valued the following qualities: (a) mercy instead of judgment, (b) doing what's right even if it brings persecution, (c) hungering for justice?

### Jean Vanier

The Beatitudes were an inspiration to Jean Vanier in starting L'Arche. Today we will hear Jean Vanier speaking about how people with intellectual disabilities have helped him become more fully human. See if you can recognize some of the ideas of the Beatitudes in what Jean says.

Play audio track #1 of *On Becoming Human*, "Jean Vanier's Introduction to Students."

### Questions for Reflection

- Why do you think the Beatitudes are important to L'Arche?
- Where are you on your journey toward accepting and valuing yourself, discovering the kind of person you most want to be, and growing in freedom to be that person?

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## Action Ideas

1. Write a few of your own "Beatitudes." Begin your sentence with "Blessed are those who \_\_\_\_\_," and finish it with "For they shall \_\_\_\_\_."
2. Watch the 20-minute video, "The Story of Stuff" and visit the "Resources" section of [www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com). Compare the values of the Beatitudes with the values found in the society we live in as presented in this video.
3. Volunteer at a soup kitchen or food bank, or make sandwiches for a homeless program.
4. Spend time with somebody who is poor, or rejected, or mourning.... Try to be open to what they can give you. In what way are they gifted, blessed?

*At the next session, you will be invited to share some of what you learned about God and yourself if you wish. Take today's quotations with you to read and reflect on during the week.*

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## Going Deeper

Listen to audio track #8 of *On Becoming Human*. How does what Jean says connect with the Beatitudes?



## Session 3 One Body, Many Parts

"We each have different gifts. I have gifts which you don't have. You have gifts which I don't have; and so together we can do something beautiful."

~Jean Vanier

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## Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of John 10:10, DVD ready to play, quotation cards to distribute.

## Engaging Today's Theme

- Share an experience from last week's Action Ideas if you wish. Did you learn anything new about God, yourself or others? Can you relate this to today's quote?
- Who do you need? Why?
- Who needs you? How do you respond to their need?

## Scripture – 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

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Invite a good reader to read the entire Scripture passage.

We all belong to a common humanity. We are often urged to be independent, but humans are not meant to function in isolation—nor can we for long. As Christians, we also have a particular belonging—we are members of the body of Christ. We are one body with many parts, each with a gift to give to others so that God’s love may be felt in our world.

- This passage confronts us with two realities: (a) we are all different and (b) we all need each other because of these differences, whether we recognize it or not. Which role in the body of Christ do you most identify with? (For example, the eyes of the body would be those with vision, the ears would be those who listen perceptively, the feet are those that get things done.)
- How do you benefit from the strengths of others? How do others benefit from your strengths?
- When have you felt as if people were saying, “I don’t need you”? When have you found yourself thinking that way about others, especially in the church?
- Can you name a time when you felt a sense of Christian community like the one described in 1 Corinthians, where everybody has a place and is appreciated for their unique contribution?

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### Jean Vanier

Jean says that people with disabilities have a special gift for relationships. They can’t escape their need for others. Needing and loving others is central to our identity as God’s creatures. When we feel powerful and strong, we may act as though we don’t need others. We might even act like bullies. Love involves helping each person discover their beauty and goodness and being open to discovering our own beauty and goodness.

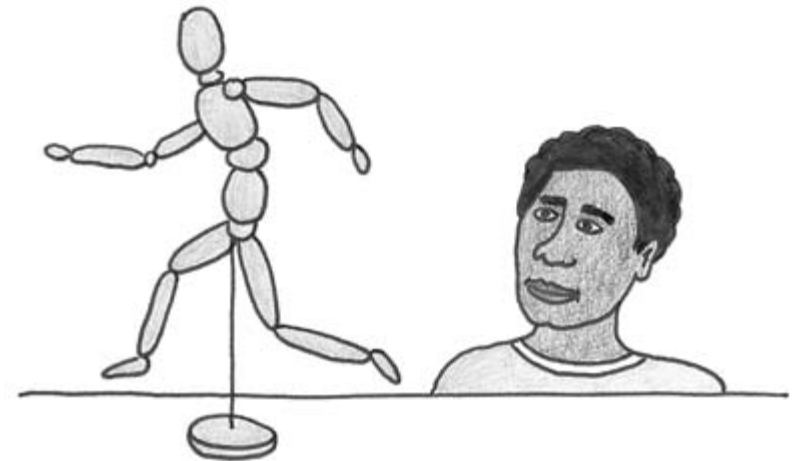
Watch the DVD *Choosing Our Future* from 6:16 to 9:32 (the questions about including students with disabilities and about bullies).

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### Questions for Reflection

- Are you more comfortable being needed or needing others? Explain.
- Jean Vanier says, “Weakness carries a secret power. The one who is weak can call forth the strong one.” The weak can help the strong to discover that there is more to life than success. There is love; there is belonging. Can you think of a time when weakness has awakened your compassion?
- How do you react to what Jean says about bullies? Have you thought about trying to understand a bully or trying to understand yourself better when you have been tempted to bully someone? Should bullying behaviour awaken our compassion for the bully?
- Jean says that some people are disturbed by weakness—the cry of a baby, people who are needy. Have you ever experienced frustration and anger in the face of weakness? When?
- Jean says we need each other to discover who we are. What are the benefits of working by yourself? Of working with others?



## Action Ideas

1. Jean Vanier says that we all ask the question, "Do you love me?" to each other, whether we know it or not. This week, be aware of the question, "Do you love me?" in yourself and in others. How do you feel when you perceive that someone loves and accepts you? How do you feel when you perceive that someone does not love you?
2. Each morning, open yourself up to the infinite love that God has for you. Imagine Jesus saying to you, "I love you. I know you. You belong. You are an important part of my body." Say these words aloud if it helps you to "hear" them.
3. Places like L'Arche are examples of how something beautiful can happen when we allow ourselves to function as a body with many parts. Go to the website [www.larche.ca](http://www.larche.ca) and click on the "Inspiration" tab at the top and subscribe to "free e-letters." Choose "weekly L'Arche e-stories." Look for examples of how we need one another in the stories that you will receive each Wednesday. (Your email address will be private and you can easily "unsubscribe.")

*At the next session, be prepared to share some of what you learned if you wish.*

## Going Deeper

Listen to audio track #12 of *On Becoming Human*, "Belonging as Where We Learn to be Human." What speaks to you in Jean Vanier's talk?



Manfred Breuler

## Session 4 The Lord of the Dance

**"I discovered a meaning in my life, which was to take people from institutions and begin to live with them, to celebrate life, to have fun."**

*~Jean Vanier*

## Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of John 10:10, DVD ready to play, quotation cards to distribute. If doing the alternative opening: a CD player, some lively dance music and space to dance.

## Engaging Today's Theme

- Share an experience from last week's Action Ideas. Did you learn anything new about God, yourself or others? Can you connect it to today's Vanier quote?
- When do you feel most alive? (perhaps when you are listening or dancing to music you love or involved in a sport or game you enjoy, or with certain people.) What elements in this time enrich your quality of life?
- *Alternative opening:* Play 2 or 3 minutes of lively music and invite the group to dance. (The leader should also dance.) Then, ask the group how dancing makes them feel.

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## Scripture – John 10:10

“I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.”

- What do you think Jesus means by “life to the full”? Have you experienced this? When? (The leader should expect a variety of responses.)
- What is an empty life? When have you experienced emptiness?
- Jean Vanier says that for him, living a full life includes doing something meaningful and beautiful and fun, and doing it with others. Can you relate to what he says? In what way?
- What are some of the blocks we encounter to living a full and abundant life?
- How can we come to experience the full life that Jesus has promised us in this verse?

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## Jean Vanier

We are going to watch a clip of people with and without disabilities who perform liturgical dance as a way of expressing a message of hope and community. Watch their faces and bodies. What do you see?

Watch the DVD *Choosing Our Future* from 13:48 to 16:20. (This is an epilogue which shows part of a rehearsal of the members of a L’Arche dance troupe, The Spirit Movers. It begins after the credits.)



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## Questions for Reflection

Sometimes encountering people with disabilities can feel awkward, because we may not be used to “dancing together,” or eating, or talking together. We can get caught in a prison of self-consciousness, where we worry about what other people will think of us and whether we look cool. This worry can thwart our natural desires to act in freedom. People with disabilities can sometimes teach us about letting go and allowing ourselves to enjoy the moment.

- What did you notice in the video? What did you feel as you watched the people dancing? Why do you think that you may feel this way?
- Can you imagine doing something like the dancing that you saw on the video? Why or why not?
- The people on the video are expressing themselves with their bodies through music and movement, even though one of the people is in a wheelchair. How does she participate in the dance?
- How would the dance change if the person in the wheelchair was not there?
- How do we make it difficult for others, our friends or classmates, to express themselves?
- In the last session’s video segment, a student asks Jean how we can better include students with disabilities in our schools. Share some possibilities.

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## Action Ideas

1. Before you go to school each morning this week, read the quotations on this week's card. Spend some time praying and ask God to help you live your day to the full. Imagine what that might look like in class, between classes, at lunch, after school.
2. When do you celebrate, dance, play music or do something else enjoyable during the week? Try to include someone in this activity who you think may be lonely.
3. Think of ways that your school or church could change to make life more full for all people, including people with disabilities. Share your ideas with the group at the next session. What steps could you take as an individual and as a group?

*At the next session, if you wish, be prepared to share what you have learned about God or yourself this week. Take today's quotations with you to read and reflect on during the week.*

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## Going Deeper

Listen to audio track #6 of *On Becoming Human*, "Balancing Being Alone and Connected." What strikes you in what Jean Vanier says?



W.P. Wilfrim Photography Inc.

## Session 5 Being Called How does God call us?

"Deeper down, it's always to find your desire;  
what do you want to do with your life?"

~Jean Vanier

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## Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of Micah 6: 6-8, DVD ready to play, quotation cards to distribute, items for collage if you are using the Going Deeper suggestion during this session.

## Engaging Today's Theme

- Describe your ideal life 10 years from now. (Leaders should expect a variety of responses.)
- What comes to mind as you think about the words "calling" or "vocation"?
- Your deepest desires are given to you as a gift and aid in discovering your sense of God's call. In what ways can you imagine your desires and God's call as similar and different?



W.P. Whitman Photography Inc.

### Scripture – Micah 6: 6-8

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

(Micah was an 8th century BCE prophet.)

- What does God require of us in this passage?
- How do we do these three things? Give examples from your own life or the life of someone you know.
- Micah’s summary of God’s call to us offers basic guidelines—a kind of rule of life that can be lived out in many different ways. Your parents or teachers may have a much more specific idea about your future. What dreams are in your heart?

### Jean Vanier

Jean Vanier has a wisdom about what it means to be called. He knows that God calls us to a full life and that there are basic principles always in God’s call.

Watch the DVD *Choosing Our Future* from 4:02 to 6:34 (the question about being afraid of the “call” and Jean’s answer).

### Questions for Reflection

- Does Jean’s talk of “a huge desire” help you to think about the meaning of your life and your future? Does it change your ideas about how God calls us.
- One of the students said that young people are often “afraid” when they think about what God might be calling them to do with their life. Why is that so? Do you relate to that fear?
- Jean Vanier says that we do not want to “be crushed.” Do you ever feel “crushed” by expectations and pressures to succeed? What are some ways we can encourage and empower one another to care about others and serve God in whatever path we are on?
- Jean Vanier tells the story of a young woman who found her deepest desire by spending time with people with disabilities. How do you think doing this might help someone come to know their own heart better?
- As Micah suggests, it’s often not what you do, but how you do it that counts. What are some concrete ways in your daily life right now that you can “do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?”



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Another spiritual thinker, Frederick Buechner, expressed what Jean says in this way: "The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." (from, *Wishful Thinking, a Seeker's ABC*)

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### Action Ideas

1. Be kinder than usual each day this week to someone you live with. This might mean helping, or being more patient, or more cheerful, or taking an interest in how someone's day has gone. Keep a log each day of how it is going.
2. Carry the quotation card in your pocket this week. Memorize the Micah passage. Whenever you find it in your pocket, read it and ask God to lead you as you make decisions about how to be in the present moment and what you may do in your future.

*At the next session, you will be invited to share what you learned about God and yourself, if you wish.*

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### Going Deeper

Use this session's Vanier quotation and the Scripture passage to make a collage on poster board, with magazines, photos, old cards, newspapers, etc. (This could be a group collage or an individual project to do as an Action Idea during the week.) Explain to the group your choice of items for the collage. Perhaps create a display in a public church space.

Listen to audio track #15 of *On Becoming Human*, "What Kind of Society Do We Want?" What strikes you in what Jean says?

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"I felt there was something missing, and I was in a way searching for a meaning to life, a meaning to my life. What did I want to do with my life?"  
~Jean Vanier

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### Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of Matthew 9: 9-13, DVD ready to play, quotation cards to distribute.

### Engaging Today's Theme

- Share an experience from last week's Action Idea or share your "going deeper" collage if you made one. Can you relate it to today's Jean Vanier quote?
  - Work used to be more stable. Your grandparents may have stayed in one job for most of their lives. Today, changing work and retraining are more common, whether by choice or of necessity. Imagine that you are already in a career but you are finding it unfulfilling and you want to change direction. How might that feel?
  - What advice would you give to a friend who is worried about what to do with his or her life?
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## Scripture – Matthew 9: 9-13

“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him.”

*(Tax collectors were unpopular because they worked for the Roman oppressors and because they often were dishonest—lining their pockets by forcing people to pay more taxes than were required.)*

Read the entire passage aloud, one person reading the narrator’s voice, one person reading Jesus’ words and others the Pharisees’ words.

- Why do you think that Matthew followed Jesus? What might he have been thinking or feeling before Jesus came along, that led him to accept Jesus’ invitation?
- This is a time of crisis for Matthew. He changed his life direction. Quite likely some of his friends or family thought his change was strange and didn’t like it. What do you think helped Matthew cope with the challenges of making this change?
- There are lots of voices that call to us—money, power, popularity... What are some voices, or who are people, that you will not follow?

Sometimes the Holy Spirit prepares us to make a change in our lives by giving us a feeling of discontent, or a change of heart or mind. We may be doing something good but God is inviting us to a new place, perhaps to use gifts we didn’t know we had. If we follow Jesus, we need to be prepared to change directions when called.



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## Jean Vanier

Jean Vanier started out joining the navy, but after a time he began a spiritual search that led him in a new direction. He found a path that helped him grow as a person and in his relationship with God while also enabling him to make a valuable contribution to our society.

Watch the DVD *Choosing Our Future* from 2:10 to 4:02 (Jean’s response to the question “What sparked you to do what you are doing?”). Listen for the changes in Jean’s life and how he discovered his call.

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## Questions for Reflection

- What factors were important to Jean in finding his direction in life?
- A sense of dissatisfaction with our life can sometimes be God’s voice calling us to make changes. Have you ever felt a need to make a life change? What happened?
- How do you think we can know when discontent is a real call from God to change and when it is just the result of some other factors?
- With whom do you talk about your hopes and dreams for the future?

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## Action Ideas

1. God calls people to follow in one way, and sometimes also calls people to change directions. Your life is an unfolding journey. Spend some time alone thinking about a big or a small decision that you are facing. Write it down. Ask God to help you as you make this decision and to trust that God will be with you in it. Remember that Jesus leads us into a full and meaningful life.

Here are some helpful ways to make a decision while asking for God’s guidance (adapted from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola):

- a. Make a list of pros and cons.
- b. Imagine what would happen if you made a decision in one

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direction. Try to be prayerfully in touch with your feelings about the outcomes of this decision. Try to use all of your senses as you imagine the outcomes. Do you feel peaceful or uncomfortable with this decision? Do you want to decide differently?

c. Ask people whom you trust to give you their input. Write down what you would like to ask and to whom. Why did you choose this person?

d. Tell prayerful people that you are facing a decision and ask them to pray for you.

2. Ask three adults you respect what has helped them make decisions. Choose people in and out of your family and of different ages, genders, and backgrounds.

*Take today's quotations with you to read and reflect on during the week. At the next session, if you wish, be prepared to share what you have learned about God or yourself this week.*

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### Going Deeper

- Listen to audio track #5 of *On Becoming Human*, "Five Principles for Recognizing the New." What strikes you in what Jean says?
- Google "Spiritual Exercises" and "Ignatius." What did you learn about this ancient method of decision making.



"If ever you meet a holy person, stick around. They don't grow on trees!"  
~Jean Vanier

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### Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of 2 Timothy 1: 1-7, DVD ready to play, quotation cards to distribute.

### Engaging Today's Theme

- Share an experience from last week's Action Ideas. Did you learn anything new about God, yourself or others? Can you relate it to today's quote?
- The idea of a "holy person" may evoke images of people with halos in medieval religious art. Think of someone you consider to be holy or saintly today. What qualities do they display?
- How would you define the word "mentor"?

### Scripture - 2 Timothy 1: 1-7

"For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

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In this passage, Paul is writing to Timothy to encourage him to grow in the faith. Paul is Timothy's spiritual parent or mentor. We also learn of Timothy's other spiritual teachers, his mother and his grandmother. Paul gives spiritual direction to Timothy, he prays for him, and he loves him. We all need such loving direction in our spiritual lives. Jean Vanier encourages us to seek out such support and to "stick around."

- Share some dearly held values your parents, grandparents or other family members have passed on to you.
- Share about someone outside of your family who is, or might be, a mentor to you.
- Can you think of other people in the Bible who were spiritual mentors? (Three ideas: Jethro to Moses, Moses to the children of Israel, Jesus to his disciples....)

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### Jean Vanier

In last week's video clip Jean Vanier spoke about meeting a priest, a holy person, who helped him recognize his call. Jean encourages students to find a mentor. Jean was guided by Père Thomas, who introduced him to people in an institution. He did not tell Jean what to do, but he made a comment—"perhaps you can do something." As Jean prayed, he had the idea of inviting some men from the institution to live with him so that they could have a happier, more fulfilling life.



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Père Thomas recognized Jean's longing for meaning and he knew that people need one another in the body of Christ. Jesus called a group of disciples. He was their mentor, their spiritual guide. He taught them and then he sent them out to minister in pairs (Luke 10:1). When you are trying to make an important decision, or perhaps changing your path, or just when you are trying to grow as a person, it can be very helpful to be able to open up to somebody who can help you listen to the voice of God in your life.

Remind the group of Vanier's account of his own journey or view the video again from the beginning to 4:02. If you do not view the video, listen to audio track #16 of *On Becoming Human*.

### Questions for Reflection

- Jean Vanier is a spiritual mentor for many people, both personally and through his books. He says he feels it is best never to give advice to anybody, but to listen to people and help them discover their own deep desire. How can you help people in their spiritual life without giving advice? Think of people who have helped you in this way. How does Jesus teach us?
- Can you remember any advice that you have been given that has stuck with you? What made the advice easier for you to receive?
- Some teachers and others are very good people and we learn from them, but we might not regard them as "holy." However, holy people are not necessarily famous. Have you ever met someone you would consider to be holy? What was it like?
- God's presence may be found in places we least expect. How can we open our hearts to receive guidance from unexpected sources? (Jean calls people who have intellectual disabilities his teachers.)

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### Action Ideas

1. Think about who helps you as you try to live out your faith. Find a way to connect with them and ask them a question that is on your mind about God or something important in your life.

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2. Ask among leaders in your church or Christian community to find someone who has had a spiritual mentor. Ask this person what that experience was like for him or her.

*Take today's quotations with you to think and pray about. At the next session you will be invited to share some of what you learned about God and yourself this week.*

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### Going Deeper

- Visit [www.makeyouthink.tv](http://www.makeyouthink.tv). Play some of the short videos and think about the discussion questions.
- If you did not already play it, listen to audio track #16 of *On Becoming Human*, "Moving Beyond Fear to Trust and Inclusion." Jean talks about his own fears and how fear can block us from growing. A good mentor can help us with this.



## Session 8 Choosing our Future: What kind of world do you want to help build?

"The big thing in our society is to help each person discover what is beautiful in them so that together we create a society where we love each other."  
~Jean Vanier

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### Preparation

Vanier quote on flip chart, pens and paper, Bibles or photocopies of Philippians 4: 8-9, DVD ready to play, quotation cards to distribute.

### Engaging Today's Theme

- Share an experience from last week's Action Ideas. Did you learn anything new about God, yourself or others? Connect this to today's Vanier quote.
- How do you imagine the future? Name a hope and a fear.
- What do you think Jean means concretely by "a society where we love each other"?
- Elsewhere Jean talks about working to close the gap between the rich and the poor. How does this connect with today's quote?

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### Scripture – *Philippians 4: 8-9*

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Take a minute to write down something that is true, something honourable, something just, etc. Share your responses with the group.

- Why do you think Paul gives this teaching to the church?
- There is a season for everything. Sadness and pain can make us more compassionate. But we can also get overwhelmed with dark thoughts. What do you do or think about when you find yourself stuck in a dark place?
- What does it mean to you that God is “the God of peace”?

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### Jean Vanier

We will watch the final portions of the video in two sections today. In the first segment two students bring Jean their questions about the future of the world and their own future.

Watch the DVD *Choosing Our Future* from 9:32 to 11:05 and Pause it.



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### Questions for Reflection

- What most struck you in Jean’s reply to the students’ questions?
- What sorts of things do you think Jean is talking about when he refers to terrible and beautiful things?
- The world can be overwhelming. A student on the video asks, “Where is hope for us—for our future?” What would you say to her?
- What might it mean for you to “be part of what is beautiful”?
- Why is believing in yourself important?

Watch the rest of the video from 11:10 to 13:20.

- Each of the students heard one or two things that were important for them in what Jean said. Think back over what you have heard from Jean Vanier in the past 8 sessions. What would you say if you were one of these young people asked to comment? Or, which student’s comment do you identify most with?
- Jean might have looked at the plight of people with disabilities in institutions and despaired. There were so many suffering people. But he decided to do something and he did it in faith and hope. He chose to help build a world where everyone belongs. In a similar way, Mahatma Gandhi encouraged his followers to “be the change that you want to see.” What specific change do you want to see? What specific way can you work towards “being that change”?
- How does Jesus inspire you to work for this change?

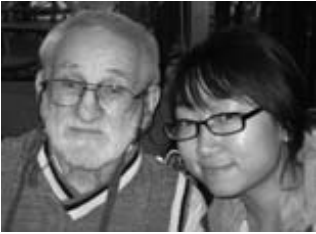
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### Action Ideas

This is the last session in this series. Below are some suggestions to go deeper with the themes of this study. Choose two:

1. In the DVD, students ask Jean Vanier about the future because he is somebody who has lived a life of faith and made a good contribution. Think of people you could invite to speak with your group about the future. List questions you would like to ask them.
2. Start a book club, choosing books about people who are living their faith in ways that help create a better world.

3. Volunteer with a person who is elderly or who has a disability, either intellectual or physical. Be open to forming a real friendship. Perhaps invite them to attend your group.



4. View together the video *Belonging: The Search for Acceptance*, which examines the social vision of Jean Vanier, or another L'Arche video. Or read Jean Vanier's book *Becoming Human*, or one of his other books, and discuss it. (See "Other Resources" on page vi.)

5. Research and get involved in one of the following faith-based social justice groups that welcome youth participation:

Anglican Youth Initiative: [www.justgeneration.ca/](http://www.justgeneration.ca/)

Mennonite Central Committee: [www.mcc.org/kits/](http://www.mcc.org/kits/)

World Vision: [www.worldvision.ca/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.worldvision.ca/Pages/Home.aspx)

Development & Peace (Catholic): [youth.devp.org/aframes.html](http://youth.devp.org/aframes.html)

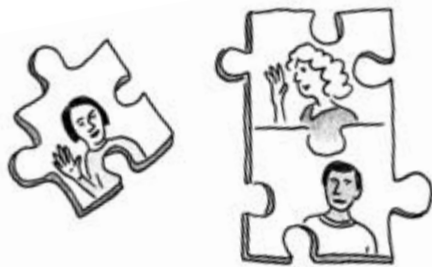
Think FAST: [www.youth.devp.org/aframes.html](http://www.youth.devp.org/aframes.html)

Kairos (ecumenical): [www.kairoscanada.org/en/get-involved](http://www.kairoscanada.org/en/get-involved)

6. Explore some of the L'Arche websites:

([www.larche.ca](http://www.larche.ca); [www.friendsofjeanvanier.ca](http://www.friendsofjeanvanier.ca), [www.larche.org](http://www.larche.org), [www.larcheusa.org](http://www.larcheusa.org)). If you live near a L'Arche community, ask if you can attend a prayer night, or invite a L'Arche speaker to your group. Ask them what kind of a future they envision and why they are choosing to live together in community.

7. Send an email to the people who created this guide telling us what you learned and giving any suggestions you may have. (Send it to [education@larche.ca](mailto:education@larche.ca).)



## Jean Vanier: A Short Biography

Acclaimed as "a Canadian who inspires the world" (*Maclean's Magazine*) and "Nation Builder of the Year" (*The Globe and Mail*, 2008), Jean Vanier is the founder of the international movement of L'Arche communities, where people who have developmental disabilities and the friends who assist them create homes and share life together.

Born in 1928 in Geneva Switzerland, where his father was serving as a Canadian diplomat, he is the son of Governor General Georges Vanier and Pauline Vanier. He was educated in England and Canada and grew up speaking both French and English. With the Nazi invasion of France, the family escaped from Paris back to Canada.



At just 13, at the height of World War II, he persuaded his father to permit him to cross the Atlantic again and enter England's Royal Naval Academy. He served in the British Navy and then the Royal Canadian Navy. In 1950, looking for deeper meaning in his life and a new way to work for peace, he resigned his naval commission and began a spiritual search. During this time he worked on a doctorate in philosophy, which he received from the Institut Catholique in Paris.

After teaching at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, he returned to France. Distressed by the plight of people with developmental disabilities, and following his sense of God's call, in 1964 he welcomed two men from an institution to live with him in a little home he called "L'Arche," after Noah's ark, in the French village of Trosly-Breuil. L'Arche grew quickly as this new way of sharing life together in community with people who would otherwise be shut away in institutions attracted many young people as assistants. And Vanier himself began traveling and speaking about his own life-changing experience of coming to know people with intellectual disabilities. Today, there are 135 L'Arche communities in 34 countries on six continents. In the 1970s, Jean also co-founded the international movement of family support groups called "Faith and Light."

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Jean Vanier carried the responsibility for L'Arche in Trosly-Breuil and for the International Federation of L'Arche communities until the late '70s. When he stepped aside from those responsibilities, it was to invite others to take leadership and to give his time more to counseling and accompanying the assistants in their personal growth, and to traveling to give lectures and retreats and encourage projects for new communities.

Jean Vanier has become a leader in consciousness-raising about the suffering of all who are marginalized. He is internationally recognized for his compelling vision of what it means to live a fully human life and for his social and spiritual leadership in building a compassionate society. He has written a number of best-selling books. Vanier resides in the original L'Arche community in France, when he is not travelling and speaking.

Vanier is recipient of numerous honours and awards recognizing his humanitarian work and his leadership as a social visionary, among them the Companion of the Order of Canada, the Legion of Honour (France), the Pope Paul VI International Prize, the International Peace Award (Community of Christ), the Rabbi Gunther Plaut Humanitarian Award, and the Gaudium et Spes Award.



Jean, (left), with L'Arche members in 1966.



Jean, at 13 in 1942, leaving for naval college.