

A 7-WEEK GROUP GUIDE

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As James says, let's be "doers" of the Word, not just "hearers" of it (James 1:22), so we designed this book with application in mind!

The goal of *The Stranger at Our Shore* is not necessarily to get you into a small group, but rather to empower you to reach out and receive the many "strangers" in your own community. However, as groups tend to provide a framework for community and application to take place, it makes sense to discuss and process these ideas together with other people in your context. Our hope is for church staffs, missional communities, small groups, micro-churches, Sunday School classes, church-planting teams, book clubs, and even entire churches to work through the book *together* and allow this material to shape their lives, the culture of their groups, and ultimately, their surrounding communities for the sake of the gospel. This study guide is intended to be a supportive resource for any group facilitator.

5 TIPS FOR LEADING A GROUP

- 1. PRAY. Prayer is a big part of our book. We want you to carve out intentional time and space for prayer. Pray that the Spirit will move and awaken ideas in the hearts of each person in the group. Pray that, ultimately, more people would be welcomed into the family of God. Have participants pray for each other concerning their next steps. And spend time listening in prayer as well—don't lead this group in your own strength, but follow God's leading in prayer.
- 2. COME PREPARED. Journal through the assigned reading on your own. Answer all the questions from each week as part of your prep work. As needed, consult commentaries or other study tools to provide insight into the meaning and context of passages for the week (you can utilize the "three questions" outlined in the next section to guide discussion about Scripture).
- **3. BE CREATIVE.** Think of ways to get the group connecting—maybe provide something fun and engaging to talk about before jumping into the more serious questions. If you're not creative, pinpoint someone in the group who is, and ask them for help.
- 4. WATCH THE CLOCK. The deeper the conversations, the greater the time challenge. Clearly identify and respect your end time. Keep things moving, not allowing one person to dominate the time, but finding ways to share the discussion. If you have a larger group, consider letting people answer some discussion questions one-on-one or in triads for the sake of time. Decide in advance how much time you will spend on each section—be sure to leave enough for the application section! Designate a group timekeeper.
- 5. **DEBRIEF AS NEEDED.** Consider discussing results of action steps chosen from the week before. This won't apply every week, but can provide some accountability as needed.

3 QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER BIBLE STUDY

Use these questions to help generate discussion after you read through the Scriptures together:

- 1. What does this scripture tell me about God? (Who is God and what's He doing in this passage?)
- 2. What does this scripture tell me about people (or myself)?
- 3. If this is God's word for my life, then how will I obey it? How will I respond in light of this truth?

The "5 Tips for Leading a Group" and format of this guide were adapted from the small group guide for "The Simplest Way to Change the World" from Moody Publishing (2017). The "Three Questions" for group study were adapted from the original Discovery Bible Study: discoverapp.org/discovery-bible-study.

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NOTE: Week One can be divided into two parts if more time for testimonies is desired!

Each week is divided into FOUR MAIN PARTS:

- 1. **READING ASSIGNMENT** for the week (including "SOUNDBITES" from the reading)
- 2. POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
- 3. ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE
- 4. FOCUS ON APPLICATION—please plan to leave plenty of time for this part!

BEFORE THE GROUP GATHERS, HAVE EVERYONE READ: Introduction and Chapters 1-3

SOUNDBITES FROM THE BOOK:

I'm not here to create controversy, but rather to stir up conviction; I'm not here to pick sides in a political debate. Not that political debates are wrong, but I am here to remind a frightened church of a deeper and more unifying truth—something that transcends all political views throughout all time: if you are a Christian, you can love people fearlessly. If you are a Christian, you simply have no reason to be afraid of anything, not terrorism or the immigrant boy down the street who needs to know Jesus . . .

The phrase "fear not" is arguably the most repeated command in all of Scripture. As Christians, we are called to fear two things: fear God and fear nothing.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10a). The foundation of all wisdom in the life of the Christian begins and ends with God. If God is calling the church to move, then moving in submission to His will is always going to be the wisest thing in the end—even if it doesn't make sense to this world—because He is the very definition of wisdom, the only one with an unbiased eternal perspective. Complete and total safety in this life is a myth because humanity is a mess. I don't have to tell stories about unsuspecting people who thought they were in safe places when tragedy struck them—we hear these stories all the time. So, the question for the church is not only going to be: "What do we think is safe and wise?" or even, "What do our experts and professionals and leaders think is safe and wise?" Most importantly, we must ask, "What does God think is wise? What is God asking us to do right now?"

- 1. What stood out to you from Josh's story?
- 2. When it comes to reaching other people for Christ, what are some of your fears?
- 3. If you personally know any immigrants or refugees, what are some of the challenges they face? If you do not personally know anyone, were there any moments in the previous chapters when you felt increased compassion for them?
- 4. Can you think of any opportunities you currently have (or have had in the past) to reach out to immigrants, refugees, or other "strangers" in your community?

ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE:

In the first section of the book, the primary topic was fear. Which Scripture from this list encourages or convicts you the most?

Jesus loved people at a danger to Himself, even to the point of death—and He calls us to the very same kind of love, to take up our cross and follow Him. (Matt. 16:24)

And even now, in these last remaining battles, God goes with us: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31b)

"For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you." (Isa. 41:13)

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." (2 Tim. 1:7)

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." (Deut. 31:6)

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18)

"The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1)

FOCUS ON APPLICATION:

Make some time to share testimonies—the story of how you came to know Jesus. *Specifically note how others helped or discipled you along the way—if you're in a group, consider making a big list of these "helpers" and how they helped to disciple you (e.g., Josh's Sunday school teacher).

*NOTE: If you want to designate more time for sharing testimonies in your group context, then feel free to break up "Week One" into two parts. Perhaps read the introduction and chapter 1 and focus on getting to know each other and sharing brief testimonies... then the following week, read chapters 2 and 3 and utilize the rest of discussion questions, Scripture, and application provided here, as needed.

BEFORE THE GROUP GATHERS, HAVE EVERYONE READ: Chapter 4, Inadequacy

SOUNDBITES FROM THE BOOK:

Think of the way a typical church might invest in their missionaries. There is usually testing and training involved; there are maturity measures; there is typically immense financial backing; there is prayerful support and regular ongoing communication efforts. The missionaries who go often spend years learning language and culture; they often inconvenience their entire family or make enormous sacrifices to be sent out. What if we received people with the same effort that we sent them out?... Over the years, we have put so much effort into thinking things like, "How are we going to go reach Mexicans in Mexico?" But the reality is, we have Mexican immigrants in our community, literally living next door. How will we reach out to them in Christ by receiving them well? Instead of putting all of our efforts into sending out a missionary to be integrated into that culture—how will we integrate these strangers into the culture of our own local church families? A strong sending model is still vital—but what would it look like for the church to put just as much effort into a receiving model?

Think about that—Peter himself almost missed the good news! Think about all that Peter had been through with Jesus—think about Peter witnessing Pentecost, the birth of the church, and watching as people abandoned their cultural beliefs and perhaps even their home countries to come live together as Christians in Jerusalem. Even after all of this, God still needed to convict Peter and warn him to no longer call anyone impure or unclean. Is it possible, if God tried to get Peter's attention in this way, that He also needs to get our attention too? If you need conviction in this area, you're just like Peter . . . and if you get Peter's heart after hearing this story, then God can use you just like He used Peter to build His church! . . . When we learn to see people as our potential brothers and sisters in Christ then our motivation to reach them and to overcome cultural barriers grows exponentially. In short, it becomes easier to love people when we start by believing they could become our future family.

Again, this is the first time Jesus claims the title of Messiah—He has not even done this with His closest disciples—and by the world's standards, this is the least honorable person to receive such an honor. But we must see, Jesus is not only doing this graciously; He is also doing it wisely. The fact that she is who she is makes her the perfect candidate to fulfill the plan. God does not use people in spite of their weakness but because of their weakness.

... For us inadequacy is a hindrance, for God it is a prerequisite.

- 1. In what ways do you consider yourself weak? Have you ever seen God use one of your own weaknesses to ultimately help or disciple someone else?
- 2. Who are the foreigners, immigrants, or refugees in your community? If you can't think of any, who are the people generally considered "outsiders" in your culture or neighborhood? In what ways do you feel inadequate to reach out to these outsiders?
- 3. Is there anything else that stood out to you from this chapter?

WEEK TWO: INADEQUACY: CH4

ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE:

This chapter focuses on two stories from Scripture; consider taking a deeper dive in your group:

PETER AND CORNELIUS (ACTS 10)

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (JOHN 4)

FOCUS ON APPLICATION:

What might it look like to create a strong receiving model in your church community to welcome these strangers into the family? Consider making a list of practical ideas and choosing some action steps.

BEFORE THE GROUP GATHERS, HAVE EVERYONE READ: Chapter 5, Ignorance

SOUNDBITES FROM THE BOOK:

How are Christians portrayed in the media and pop culture? In a good light or a bad one? Most Christians would say the worst aspects of Christianity are often the ones highlighted, not the best. Do you think it's possible that this same trend could be happening to other people groups too? Is it possible that a Muslim person would not want you to get your view of Islam from the news, in the same exact way that you would not want people to judge all Christians based on negative stereotypes in popular TV shows?

And what would you want people to know about Christians? And how would you want them to learn it? You would probably want them to see the good side of your faith—and you would probably want them to experience the good side from real-life, Jesus-following Christians.

So, consider for a moment: Who is informing your view of immigrants and people of other faiths? Is it Jesus? Is it your immigrant friends? Or is it the news, a website, or a TV show? If you find yourself with strong feelings against a certain people group—and you don't have a single friend from that people group—then consider the source of your information.

So, how do we find balance? After all, we cannot simply ignore people's culture when we seek to build relationships with them—as this is such an intimate part of their personal story—but neither can we make church culture-centric, basing our practices around something so transient. Church must be Jesus-centered. Culture is not the king here. Jesus is the King. So how do we know when we're drifting too far toward either extreme? Christians are certainly called to look different from the world, but have we rejected or demonized the culture so much that we have completely isolated ourselves from people in our community who need God? On the other hand, culture certainly has a place in our lives, but have we catered to culture so much that most people in our church look like us, talk like us, and believe like we do? Have our gatherings turned into echo chambers? Sunday morning sadly continues to be the most segregated hour in America. Reflect on your own church—who is missing from the family? Are there people groups who reside in your community that are not represented in your church? And not just in your church, but in your church leadership.

Jesus was not partisan, but He was certainly political. Jesus is King-that is a political title. He has set Himself up as the political ruler of His people, using "kingdom" language, saying His "government" will not end. Our main concern as Christians should be, "Am I under the rule of Jesus? Am I following the politics-not of Republicans or Democrats-but of King Jesus? Is my goal to defeat liberal or conservative ideology-or to love the liberal and conservative people whom Jesus loves?

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1. Can you think of examples of how Christians are often portrayed in the media and in pop culture? And likewise, how are Muslims or immigrants and refugees often portrayed?
- 2. Who is informing your view of immigrants and refugees? Do you have any friends who are immigrants or refugees? If so, how has this affected your views over time?
- 3. Culture changes so quickly. We have all seen major cultural changes just within the past ten years, and we have all seen examples of churches who gravitate towards extremes when it comes to culture, often out of fear—either isolating from the culture or catering to it. What helps us rebalance and engage the culture in a healthy, Christ-centered way?
- 4. Did anything else stand out to you from the chapter? Which Scriptures from this chapter encouraged or convicted you the most?

ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE:

Consider rereading the "letter to Diogenetus" in the chapter, as well as taking a deeper dive into the following Scriptures from the chapter to further explore the ideas of culture, identity, etc.:

PHILIPPIANS 3

REVELATION 7: 9-17

FOCUS ON APPLICATION:

How can you better engage a culture that you personally do not know very well? Consider making a list of ideas as a group.

BEFORE THE GROUP GATHERS, HAVE EVERYONE READ: Chapter 6, Indignation

SOUNDBITES FROM THE BOOK:

Consider the passage again in Revelation—the more multicultural we become as a church, the more we literally look like heaven! The more segregated we become, the less our blind spots are challenged—the more our churches become echo chambers. Diversity strengthens the church. The more diverse we become, the closer we are to the Truth—the closer we are to the heart of God.

But Jonah doesn't know what's good for him. He doesn't understand that their good is his good too! He doesn't get it; by preaching the good news to the Assyrians, God is actually answering the very thing he wants! By bringing them to repentance and pointing them to the true God, Jonah is giving them the best motivation to not murder, torture, and pillage the Jewish people. So Jonah is sitting there in misery in the last chapter, wanting to die, not realizing that God has defused the conflict situation and fulfilled Jonah's highest hopes about saving his own people. . . . Their good is our good too. This is how God built us. When the Israelites were taken into captivity in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah counseled them: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:7).

Is it possible that we're actually creating the very thing we're trying to defend ourselves against? Whether directly or subversively, when we say things like, "You have no place in our country. Go back to your country. You can never be one of us," the tendency is for these people to say, "Okay, I believe you." They grow up feeling like this is not their home, this is enemy territory. These extremist groups looking to recruit young members are all saying the same thing: help us defeat the West, the West is your enemy, you don't fit in there, you don't belong, you belong with us, etc. And what may have started as rejection has the potential to one day turn into violence.

. . . Now contrast these stories with what happened to me. I was accepted into the church, pursued by the people of God. I was loved; I was included. There were certainly obstacles and many times I felt different, but lots of things made me feel the same. In the end, I saw there was a place for me in the family.

- 1. Have you ever struggled with prejudice or even hatred toward a certain people group? Are there any cultures/subcultures you view as more evil than your own? Or times when you felt your anger against a certain people group was justified?
- 2. Can you think of a time when someone who was different from you helped you to see your faith with fresh eyes or provided a stronger interpretation of Scripture?
- 3. Often prejudice is deep-seated in our hearts, to the point where we don't even know it's there. Spend time in prayer asking God to show you any anger you harbor toward others.

ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE:

Consider taking a deeper dive into the story of JONAH, particularly chapters 1 and 4.

If you didn't discuss it last week, you can also take a look at **REVELATION 7: 9-17.**

FOCUS ON APPLICATION:

Can you describe a time in your life when you felt like a stranger or outsider? Write or share memories of when someone made you feel welcomed, like you belonged, especially in a new group of people. If you're in a small group, consider making a list of these practical ideas. Consider asking the group to prayerfully take an idea from the list to commit to as a personal action step.

BEFORE THE GROUP GATHERS, HAVE EVERYONE READ: Chapter 7, Love: From Charity to Family **SOUNDBITES FROM THE BOOK:**

You might think this makes no difference. It might even feel trivial to welcome a foreigner. But to me, it meant everything. Those small kindnesses, those commonplace interactions, they build up into a community you feel that you can trust and belong to. It may not mean much to you to get out of your comfort zone and intentionally welcome a stranger, but it can mean everything to them.

My first perspective of Christianity—and maybe this came mostly from my grandparents—was that Christians were kind, loving, accepting, welcoming, and wanting me to know Jesus. There was never a talking down of Islam—there was never a moment when I said, "Oh, you finally convinced me that Islam is terrible, yes, now I believe!" None of this. There was invitation after invitation. What won me over was the introduction to Jesus. Jesus drew me in, and all the things that needed to fall off—the cultural pieces and perspectives that were grounded in a worldview apart from Christ—fell off as I continued to walk toward Christ.

Who are the "projects" that your church targets? Is it possible to see them less as projects and more as people? To proceed from doing charity to doing family? Many people in your church congregation will stock food pantries, donate clothes, and care for the basic needs of their fellow human beings, but they would have a very difficult time including these human beings within their circle of friends. We want to empower them, but do we actually want to befriend them? Do we really want them as part of our family?

All churches have the potential to become unhealthy. The model we choose should be shaped by and best suited to the culture and context around us. But the mission is always the same. The mission is more important than the model. The question is, is your church on mission? And is that family mission then shaping the model?

- 1. Who are the "projects" your church targets as recipients of charity? Are any of the people from these projects members of your church family? Are any of them your personal friends?
- 2. Are there any people groups in your community noticeably missing from your church family gatherings or from your church leadership?
- 3. What are some benefits about the model your church uses? What might be some of the weaknesses? What is the mission of your church—and is your church "on mission" with God?

WEEK FIVE: LOVE: FROM CHARITY TO FAMILY: CH 7

ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE:

Jump back to the chapter on "Ignorance" and review some of the "family" Scriptures (and even other stories, such as the story about the café . . .):

Jesus' mother and brothers from MATTHEW 12

Jesus, John, and Mary at the cross from JOHN 19

Jesus' prayer for unity from JOHN 17

FOCUS ON APPLICATION:

Take some time to prayerfully reflect and write down an action step. Who will you reach out to in the coming weeks and months? How can you better position yourself to meet the "strangers" in your community? (Perhaps work through the list of ideas on pg. 122 together?)

BEFORE THE GROUP GATHERS, HAVE EVERYONE READ:

Chapter 8, Prayer: From Practice to Lifeline

SOUNDBITES FROM THE BOOK:

Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). In order to truly know the voice of God, we have to spend actual time listening in prayer. The greatest limiting factor in getting the Western church to pray more is our own comfort. Prayer is an expression of humility and need. The less you need and the more comfortable and in control you feel, the less likely you are to pray. The world we live in conditions us to be in control. I can control everything in my house on my phone. I can track my heart rate on my watch. And if my world is relatively comfortable and under control, then I don't feel much need to pray.

Not many of us pray like my grandmother. Not many of us find ourselves praying for ten years about the same request, let alone gathering a group of people every week for that specific purpose. We're tempted to give up if we don't get the answer we want. Not many of us even pray intercessory prayers for others. We often focus on our own prosperity—our own health, security, or "traveling mercies" as needed. These requests are not wrong, especially if we are asking with pure hearts. No request is too small—after all, Jesus Himself directed His disciples to pray for "daily bread." But we also need prayers of boldness and persistence. We need people who will boldly pray for the salvation of others for ten years, twenty years, or even longer.

Time is our most valuable resource—and time is the way we must prioritize prayer. . . .When we want to focus on losing weight, we carve out time in our schedule for exercise or meal preparation. When we want to build a relationship, we carve out time in our schedule for a date or some other type of quality time. It's the same with prayer. We must simply set aside time and space. Jesus consistently stole away from the crowds to pray and connect with the Father.

- 1. Have you ever known the joy of a long-awaited prayer being answered?
- 2. Why do you think Jesus prayed so much? And why do you think God calls us to pray so fervently in Scripture?
- 3. Is there anything else that challenged or encouraged you from this chapter?

ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE:

Consider reading through/meditating on these Scriptures as a group:

"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." (Rom. 12:12)

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Phil. 4:6)

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances..." (1 Thess. 5:16-18)

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." (Col. 4:2)

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5:16)

"After leaving them, he (Jesus) went up on a mountainside to pray." (Mark 6:46)

FOCUS ON APPLICATION:

Is prayer a priority in your life and in your church life? And if not, what would it look like to truly prioritize prayer in your life and the life of your church?

BEFORE THE GROUP GATHERS, HAVE EVERYONE READ:

Chapter 9, Blessing: From Comfort to Suffering

SOUNDBITES FROM THE BOOK:

Comfort does not equal God's blessing. Plenty does not equal God's blessing. And suffering does not equal God's curse. God's glory is the only thing that equals God's blessing.

That shocking phrase, "participating in the sufferings of Christ," is not well understood. Suffering is not meant to be masochistic. We are not taking pleasure in the pain itself. Even Jesus did not want to go to the cross—we see Him in the garden of Gethsemane sweating drops of blood as He contemplates the task at hand. Every cell in His body—and every cell in our bodies—does not want to die. We are designed for life; we thirst for life because God has set eternity in the human heart (Eccl. 3:11). So, as Christians, when we say we are participating in the sufferings of Christ, we are implicitly including the idea of willingness. The suffering of Christ was willingly chosen, in love. We see in Scripture how no one could even touch Jesus because it wasn't His time. No one could take the life of Jesus; He chose to lay it down (John 10:18a). . . . There is sometimes a mindset in the church that we'll be prepared to suffer as a last resort. So we think of scenarios like, "If someone puts a gun to my head, then I would choose Christ." But the suffering that Jesus is calling us to is not forced. It assumes there is a choice. There must be a willingness to lay down our lives daily, by simple humility, by putting ourselves last. I can participate willingly by choosing to give up my comfort, my money, my freedoms, my privileges, or my time. Suffering is a first choice, not a last resort.

God is calling us to sacrifice, and Jesus describes this way of life as a cross that you pick up. Yet, He also says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest . . . For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28, 30). God is calling us into suffering, but He is not actually calling us into a life of misery. Where we see suffering and sacrifice in Scripture, we also see joy. . . . Think about parenting. Parents do not typically frame their lives of caring for children as suffering, but as blessing and privilege. And yet, they are willing to lose many hours of sleep, lose enormous amounts of money, lose entire parts of their identity, endure huge life changes and severe emotional strain. If it was something else besides children causing these things to happen, people would call it suffering! But the difference is the love we have for our children. We count the suffering a blessing and a privilege, rather than misery.

We often feel overwhelmed by all the world's problems. It's even more difficult when you're reaching out to people who have made problems for themselves. Oftentimes we think, "Dude, you made your own bed in all this, why is this my problem again?" It feels like I have to inconvenience my life and my family to now walk with them in their problems. . . . And yet, I see the incarnational way that Jesus did things. Here we are on earth, living in our sin, and Jesus came; He lived here among us, He smelled us, He touched us, He was tempted, He suffered, He healed us, He prayed for us, He fed us, He taught us, He walked with us, He wept with us. Jesus came down from heaven—from inconceivable abundance—and chose to get into our mess. The mess we had made for ourselves.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1. In what ways does your faith cost you?
- 2. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know suffered for something or someone, but counted it a blessing or even experienced joy through that time?
- 3. Take a moment to reflect on the journey of this book. Go back to the introduction. Of the three kinds of readers, what kind are you?

ZOOM IN ON SCRIPTURE:

THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LUKE 10)

THE GIFT OF THE MACEDONIANS (2 COR 8: 1-15)

FOCUS ON APPLICATION:

How has this study challenged or changed you? (Perhaps go back and read the introduction with the three types of readers prior to asking this question.)

What are you going to commit to doing in order to care for immigrants and refugees? What giftings or resources could you or your church potentially allocate to serve the "stranger" in your community?