

# An UNTIDY FAITH

A COMPANION GUIDE FOR REFLECTION,  
DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY



STUDY GUIDE BY  
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# A NOTE TO READERS ON USING THIS GUIDE

This is a companion guide for reflection, discussion, and further study to Kate Boyd's *An Untidy Faith: Journeying Back to the Joy of Following Jesus*. As such, it is assumed in the structure and nature of the questions asked that if you are using this guide, you have read the corresponding chapter in the book.

For each chapter in the book, this guide includes a few main themes or takeaways found therein, and a few questions to help readers reflect on, discuss, metabolize, and apply what they read to their lived experience, faith journey, and where they currently find themselves along the way.

Most, if not all, of the questions available for each chapter can be used for personal reflection as well as in group discussion. A few questions are specifically geared toward personal introspection only, and a few are meant primarily for discussion in a group setting. Feel free to add to, adapt, or skip over questions as it best serves you in your context.

Some questions will ask you to consider your theology, beliefs, practices, and church traditions, and to then share those in a group setting. This also means that within the group discussion time, people who believe and practice differently than you will be doing the same thing. My prayer is that rather than assuming a posture of certainty, insistence, gatekeeping, or domination, each of you will approach these conversations with curiosity, humility, charity, and loving-kindness.

## BLESSING

May you wrestle with these ideas like Jacob wrestled God—

for as long as it takes and not letting go until they yield a blessing.

Even if there's pain.

Even if you experience a fundamental change in who you've been and how you identify.

Even if your walk looks different than it did before.

May the blessing of God's transforming love and faithful presence be enough. Amen.

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# I CHOOSE YOUR OWN DECONSTRUCTION

## THEMES

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1. Traveling to or learning about countries where Christianity is suppressed can give us a wider lens through which to see the Christian faith, how God moves, and what it means to actually live out the popular '90s slogan "What would Jesus do?"
2. This chapter explores the cognitive dissonance we experience when confronted with the moral failings of evangelical leaders and teachers—including abuse and misconduct—and the seemingly endless stories of survivors of such trauma, as well as the way this has caused many of us to begin rethinking our relationship with Jesus, the church, or evangelicalism.
3. *Deconstruction* as a theological concept was first introduced as a helpful way to look at our faith journeys, but soon became dreaded, demonized, or damned by leaders who felt that their authority or credibility was being challenged by those in the process or on the other side of it. People tend to make one of three choices for their deconstruction journey: doubling down, demolishing, or disentangling.
4. The process of disentangling formerly held beliefs (certainties) is modeled for us throughout the gospels by Jesus and his disciples.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. Read John 6:53–69. This passage offers us just one example of Jesus making space for his followers to count the cost of their discipleship, to ask questions and express confusion, and to let go of their preconceived notions. Put yourself into the shoes of someone hearing the teachings of Jesus in this passage for the first time. Can you identify with the disciples' reaction to Jesus' teaching in this passage? In what ways does Peter's response to Jesus resonate with your own faith story?
2. What parts of this chapter, if any, did you find difficult to square with your experience of church or faith or God?
3. In this chapter, Boyd writes that after her travel to Latin America, her new motto for understanding the Christian faith became "If it is biblical, it must be global" (p. 30). What does that expression mean to you? Why is that good news?
4. After reading the definitions of orthodoxy and fundamentalism on page 37, which one resonates more with your experience of the Christian faith throughout your upbringing? And today?
5. Is there someone in your life like Benita whose faith has reflected back to you a clearer vision of God's work in the world and the Christian faith? Share about this person with your group, and what specifically you find compelling (or convicting) about their faith and its expression.

## 2 RESPECTING THE BIBLE'S BOUNDARIES

### THEMES

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1. In this chapter, Boyd explores some of the doctrines about the Bible that are most widely used within fundamentalist evangelicalism—namely, inerrancy, infallibility, verbal plenary inspiration, and plain-reading interpretations—and some ways that those doctrines can be exchanged for or transformed into a more helpful, faithful way of engaging the Bible.
2. Our beliefs about these doctrines (or the ones we have swapped them out for as our faith evolved) shape how we read the Bible and how we interpret its meaning and apply it to our modern-day lives of faith.
3. Rather than demanding the Bible be something it isn't, we can instead respect the Bible for what it is and what it is intended to be—a complex library of books that tells the story of how a loving God interacts with humanity, renews all broken things, and invites us to participate.
4. Engaging concepts like context, the meta-narrative of Scripture, genre, authorship, intended/original audience, themes, literary devices, interpreting in community, and the companionship of the Holy Spirit can help us as we read and interpret the Bible today.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. What are some ways you have seen or experienced the doctrine of inerrancy weaponized against Christians who disagree or who come to conclusions different from the “party line” of fundamentalism?
2. Are there any areas or subjects where you are asking the Bible to be something it was never supposed to be? (Examples: a scientific account of when and how life begins, a historical record of how and when the world was created, an instruction manual on how women today should dress or how modern church services should be conducted based on what is written for a first-century context). In what ways can you release that requirement of the Bible and still love it for what it is?
3. Why should considering things like context, genre, authorship, original audience, and overarching themes inform the way we read a specific biblical text? What is different about the way you read poetry from the way you read a letter? How does it help when interpreting Scripture to know the context in which it was written (e.g., in Israel's captivity written for an oppressed people, from prison to a local church of new believers heavily influenced by secular Roman or Greek culture)?
4. Throughout your faith journey, how has reading the Bible and doing theology in community (whether in community with the spiritual fathers and mothers from centuries ago, or together with a group of people now) borne fruit in your life? What fruit was borne of it? (Note: If you're reading this book for a small group or book club and then gathering to discuss it, you're doing this now!)

# 3 THE WHOLE GOSPEL

## THEMES

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1. In this chapter, Boyd describes some of the common teachings and pushback within certain circles of American Christianity that believe the gospel is *spiritual only*, in comparison with other subsets of American Christianity that believe the gospel encompasses social justice and God's heart for the oppressed.
2. The good news of the gospel is why we wait with hope for the day when all things are made new and every person is made whole, and that we see it is God's desire for us all along. On page 69, Boyd writes, "If God wants our bodies and souls to be complete, then part of bringing God's kingdom 'on earth as it is in heaven' means partnering with God to be agents of that completion. Physical care is part of our spiritual ministry, because humans aren't just souls."
3. Meeting physical, financial, psychological, emotional, and relational needs can open a door for evangelism and meeting spiritual needs. In this chapter, Boyd includes examples from Jesus' ministry where he meets both the spiritual and physical needs of those to whom he is ministering.
4. The gospel story is a wholeness story, and a justice story. If the gospel is true, and is truly good news, then it must necessarily include wholeness, justice, equity, reparation, and healing—not just for the individuals receiving and believing it, but for those who consider themselves partners of and in sharing the gospel, for whole communities or people groups, and for the entire world.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. Micah 6:8b says, "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (NIV). How does the pursuit of mercy and walking humbly with God tie in to the work of justice for us as Christians? Discuss how each of those aspects informs the others.
2. Think of some other encounters from the gospels where Jesus meets people's needs. Are there times when he simply preaches to people or teaches them without meeting a need they have asked him to meet? Are there times when he just heals them physically or provides for them in some other way and leaves it at that? How do these stories shape your understanding of God's heart? God's mission? The church's mission? Give examples as you discuss within your group.
3. In this chapter, Boyd explains the intrinsic connection between justice and righteousness, especially in the Greek and Hebrew languages. Continuing Boyd's exercise from this chapter, consider the following verses that use the word *righteousness* and see what changes when you substitute the word *justice* instead: Matthew 5:6; Romans 14:17; Hebrews 12:11; 2 Peter 3:13.
4. In what ways can your love for God inform how you practice self-care and love for self? In what ways can love of and care for yourself inform how you see and love God?

## 4 A MORE TANGIBLE HOPE

### THEMES

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1. Evangelical teachings about the end times, heaven and hell, and the rapture are often a version of modern gnosticism that prioritizes and elevates all things spiritual over all things physical.
2. To get a clearer picture of the end of the story, the *eschaton*, we need to start at the beginning . . . in the garden, where God and humans dwelled together in perfect shalom.
3. Throughout the narrative of Scripture, and certainly in the passages dealing with eschatology (the study of the end times), we see the promise and foreshadowing of a New Jerusalem that is re-stored back to perfect shalom, culminating in the description found in Revelation 21–22.
4. We also see a foreshadowing of this in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ—often referred to in the New Testament as the firstfruits of what’s to come for all of us in Christ.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. In everything from Sunday school and sermons to secular movies and music, descriptions of what people think heaven is like are commonplace. Think back through your upbringing and even to the present. What are some popular notions of heaven or the end times that you have most frequently heard—whether from within the church or from broader Western culture?
2. Was (or is) “end times anxiety” something you relate to, perhaps drawing on apocalyptic Christian fiction like *Left Behind* (and others)? How did that anxiety manifest in your life and faith?
3. What messages have you received from the church about physical bodies (yours and others’), the earth, the environment, money, possessions, land, missions, and the prioritization of spiritual health/growth? Did, or does, functional gnosticism, as Boyd describes it, show up in any of those teachings and messages?
4. “The love of God not only changes us, it changes how we interact with the world” (p. 96). How does the love of God for us—not just personally, but for the whole of creation (*kosmos* in Greek)—change how you interact with and care for creation?
5. Is there a certain word, phrase, or promise from Revelation 21:1–4, which Boyd references in this chapter, that offers a particular anchor of hope for you? What is it and why?

# 5 KINGDOM OF GOOD

## THEMES

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1. American evangelicalism, since its beginning, has sought to infiltrate political power structures, twisting some of America's founding principles (including religious freedom, the separation of church and state, and white supremacy) to fit its own narratives in an attempt to re-brand America as a "Christian nation" from its founding. Taken even further, the rising Christian nationalism movement claims that God has special affection for the United States *over others*, and special affection for Christians *over others*. This leads to two dangerous conclusions: (1) that authority and power should belong to (primarily white) evangelicals "for the good of the whole country and the world" and (2) that countries which are not "Christian nations" (read: most other countries, and especially those where the majority population is not white) and their citizens are not favored by God. Therefore, any suffering, war, poverty, hunger, or disease is evidence of this.
2. In stark contrast, Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God on earth—which encompasses every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth—rather than a particular nation-state or people group. In the kingdom of God, worldly power structures, class systems, and values will be thrown down, sent away, and cast out in favor of justice, peace, meekness, humility, gentleness, and the restoration of dignity for all people.
3. In the Gospels, we frequently see Jesus communicating what the kingdom of God is like through the use of storytelling and parables.
4. The biblical idea of blessing is very different from the prosperity promises we encounter in some circles of Christianity, and we see this at work perhaps most clearly in the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. Consider the messages you have heard throughout your life about America's founding principles, the founders themselves, God's relationship to America, and God's relationship to the world. Where do you see American exceptionalism, Christian nationalism, or other false, harmful narratives that skew the vision, love, and mission of God?
2. Which of the parables told in Matthew 13 is the most winsome, helpful, or clarifying for you in understanding what the kingdom of God is like?
3. Read Luke 1:46–55, which is Mary's Magnificat, a song of worship to God for the coming of the kingdom through the baby in her womb. In this song, she also describes what the kingdom of God is like. What connections do you see to Mary's Magnificat and the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount?
4. As an exercise, create your own parable of what the kingdom of God is like, using modern language and metaphors. Share your parable with your small group or book club and discuss why you chose the imagery you did and what it communicates about a central tenet of the kingdom.

# 6 UNDERSTANDING OUR FAMILY LEGACY

## THEMES

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1. By seeing how Christians practice their faith in parts of the world that are hostile to Christianity, we are confronted with our own (North American) understandings of “church” and worship and daily mission.
2. The New Testament writers often used various metaphors to describe the essence, function, and relationships of the church—metaphors like temple, body, and priesthood.
3. Boyd explores three types of congregational dynamics that can become problematic either for a congregation’s members or for its witness: consumer-driven (an emphasis on opportunities for learning and fellowship), conference-style (an emphasis on a big experience with God), and cult (an emphasis on a charismatic leader and an “us versus them” mentality).
4. Drawing on Acts 2:42–47, Boyd highlights four activities which indicate that a local church expression is following the legacy of the earliest church: gathered communal rituals of worship, proclamation of Jesus and the kingdom, service to one another and the wider community, and fellowship with one another.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. Have you ever experienced something similar to the dissonance Boyd describes of seeing Christians abroad worship in contrast to witnessing the capital campaign for building funds being raised in her home church? Did your experience, or the one Boyd describes, prompt you to reconsider what you think church is or ought to be?
2. Which of the three metaphors for the church found in the New Testament and explored in this chapter—body, bride, temple—resonate most with you? Why? (Especially for men: If the bride metaphor is the one you least identify with, take a moment to consider whether it’s because of the feminine language/imagery. If so, how might your faith become more robust, full, and inclusive if feminine imagery and language were integral to it?)
3. Some Christian denominations emphasize apostolic succession, calling and ordination, and seminary training in order to be recognized as a leader or hold church office. Others place a greater emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, willingness and availability, and lay ministers. Which of these are you most familiar with? What are some of the pros and cons of each perspective? In your view, which offers a more compelling vision of how the church today is governed, led, and functions? Why?
4. Think about your current or most recent experience of belonging to a local church. Of the three dynamics explored in this chapter—consumer-driven, conference-style, cult—which most closely describes it? What are the reasons you were drawn to this church initially, and what keeps you coming back?
5. Of the four aspects highlighted as the legacy of the earliest church, where do you see your current or most recent church in need of improvement? Where do you see this church most faithfully following in the footsteps of our spiritual mothers and fathers of the first century?



# 7 THE PAIN IN THE PROMISE

## THEMES

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1. Persecution is a reality for many Christians all over the world. However, what many American Christians—especially in white evangelical circles—view as persecution is rather the existence of opposing viewpoints and culture wars.
2. The whole of the Sermon on the Mount paints for us a picture of what followers of Jesus should do on his account, and it has nothing to do with dominating culture. Rather, it is largely focused on how we position our hearts in order to break cycles that disrupt shalom and bring reconciliation to our relationships with those around us. It is the work of restoring shalom—peace, wholeness, integrity.
3. From the earliest days of the faith, suffering has been part and parcel of the Christian life. In all our suffering, whatever it looks like, the promise of God to us is the same: God is near. God loves you. God will make all things right. Our reward is great in suffering because it is the reward of the redeemed and restored. It is the reward of Godself and being a part of the future world where everything has been set right again.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. Consider these questions that Boyd raises: “How did your church growing up talk about persecution or cultural values? What examples, if any, did they use of your waning influence? How did they encourage you to view these interactions or pushback against them?” (p. 133).
2. Have you ever experienced what you considered to be persecution for practicing your faith? Has your perspective changed after considering what true persecution looks like for global Christians who aren’t in the dominant culture where they live? Why or why not?
3. In this chapter, Boyd says, “Living prophetically in the way of the kingdom means living a life of faithful disruption” (p. 137). In what ways does your faith inform and compel you to disrupt the American/Western status quo of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, ableism, and other oppressive power structures? What has discipleship cost you specifically? What pushback or responses have you experienced from within or outside of the church?
4. Think back on times of suffering in your life. Did you experience spiritual bypassing or any of the “thought-terminating clichés” that Boyd writes about from other Christians trying to comfort or console you (see pp. 139–140)? What did you hear? Discuss among your small group or book club some better alternatives for offering hope to those around us who suffer.
5. White American Christians (like me) have much to learn about perseverance in faith despite suffering and persecution experienced by their Black brothers and sisters in Christ. Who are some Black theologians, authors, pastors, or prophets whose teachings you have learned from in this area? If no one comes to mind, how can you commit to learning from such voices going forward?

# 8 COMPELLED BY COMPASSION

## THEMES

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1. This chapter begins part 2 of the book, where Boyd shifts focus to the joyful embodiment and practice of our faith.
2. Using the gospel of Mark, we see what it looks like to redefine power and authority structures within the church to be modeled on Jesus' own leadership.
3. Driven by compassion for those whom he was ministering to and teaching, Jesus regularly resisted (and often outright opposed) the kind of platform-building and financial gain that tempt so many within American Christianity today. Instead, he ministered to people in proximity and fed them spiritually, physically, and relationally.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. In your denomination or faith tradition, who has power or authority? What, if any, are their common characteristics? Who is missing or underrepresented, and what might it mean if they were included?
  - a. Are those in power all or mostly men, or are women equally involved in leadership, teaching, preaching, and ministry?
  - b. Are those in power all or mostly white, or is a diverse range of ethnicities, races, and backgrounds represented at the decision-making table?
  - c. Are those in power all or mostly straight and cisgender, or are LGBTQIA+ folks affirmed and celebrated in leadership?
  - d. Are those in power all or mostly all married, or do single, divorced, and widowed people also lead with authority?
  - e. Are those in power all or mostly all able-bodied? Of a certain generation? Wealthy?
  - f. Does your local church have full or almost-full autonomy, or is there a hierarchy that each congregation or parish must submit to or collaborate with?
2. In this chapter, Boyd references the compassion of Jesus noted in Mark 6:34. Matthew's version says, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36 NIV). Close your eyes for a few moments and let that verse run through your mind, through your heart, and through your body several times. Is there a certain word or set of words that stands out to you personally? What image of Jesus forms in your mind's eye? How does it feel in your body when you sit with these words?
3. In keeping with the theme of part 2 of this book—the joyful practice of our faith—what is something you read in this chapter that, when embodied in your faith practice, could lead you to more joy in following Jesus? What (if anything) is stopping you from stepping into, embodying, and laying hold of that thing?

## 9 CONFIDENCE IN THE SPIRIT

### THEMES

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1. The American church can learn much from our global siblings in how we see spiritual authority and who is leading our church services, ministries, and spiritual formation.
2. The Holy Spirit that dwells within each Christian individually, and within the church as a whole, is the primary source of one's spiritual authority—not seminary degrees, ordination, or titles.
3. The Holy Spirit's indwelling is also the primary source of our ability—enabling people to serve, lead, and make disciples. Boyd notes, “The power we receive is not one of earthly power structures and seats of domination. It is not an authority that overpowers. It is an authority that empowers. It does not rule. It serves. And as the great commission makes clear, it is an authority used for making disciples—baptizing and teaching to obey, and therefore, embody witness in the world. That is the purpose for which we are empowered” (p. 173).
4. Because these things are true, we should neither hide our gifts, believing they are not as important as others, nor seek to exercise them for the sake of having power or dominion over others, believing our gifts are more important than those of others.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. What comes up for you as you read this statement: “Theological training doesn't have to be formal to be effective, but even more importantly, faithfulness does not require formality” (p. 169)? Do you agree or disagree? How does that align with your current faith practice or tradition?
2. How is it determined—in your tradition or denomination and within your local church context—who will be behind the pulpit, leading worship, directing ministries, and teaching classes? What qualifications are required, if any? When, how, and where are laypersons serving and leading? (If you aren't sure, set aside a few minutes to research the answer through staff bios, About Us pages, denominational websites, or asking your pastor/rector/minister.) What are the pros and cons to the way your denomination and local church context are spiritually formed and led?
3. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, 11, we read that each person is empowered by the Holy Spirit with gifts to be used for the common good of the whole church. What spiritual gifts can you use for the good of your local church or the church as a whole? If you aren't sure or haven't considered this before, ask people who know you well and see whether a common theme arises in their feedback. What ministries, organizations, or other outlets might you be able to serve in to use your spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ?
4. What is something you read in this chapter or considered in these questions that—when embodied in your faith practice—can lead you to more joy in Jesus and your faith? What (if anything) is stopping you from stepping into, embodying, and laying hold of that thing?

# 10 HEADS, HANDS, AND HEARTS OF CHRIST

## THEMES

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1. Credentials, awards, political and social stances, and even our questions or doubts can often be used by others, and by ourselves, as metrics for faithfulness or true discipleship of Jesus. We see in this chapter that those things, some of which are important, are not what determine our standing before God nor our belief in and belonging to Jesus.
2. The Christian life of discipleship is not about pursuing credentials, checking off boxes, or striving to perform at our best. Disciples need to be formed in what they believe (orthodoxy), what they do (orthopraxy), and what they become (orthopathy)—in other words, belief, behavior, and becoming.
3. As we see in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, love must be the compulsion, the conviction, and culmination of all we do in the name of and for the sake of Jesus.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. Have you ever had someone—whether in person or online—challenge your authenticity as a “good” Christian, a true Bible-follower, or a faithful disciple? (Or have you ever challenged those things in another based on something they posted or tweeted or promoted?) Are you ever tempted to, as Paul does several times throughout his epistles, tout your “Christian resume” or “pedigree” in defense of yourself as a true disciple of Jesus? What metrics do you use toward others, or have you had used against you, to determine authenticity of faith and salvation status?
2. Are you someone who tends more toward certainty and checking boxes or more toward skepticism, questioning, or doubt in your faith? How has that tendency served you well as you grow in and practice your faith? How has it challenged or hindered you?
3. Reread 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, either in your Bible or as quoted in this chapter. Paul describes things that anyone would consider spiritually elite, “varsity level” Christianity, and then after each one reminds us that if these actions aren’t rooted in love, they are meaningless. Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, often says, “If it’s not about love, it’s not about God.” Consider and discuss what might look different—in our online interactions, political dialogue, social justice activism, and public witness—if we really believed and embodied those ideas.
4. Of the three aspects of discipleship and formation that Boyd explores in this chapter (orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy), which is easiest or comes most naturally to you? Which comes least naturally or are you most prone to leaving out? What is one small way you can intentionally implement the aspect that is most challenging for you into your daily devotional or disciple-making practices?

# 11 IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

## THEMES

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1. God desires what Jesus calls true worship and true worshipers. According to Scripture, worship extends far beyond the walls of the sanctuary or the allotted times for weekly services. It includes but is not limited to singing songs, raising our hands in praise, shouting “Hallelujah!” and giving of our money. Worship is the way of life for Christians.
2. Where we worship is no longer limited to the temple in Jerusalem, nor is it limited to the four walls of our sanctuaries, Sunday schools, or arenas packed to see contemporary Christian music artists.
3. Why we worship matters because it informs what/who we worship. Boyd explores Romans 12:1 in light of its context within the rest of the book of Romans. Because of God’s mercy, God is worthy of our full-bodied worship, which begins when we recognize the goodness and greatness of our God. This is the basis of our worship.
4. True worship is also in how we live and love in our lives beyond our church buildings and gatherings.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. How did your local church or denomination respond to the pandemic? What did that response communicate to your community (believers and nonbelievers alike) about how they view worship, and how they care for worshipers?
2. In Romans 12:1, Paul starts out, “Therefore, in view of God’s mercy . . .,” and then proceeds to call believers to live their lives in worship accordingly. Make a list of some of the evidence in your life of God’s mercy, grace, and love. (For those of you in seasons of doubt, grief, or other hardship: God’s love and mercy for you is present and immovable. But this question is not intended to be an exercise in spiritual bypassing or toxic positivity, so if it feels too tender to answer it right now, skip it. May this permission slip be a small mercy.)
3. In this chapter, Boyd quotes Romans 12:1. Read it along with verse 2. How have you seen the American church’s collective views on worship and our individual daily lives of worship conform to the patterns of this world? What would it look like to disentangle these views?
4. Continue reading to the end of Romans 12. What sticks out to you in those verses as ways you personally, and our churches collectively, can be renewed and transformed in our minds concerning our local church contexts, gatherings, underlying missions, culture, and ministry?
5. In Isaiah 58, we see God’s passion for true worship, as well as God’s disgust with performative acts of empty worship devoid of love, justice, and mercy. How can this inform how you think about what worship is and how you can embody a life of worship even outside your church walls, with no hymnal or band in sight?

# 12 THE TIES THAT BIND US

## THEMES

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1. Baptism and eucharist (also called holy communion, mass, or the Lord's Supper) are two rituals practiced by Christians since the earliest days of the church and continue to be "the ties that bind us" as Christians today. These rituals—also called sacraments or ordinances—are not just about our personal righteousness; they are means of grace, "tools for our participation in the story and family of God" (p. 209).
2. Both baptism and communion involve a visible, physical ritual which dramatizes an invisible, spiritual reality: that we are united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, to his broken body and shed blood, and to the "one, holy catholic and apostolic church."
3. The table of the Lord is also a space for reflection, repentance, and reconciliation with one another—a place to restore health and wholeness to the body of Christ where it may be lacking.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. What imagery, memories, somatic (bodily) responses, and previously held feelings do the words *rituals*, *baptism*, and *communion* evoke in you?
2. After witnessing believers around the world observing the same rituals of baptism and communion through different means or methods specific to their contexts, Boyd realized that "the ritual is the key, not necessarily the elements themselves (though I know some will disagree with that last bit, and that's okay)" (p. 201). After reading this chapter, do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why?
3. If you have been baptized, what is your baptism story? Who baptized you? Was there a public profession of faith or baptismal vow made by either you or your family? Take a moment to remember your baptism, and then share your story in group discussion time.
4. Two of the dominant ways that Christians tend to practice communion are closed communion and open communion (or the open table). Closed communion is the practice of limiting the serving of the Lord's Supper to those who are members in good standing of a *particular* church or denomination. (Various traditions and churches define, in a variety of ways, who is or can be restricted from receiving communion, and why.) Open communion is the belief that *all* may come to the table of the Lord, regardless of membership or affiliation, emphasizing that since it is *God's* table and not ours, it is also not ours to close off to any who approach it. Which of these are you more familiar with in your own faith story? How does your current church or faith community practice? Which most closely aligns with how you understand and interpret Scripture?

# 13 VALUING CONNECTION OVER CONVERSION

## THEMES

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1. Within evangelical subculture, there is a major emphasis on evangelism—not just on mission trips or for missionaries, but for every believer at every opportunity all the time. While the underlying intent of this messaging may be pure, it can often result in heavy burdens like immense pressure, guilt, anxiety, and comparison, and—worst of all—may lead us to view the people around us and those we interact with daily as projects to work on or points to score for the kingdom of God.
2. If you wish to recalibrate the way you think about evangelism, Boyd invites us to lay down the burdens of (1) forcing conversion moments so we get the credit for someone else’s “yes,” (2) being “the only Jesus someone may ever meet,” and (3) making people believe exactly as we do.
3. The five “key qualities of good evangelism,” as quoted in this chapter, are hospitality, relationship, integrity, message bearing, and church rootedness (p. 216).
4. Boyd explores some of the historical ways that white and Western supremacy, colonization, and forced assimilation have been baked into much of the DNA of missions work still happening today. She invites readers to evaluate missions using criteria such as whether it (1) meets both physical and spiritual needs, (2) listens to and follows the leadership of the locals in a given place, (3) makes sure our work is needed there in the first place, (4) ensures we are qualified to do the work we are going there to do, and (5) considers the time commitment needed to build relationships and invest in a community rather than being in and out quickly.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION, DISCUSSION, AND FURTHER STUDY

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1. What messages have you received from the church about evangelism—both explicit and implicit? About those doing the evangelizing? About those being evangelized? About heaven, hell, and how God feels about non-Christians? How did those messages form how you feel about evangelism now?
2. Would you add anything to Boyd’s list of five key qualities of good evangelism? Is there anything on the list you don’t agree is essential? (See the theme section above for a refresher on the list.) If so, what would you add or remove, and why?
3. How did this chapter challenge how you think about missions work or mission trips? Did you find yourself feeling defensive or surprised as you read briefly about how colonization and white supremacy are foundational to and embedded in Western missions? Why is it important for our global witness that Western and American Christians do the hard work to decolonize mission work and divest from white supremacy?
4. Consider the idea “If it’s not actually good news—and good news for everyone—then it’s not the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Take a moment to brainstorm either a Bible verse or biblical story or hymn or quote that is truly good news—and why you chose that thing. Then take turns sharing in group discussion. (Examples: God is love, 1 John 4; the incarnation; the resurrection; Revelation 21.)

# FINAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How have your faith, your perspective, and your questions changed since you first started reading this book?
2. What—if anything—did you previously consider yourself certain about that this book or the concepts within it have led you to see differently or change your mind about?
3. Has your relationship to and with the church—or more precisely, how you feel about local church attendance and membership and your current place of worship—changed or evolved over time? How has this book contributed to your understanding of and feelings about church, other denominations, and differing biblical interpretations?
4. What is your biggest takeaway from reading this book or discussing it in your group?

## BENEDICTION

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May your belovedness be so settled in your bones and body that you never fear when more questions arise in the future.

May your vision of God and Christianity be solidly fixed on the person of Jesus Christ that you never forget that the Word of God is a *person*, not a book.

May you find ways to love those who have come to different conclusions about God, the Bible, the church, culture wars, and politics but who remain your neighbors.

May you be released from the capitalist version of Christianity that prioritizes and platforms performance and productivity. Instead, may you heed the invitation that Jesus repeats throughout his ministry: come to him, find rest, be filled with good things, be made whole, and find God.

May you find ways to participate in the opposition, dismantling, and destruction of oppressive systems of injustice, patriarchy, white and Western supremacy, poverty, religious tyranny, war, ableism, and queerphobia.

May the love of God for you empower you for neighbor love, self-love, and enemy love. May you remember the words of Bishop Michael Curry: “If it’s not about love, then it’s not about God.”

Amen.