



# ONE

Unity in a Divided World

## **SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE**



**Southwood**  
Lutheran Church



# ONE Unity in a Divided World by Deidra Riggs

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*  
Ephesians 4:1–6 (NIV)

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# WELCOME

Thank you for joining us on this *ONE* journey! We live in a diverse and divided world. We are driven away from each other by race, by religion, by sex, by politics, etc. But this is not God's vision for us.

God desires us to be: ONE in Christ ...

ONE in Faith ...

ONE in Community ...

even though we are different from one another. The *ONE* Study and Sermon Series will dive into these themes from a faith perspective. We will be challenged to listen, to learn, and many times to change in the ways that we might think about others who are different from us. In this way we might grow to be ONE with one another and with our God.

## Guidelines for Each Session

- ▶ Note that there are discussion questions for each chapter of the book, but the ones we will focus on during this study are chapters 1, 4, 5, 7, 9 & 10.
- ▶ The remaining chapters 2, 3, 6, & 8 are labeled “Digging Deeper” in the Study Guide. These are for groups that would like to continue their discussion of *ONE* beyond the 5-week period of our church-wide study.
- ▶ Use “A Pattern of Prayer to Begin Each Session”, found on page 4.
- ▶ Review the “Guidelines for Group Discussion” found below.
- ▶ Watch the video.
- ▶ Discuss the video and chapter, using the discussions in the Study Guide.
- ▶ If you have a large group you may want to subdivide into groups of 4–6.
- ▶ There are additional questions in the back of the *ONE* book that you may use to supplement or replace the questions in the Study Guide.
- ▶ Finish your time together by asking if there are any prayer requests for the week. Close with a simple prayer, and a reminder of when you will meet again and which chapter should be read for next time.

## Guidelines for Group Discussion

- ▶ Pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit and expect that you will experience it.
- ▶ Confidentiality of the group. Be sensitive to the sharing so no one is getting shamed.
- ▶ Respect others. For some parts of the study, you can break your table group into smaller groups of 2–3. This really helps the introverts.
- ▶ Turn to wonder (not judgment). E.g. “I wonder why they think that way?” instead of “they shouldn’t think that way.”
- ▶ Speak for yourself. Use “I” statements.

- ▶ Pay attention to timing and attendance. You may delegate a time-keeper, if helpful.
- ▶ Trust and learn from silence. The Spirit is working in the space we make available.
- ▶ If no one responds to a question right away, silently count to 30 then ask if anyone has something they'd like to share before moving on. People often need time to process before contributing.

## A Pattern of **PRAYER** to Begin Each Session

### Introductions:

- ▶ Ask small group members to introduce themselves. Include an “ice-breaker” question, such as “what was your favorite experience of this summer?” or “What are you most looking forward to this fall?”
- ▶ When you are ready, the following may be prayed between the small group leader (or another designated person) and the small group.

### Opening Verses: (Ephesians 4:1–6, 12–13 NRSV)

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,*

making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,*

one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

*one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

Equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

*until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity,*

*to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

### Silence:

- ▶ Take 1–2 minutes in stillness & silence to set aside the distractions of the day and be centered before the Lord. You may want to set a timer on your phone.
- ▶ Take a few deep breaths to settle into the silence.
- ▶ Choose a simple prayer to express your openness and desire for God (for example: Abba, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Here I am Lord).
- ▶ Close your eyes and offer this prayer to Jesus, allowing his will and love full access to your life.
- ▶ When you become distracted, offer again your simple prayer back to God.

### Group Prayer:

The leader ends the silence by using the following, or a prayer of your own:

- ▶ Let us pray. Loving and gracious God, you have given us your Son Jesus so that we may be one in him. Give us open hearts and minds today, that we may listen for his voice. Lead us by your Spirit in our time together, and send us into the world carrying your love and mercy for all people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# Chapter ONE Discussion Questions

## Introduction and Chapter 1—A Soul that Hears Well

1. On page 18, Deidra Riggs explains the reason why she wrote this book: because God has extended to us the invitation to become reconciled with others in the manner Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15–22.
  - ▶ Have you ever experienced this teaching put into practice? What was it like?
  - ▶ What hopes for unity do you bring with you as we begin to reflect on this book together?
2. On page 26, Riggs observes that the “question of identity is a crucial element in the journey toward oneness Jesus desires for us. If we can extricate our identity from the result of any discussion, argument, debate, or conversation, we stand a much better chance of achieving the harmony we so richly desire. Our identity is not impacted by whether or not others agree with us, or even by what others think about us. Instead, finding the right perspective on *who we are* is based on understanding *whose we are*...my investment becomes less and less about proving you wrong and more about building a relationship with you.”
  - ▶ When is it easiest for you to find your identity in Christ alone?
  - ▶ When do you most want to find your identity in the results of “winning” an argument or choosing the “right” side?
  - ▶ Do you have any spiritual practices that are helpful for reminding you of *whose you are* (*in other words a child of God and a friend of Jesus*)?
3. On page 32, Riggs draws a lesson from the stories about Solomon and Harry’s mother: being right isn’t the goal, abundant life in Jesus is the goal.
  - ▶ In looking at the quote from David Brooks, how might realizing that “we are all sinners together” and gaining “sympathy toward others who sin” help you gain a more abundant life in Christ?
4. On pages 33–35, Riggs answers her question “How do we love well?” It begins by recognizing that God loves all of us, and the love of Christ was the wellspring of all his actions. But for us, love is hard and we often find it easier to draw a line in the sand and then determine who is on our side and who isn’t.
  - ▶ What is one step you can take to offer yourself in the “ministry of reconciliation” that St. Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20?

5. On page 36, Riggs quotes Parker J. Palmer who writes that to bring healing to division we “need to find a Third Way...holding our differences in ways that open us to possibilities we never would have imagined if we had failed to hang in with each other.”

- ▶ Tell about a time you’ve watched someone “hang in” with another person with whom they had some differences.

## ▶▶ Take Action

Pay attention to your conversations this week—at home, at work or in social settings. Do you have a tendency to debate rather than just listen, or judge others based on their opinions? Try harder to listen and learn from your differences.

## ▶▶ Serve as a Small Group

Studying as a Small Group is great, but living out God’s Word together is inspiring. Consider gathering your Small Group together and serving at one or more of these opportunities:

### Ongoing Serving Opportunities

[southwoodlutheran.ivolunteer.com](http://southwoodlutheran.ivolunteer.com)

- ▶ Harvest food in the Southwood Garden
- ▶ Serve or distribute food to those in need
- ▶ Prepare food to serve

### Southwood Serves—10th Anniversary

Saturday, October 6 • 8:30AM

- ▶ Join us for a morning of serving! Volunteer opportunities available to serve at Southwood and in the community of Lincoln!
- ▶ Sign up will start on Wednesday, September 12



### United for Mission—Legacy

Thursday, October 25 • 6:30PM

- ▶ Annual Mission dinner/fundraising event to celebrate our current mission partnerships and volunteers.
- ▶ Learn more and register at [UnitedforMission.org](http://UnitedforMission.org)



# Chapter TWO Digging Deeper Discussion Questions

## Chapter 2—Integrated Experiences

1. On page 45 Riggs describes how racism is one of the most destructive sins that separates people from each other: “Racism is one manifestation of our fallen condition and one of the ways we let disunity and division ruin our witness of God’s power to heal a broken world.”
  - ▶ How do you think racism harms not only those who are on the receiving end, but also those who hold or act on racist beliefs?
  - ▶ How might a person feel the effects of racism, even when a racist attitude or practice is not intended?
  - ▶ Are there other “manifestations of our fallen condition” that contribute to people falling into racist beliefs or practices?
  - ▶ What do you imagine society would be like if racism completely disappeared?
  - ▶ When have you seen disunity and division in the body of Christ because of racism?
  - ▶ When you have seen the power of God bring healing to racial divisions?
  
2. On page 46 Riggs describes her personal experience as a woman of color who is “given the opportunity to minister in and to the white evangelical community.” She says, “my challenge is always to make space for grace in every single encounter. When I walk into a church and see that I’m one of the very few persons (or the only person) of color in the entire building...*I have to* choose my response. Many others make this same kind of choice every single day... Often for those not in the majority culture, these are not choices that must be made on a regular basis.” Then on page 49, Riggs describes how people of a minority group often feel a need to “code switch” while with a majority group: “Code switching is not always an indicator of discomfort...However, consistently feeling as if one must defer to the majority’s preferred way of communicating in order to be accepted often becomes an unfair burden on individuals in minority groups.”
  - ▶ Have you ever been in a place where there was a characteristic about you that was obviously different from most other people present (e.g. race, gender, age, or even height, accent, occupation, clothing style, driving on unfamiliar roads, visiting a different church, or traveling to a different city or country)?
  - ▶ Did others pay more or less attention to you because of this difference?
  - ▶ Did you feel comfortable or out of place? What kind of welcome did you receive? What kind of response did you choose to make when others noticed or commented on this difference? If your difference was not noted by others, did you still feel out of place in some way?

- ▶ How did you feel when you returned home, or to familiar surroundings?
- ▶ Did you find your experience energizing or tiring?

**3.** In Romans 12:18 St. Paul writes about what it looks like when we put the teachings of Jesus into practice: *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”* (NIV) On page 52 Riggs expresses her belief that “it is possible to reconcile with anyone... But remember, reconciliation is a process that begins when two opposing parties come together for the purpose of peace. If both parties are not willing to participate, what is often achieved is forgiveness from one party, but not reconciliation... you may even achieve some semblance of peace, but even the presence of that kind of peace does not equal reconciliation.”

- ▶ Why is forgiveness easier to achieve than reconciliation?
- ▶ What can it be so difficult to obtain true reconciliation and peace as the Bible describes it (see Ephesians 2:14–18)?
- ▶ What steps can you take in your own life to get closer to the goal of reconciliation when it is needed?
- ▶ What is the benefit of forgiveness even when reconciliation has not happened?
- ▶ What would full reconciliation make possible that forgiveness alone cannot?

**4.** Riggs’ friend shared with her his perspective about how to work towards racial integration, oneness, and unity in the body of Christ (page 55): “We have to be open about what’s going on. We are one, and we need to keep reminding each other of that.”

- ▶ How can we “keep the goal of unity and oneness an *up front and regular* part of how we go about our everyday lives”?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that Jesus calls his followers to be “ambassadors of unity”?
- ▶ How else would you describe the way Jesus teaches his followers about oneness and unity?

**5.** Riggs describes on page 56 how the Israelites’ world-view “saw no distinction between what you and I might categorize as either sacred or secular” and that they “were vigilant about making God part of their everyday experiences.” Likewise for us, “everything we do is sacred—because it all matters to God.”

- ▶ How do you, or could you, weave together your work, rest, play, and worship to better recognize that everything we do matters to God?
- ▶ How have you seen the presence of God in something that is typically considered “secular”?



# Chapter **THREE** Digging Deeper Discussion Questions

## Chapter 3—What Do We Do about Evil and Injustice?

1. At the beginning of the chapter, on page 61, Riggs reminds us that unity, oneness, evil, injustice, and reconciliation can be viewed from both an individualistic perspective and a collective standpoint.
  - ▶ Do you think there are potential strengths or limitations in each of these viewpoints?
2. On page 63, Riggs defines “grace” as “giving space for God to get a person to the place where he wants them to be. Then from page 63–66, she tells of a weekend retreat where participants had the chance to “move from the seat of judgment to the seat of mercy.”
  - ▶ What reflections do you have about this metaphor of “the seat of judgment and the seat of mercy” as a spiritual practice for reconciliation?
  - ▶ What does it mean to you that God is “a God of both justice and mercy (page 64)”?
  - ▶ Why do you think God invites but does not force us to choose reconciliation or unity?
3. After telling a story about the Hutus and Tutsis involved in the Rwandan genocide, and how a victim forgave her oppressor, Riggs explains how this experience reflects the theology of the cross (pages 68–71). On page 70 she writes, “this way that Jesus teaches us to live feels backward and illogical. But he was serious... There is no way around the direction Jesus calls us to take. Love, and its expression of mercy, is the way of the cross. This is the pathway to hope, healing, and redemption.”
  - ▶ After reflecting on this story, why do you think “reconciliation begins in our own hearts and minds” and “inside our individual souls”?
  - ▶ How do outside forces move us toward individual decisions?
  - ▶ Why is “justice not a prerequisite for reconciliation and oneness (page 72)”?
  - ▶ What is the difference between “retributive justice” and “restorative justice” (page 72)?
  - ▶ How does restorative justice reflect the way of the cross and the teachings of Jesus?
4. On page 75, Riggs writes “God does not ignore our broken hearts when he invites us to consider mercy. He isn’t even telling us to choose mercy *instead* of justice... God’s goal is always unity and healing, oneness and reconciliation, so he invites us to begin with mercy.”
  - ▶ Why do you think God invites us to begin the journey toward justice with seeking mercy?
  - ▶ How does God heal us when our hearts are broken by injustice?

- ▶ How does compassion help us to better understand our shared humanity?

5. Riggs discusses the place of anger on page 78: “God did not tell us not to get angry. Anger is an emotion, just like all the rest. It is normal and healthy. Trying ‘not to get angry’ is like trying not to be proud at your child’s graduation. What we’ve been instructed to do is refrain from sinning in the midst of our anger and as a result of it.”

- ▶ Anger is a difficult emotion for many people. What are some ways that you have practiced (or seen others practice) that help you refrain from sinning in the midst of anger?
- ▶ Are there other difficult emotions that are “normal and healthy” yet our faith requires us to refrain from sinning as a result of them?

# Chapter **FOUR** Discussion Questions

## Chapter 4—Let it Go

1. On pages 79–83, Riggs tells the story of when she was blessed by the people at the rental car counter, and likens them to confessors: “We all need confessors. We need people who will take us as we are and let us be that way. We need people who won’t try to change us simply because we’ve shown them that we know we can be improved on. We need people who receive our sincere apology and let it be just that.”
  - ▶ Have you had someone be this kind of confessor for you?
  - ▶ Have you been a confessor for someone else? (In answering, remember to keep confidentiality.)
  
2. In the section on *The Sacred Work of an Honest and True Apology* (pages 84–87), Riggs makes several points about how difficult it can be to confess one’s sins and apologize.
  - ▶ As you consider the following quotes, how might you offer grace to people in these situations?
  - ▶ How might you receive God’s grace when you find yourself in these situations?
  - ▶ When have you felt the transforming power of God’s Spirit in a challenging time?
    - a “Humbly admitting their guilt is often the end of a long journey for that person.” (p. 84)
    - b “Sincerely apologizing for something is hard work, and accepting an apology is a holy and sacred charge.” (p. 85)
    - c “We do not forgive as quickly as God; we are human, after all. But perhaps we can remember how hard it is for someone to confess and/or apologize, and let that stand for something.” (p. 85)
    - d “Christians get it wrong sometimes. Often our claims of having a deep love for Jesus are the exact reasons we can’t see our sins clearly.” (p. 85)
    - e “If our holy convictions require us to make enemies of others, malign others, dehumanize others, or otherwise minimize another person’s humanity, it’s time to check in and see if we’re truly serving the Jesus of the Bible.” (p. 86)
    - f “We must constantly hold our own convictions loosely before the transformative power of the Spirit of God. Over and over again, we have to allow ourselves to be transformed by letting God renew our minds.” (p. 87)
    - g “If it’s been a while since your faith was challenged, I’d humbly submit that you may have drawn too tight a circle around your conviction and cordoned at least part of yourself off from the sweetly fragrant power of the Holy Spirit.” (p. 87)

3. Riggs recounts the story from Acts 10 of Peter undergoing a paradigm shift when God tells him to eat food Peter had previously believed to be ritually unclean. She concludes, on page 89, that “God had not changed. Instead, God was asking Peter to trust him even more than ever before...” Then Riggs applies this for us on pages 89–90: “Sometimes we get entrenched in some conviction about God and what we believe he thinks about something based on what we have come to understand about him in that moment in time... God is like an exquisite diamond, with multiple facets we can never take in at one time... It might be the case that God is trying to show you some facet of himself you’ve never seen before.”
- ▶ Is there an aspect of your life or faith when you changed your mind? How long did this take? Was it easy or hard?
  - ▶ Even after you changed your mind, were you always certain of your new views?
  - ▶ What is it like to live by trusting God, even if you are unsure where God is leading you?
4. On page 91, Riggs describes what it might look like to see the world through God’s eyes: “I am confounded when I find out Jesus looks more like my least favorite person in the world than I ever thought possible... And, because God loves me, God brought someone into my everyday life who loved Jesus but hailed from that other “camp”... God worked through this person to transform me..”
- ▶ When did God send a person into your life who hailed from a different “camp” but whom God used to transform you in some way?
5. On page 93, Riggs counsels: “No one has all the information available about God and what he thinks about the things of this world. If we let our convictions take the place of Jesus in our lives, we could very well be standing in the way of the same Holy Spirit with whom we profess to be filled.”
- ▶ Have you ever had a conviction that took the place of Jesus in your life?
  - ▶ Is it something that you put more faith in than God?

### ▶▶ Take Action

Think of a time when you let your own convictions bring harm to a relationship. It’s never too late to ask for forgiveness. Perhaps send a note to that person with an apology. Or, reach out to someone who has apologized to you but you’ve had a hard time extending grace.

# Chapter FIVE Discussion Questions

## Chapter 5—The Power to Unite

1. Riggs begins Chapter 5, on page 95, by summarizing the “most important thing to understand”—that is “We are loved by God. All of us. Even those who don’t claim to be, as well as those who don’t believe they are. We are loved by God, created in his image. God’s love extends even to our enemies...”

  - ▶ How do you see Jesus expressing this kind of unconditional love? Is there a Bible story that comes to mind?
  - ▶ What places or people are most in need of this message?
  - ▶ What circumstances do you think prevent people from believing this message?
  - ▶ What does it mean to you that all people have been created in God’s image?
2. On page 96, Riggs reminds us that to follow Jesus we don’t have to “be someone different that who we are” because Jesus is a “come-as-you-are Savior”. Then on page 97, she points out that God “chose to create humanity with so much diversity...we cannot expect that we should conform to be like one another... Oneness is not about *conforming*. Oneness is about *transforming*... Within the body of Christ are people who support each aspect of every position... When I mistake my position on an issue as being critical to my identity, I’ve let these differences stand between me and others in the body of Christ.”

  - ▶ How have you seen people from different backgrounds put into practice in different ways their common faith in Jesus Christ?
  - ▶ Do you think there is a tension between “coming as you are” and “being transformed”? Why or why not?
  - ▶ Have you had a friendship with someone who has a different opinion on a matter that is important to you? What has been most helpful for you to keep developing this friendship?
3. On page 98, Riggs applies the Christian conviction that “our identity comes from God alone” to politics: “Our political affiliation (or non-affiliation) is neither right nor wrong. It is an earthly category... Our affiliations and positions...are one way in which we express our current phase of our faith journey in this particular moment... There is no right answer beyond that which is motivated by love.”

  - ▶ How do people who are motivated by love sometimes reach different conclusions?
  - ▶ How have your own opinions changed or remained the same over the years?
  - ▶ How do you let your own “current phase of the faith journey” be informed by Christ’s love?

4. On page 99, Riggs quotes Michelle Alexander who offers her definition of what it means to be “fully human”: it involves “the simple act of caring for one another, and being aware of your connectedness as human beings, and also the reality of our suffering, and the reality that we make a lot of mistakes, and we struggle and we fail.”
- ▶ What stands out to you from this list of characteristics?
  - ▶ Which is most significant to you?
  - ▶ Is there anything else you would add?
  - ▶ Anything you would change?
5. On page 101–102, Riggs writes, “Christ came to tear down the all the walls we build to keep one another at a distance (see Ephesians 2:14)... No matter how strongly we hold our opinions... there are Christians who just as strongly hold a polar opposite position. It is quite disorienting to discover [this]...However, the more we press into this difference rather than resist it (and the person who holds that opposite viewpoint), the more we may grow to understand about God’s character.” And she writes of how understanding the journey of others “reminds us of the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in our own lives.”
- ▶ How have you grown in your understanding of God through knowing people who are different from you in some way?
  - ▶ Do you find it easy or difficult to engage with people who hold a different opinion?
  - ▶ Where do you see bridges being built to connect people who are different?
  - ▶ How have you experienced the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in your own life?
6. Riggs reminds us that as Christians we do not condone evil, even as we follow the example of Jesus to “love your enemies”. “One of the most crucial ingredients of building a life that includes loving our enemies is *having a desire to love them* (p. 105).” Then on pages 106–108 she writes of how “science confirms what God has been telling us all along” and describes the research done at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, which found that “practicing loving-kindness and compassion actually works to create new maps in our brain.”
- ▶ How well have you been able to “love your enemies”?
  - ▶ Was there a time in your life when this was easier or harder?
  - ▶ What is your reaction to the findings of scientific researchers at UW—Madison?

## ▶▶ Take Action

Pray for your enemies and ask God to help you open your heart to desiring good for all people. Practice loving-kindness and compassion even when you find yourself wanting to give someone “what they deserve.”

# Chapter **SIX** Digging Deeper Discussion Questions

## Chapter 6—Awake in the Dark

1. Riggs reminds us on page 113 that “All a person can ever really tell is his or her own story” and she then relates the events that happened in Ferguson, Missouri—not to explain or analyze why the confrontation between Michael Brown and Officer Darren Wilson occurred as it did, but to share her experience of visiting Ferguson during the difficult time following the shooting. Riggs shares some realizations she had (pages 115–116): “God is madly in love with Michael Brown, the young black man who was killed that afternoon... God is madly in love with Officer Darren Wilson, the while police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown... God does not delight in these people because of their actions. He delights in them—and in us—despite their actions and in the midst of their actions... God is rooting for us, giving us the opportunity to learn more about love and grace, and what it means to forgive, to grieve, to lament, and to heal.”
  - ▶ What does it tell us about the nature and character of God that God loves both Michael Brown and Officer Darren Wilson?
  - ▶ How does God “root for us” because of who we are rather than the actions we take?
  - ▶ What does it mean to you that God is “the only one who knows the entire truth (page 116)”?
  - ▶ How do you think Jesus’ experiences during Holy Week show us how “God is not a God of ‘out.’ He is a God of ‘through.’ God enters our wilderness experiences. He walks through the valley of the shadow of death right along with us (pages 116–117)”?
2. On page 117 Riggs describes the world’s answer to the problem of injustice (choose a side and find our identity in that particular side of the argument) and concludes that “when people on the other side of our argument become our enemies...we have let our argument become our idol.”
  - ▶ How is God’s answer to injustice different from the world’s answer?
  - ▶ Have you ever considered a person to be your enemy because they had a different point of view than you?
  - ▶ Have you ever let an argument become your idol?
  - ▶ How does Christ and our faith in him provide a way to relate to people whose experiences have led them to hold perspectives different from your own?
3. On page 118 Riggs points out that “people who feel as if they are sweltering beneath the heat of oppression will try to tell you how they feel. It doesn’t matter if we agree that they are sweltering... People who tell us repeatedly that they are being oppressed deserve to have others sit up and take notice.”
  - ▶ Have you ever received healing through the simple act of someone else listening to you?

- ▶ Do you know if the listener agreed with you? Whether they did or not, what was the most important thing for you in this conversation?
- ▶ Have you ever listened to someone who was feeling oppressed, down, or troubled in some way? What was this like for you?
- ▶ What do you think it was like for the person sharing their story with you?

4. Riggs writes of how we can actually find unity in our common human sinfulness on pages 121–122. “We are all criminals. Every single one of us... Because all of us are sinners... just as we take the image of God with us into our workplaces, marketplaces, gathering places, and worship places, we carry our sinful, criminal selves there as well. It behooves us to acknowledge this...so that we can identify with the people whose shortcomings seem so much more horrendous than our own. They are not. We are just like them...we are all truly the same. We are criminals, and God loves us.”

- ▶ What does it mean to you that because of our fallen human nature, everyone is in some way a criminal, for whom Jesus willingly gave his life on the cross?
- ▶ When do you feel that the image of God in yourself, or in others, becomes most hidden from view?
- ▶ Are there other aspects of human nature besides sinfulness where you can find common ground with people who are different from you in some way?

5. Beginning on page 122, Riggs describes two different ways in which lament was carried out on the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. There were many different reasons why people were there. One group played music of frustration, defeat, and hopelessness. Another group played Christian praise music. While neither message got through to the other, both were reacting in their grief to the same events with the cry of lament. A lament is (page 124) “a working out of a deep despair. It is a release of emotions. It is loud and unrelenting. But it might also be quietly steady and mournful, releasing itself in moans and agonizing sighs of emptiness.” “A lament may not look as if it’s doing anything important and may be inconvenient for those who cross its path. But it is paving the way for restoration and reconciliation in places we cannot see.”

- ▶ Why do people who look at the world through different perspectives need to express their grief with different forms of lament?
- ▶ Why is lament a necessary step for those in grief before attempting reconciliation?
- ▶ How does lament fit into the gospel pattern of death and resurrection?
- ▶ How can those who do not have the same sense of grief allow space for the lament of those who do grieve?



# Chapter SEVEN Discussion Questions

## Discussion Questions for Chapter 7—Our Breaking Point

1. Riggs observes, on pages 132–133, that “the journey toward oneness and unity often feels like a thermal shock to our souls and our hearts” yet the good news of the gospel is that our brokenness is God’s way in. “If God is going to get through to us, it’s often through our brokenness. He makes his way in because of our brokenness. Through our brokenness—despite our brokenness—God transforms us.” This is central to the theology of the cross, yet often seems counterintuitive.
  - ▶ How can we present our heartbreak to God, so he can transform it?
  - ▶ How or when have you experienced God coming to you in your lowest moments? Or felt Christ lifting you up?
  - ▶ When does God “get in” through our own brokenness?
2. “From the moment we chose the kingdom of this world, God has been at work to bring us back to him... To heal our brokenness, in all of the places it snakes its way into our lives... As we give more and more control of our lives to God, we become more and more like his Son, Jesus (p. 136).”
  - ▶ How have you seen God at work, trying to bring people back to him and heal the brokenness in our lives?
  - ▶ Who is a person you’ve witnessed who has been able to surrender control of their life to God and so become more Christ-like?
  - ▶ What kind of spiritual practices do you find helpful for turning to God, or which would you be interested in learning more about?
3. Riggs quotes Bryan Stevenson on page 138, about a trap we often fall into: our “comfort level with reducing people to their worst act and acting in very extreme, harsh, punitive ways.” Yet there is a grace-filled way to be free from this trap, to remember that “we are not the worst thing we have ever done. Neither is anyone else. Our brokenness is not the totality of who we are, and when we can find a way to see it, our brokenness is also a gift.”
  - ▶ Is there any way to avoid the brokenness of the world?
  - ▶ Would avoiding the brokenness bring more or less healing?
  - ▶ When is it easiest to reduce people to the worst thing they have ever done?
  - ▶ How can our brokenness also be a gift?
  - ▶ How can the message of God’s grace bring new life in the broken places of our lives, communities, families, churches, or relationships?

4. Riggs quotes Parker Palmer on page 138, who recounts the lesson of a Hassidic tale: “Your heart will at times get broken by loss, failure, defeat, betrayal, or death. What happens next in you and the world around you depends on *how* your heart breaks. If it breaks *apart*...the result may be anger, depression, and disengagement. If it breaks *open*... the result may be new life.”
- ▶ How can we cultivate in each other a greater capacity to have our hearts *break open* rather than *break apart*?
  - ▶ How can you present your heartbreak before God, yourself, and others so that it becomes an open door rather than a dividing wall?
5. Riggs invites us to regain a Christ-like focus in the language we use to talk about others (p. 139–140): “We have grown brave in our dismissals of another person’s story. We have become experts at driving a wedge instead of building a bridge... If there is division in our hearts, our language will perpetuate division in our culture and in the world around us.”
- ▶ Can you tell another person’s story from their perspective, even if it is a perspective different from your own?
  - ▶ How might this practice build bridges between people?
  - ▶ How do you think the language we use influences the way we understand things?
  - ▶ How can we become more aware of whether our language choices are having a positive or negative effect on others?

## ▶▶ Take Action

Practice using the phrase, “help me understand” when talking to someone who thinks differently than you. Don’t try to express your opinions this week, rather learn why others think and feel the way they do.

# Chapter **EIGHT** Digging Deeper Discussion Questions

## Chapter 8—Beyond Our Wildest Imagination

1. Our imagination is a gift from God (page 145): “Just as we, in spirit, mind, and body, reflect the image of God in this world, we also reflect his image through our imaginations... we are not only created with God’s image imprinted on us, but we also reflect God’s image back to God.”
  - ▶ What does it mean to you that every person has been created in God’s image?
  - ▶ How do we reflect God’s image back to God?
  - ▶ How do you understand the relationship between the gift of imagination, and being created in God’s image?
  - ▶ When has using your imagination opened up new ways of doing something or understanding a situation?
  - ▶ Read Genesis 1 and discuss how God’s imagination was at work in the act of creation.
2. Riggs provides a definition of “faith” on page 146: “taking God at his word and acting as if it is so, even though we can’t see it. Yet.”
  - ▶ How does imagination fit into this understanding of faith?
  - ▶ Read Hebrews 11:1–3 and discuss how Riggs’ understanding of faith and imagination reflects these verses. Was there a time in your life when you took God at his word and acted on it even if you couldn’t see where it would lead? What prompted you to follow this path?
3. On pages 146–147 Riggs describes how as Christians we are “culture makers in the world” and she looks at the relationship between the words culture and cultivate. Culture is defined as “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time” and we build culture every day through our actions and experiences.
  - ▶ Look at the list of culture-making activities on page 147. Would you add anything to this list? Which ones do you relate to the most? Which ones have had the greatest (or least) impact on your life?
  - ▶ How do you most contribute to culture-making?
  - ▶ Why do you think it is necessary to “surrender” to God the Creator the ways we make culture in order to “cultivate an environment in which oneness and unity can flourish”?
4. On pages 149–151 Riggs describes her reaction to a news report about an act of terrorism, and how she heard the newscasters begin calling the terrorist by a nickname that was based on the horrifying action he had taken. She realized that this nickname was “a lack of imagination and

a door swung wide for evil to enter in” and that if she called the terrorist by this nickname she would be contributing to more fear and despair in the world because “dehumanizing a person by taking away their name is one of the surest paths to division, discrimination, marginalization, and hatred.” She also found that “the more I prayed for him [by his actual name], the less I feared him.”

- ▶ Have you ever been on the “receiving end” of name calling, or been one doing the name calling? What feelings did this situation bring about within you?
- ▶ How is using a derogatory nickname like “setting a brick in a wall that fear wanted to build” between people?
- ▶ How would such a nickname make despair “grow and settle around each brick like a mortar, setting in the blaze a flame that looked a lot like hate”?
- ▶ Have you ever prayed for someone who hurt you, or who was regarded as an evil or bad person? What was this like? How did you decide to pray for them? How long after the incident occurred did you wait until you prayed? How did prayer change your perceptions?

**5.** Page 152 describes perhaps one of the hardest things for us to understand about God and God’s calling for his people: “God desires that even terrorists, abusers, and oppressors be reconciled to him, to themselves, and to one another. And yes, God has given us the Holy Spirit and made us agents...creating and teaching others to foster an environment in which oneness and unity flourish. We are agents of reconciliation.”

- ▶ How do you think developing an environment for reconciliation is different than making excuses for harmful behavior?
- ▶ Is it easier to be an agent of reconciliation, or to give in to despair?
- ▶ What do we need to rely on in order to be agents of reconciliation?

# Chapters **NINE & TEN** Discussion Questions

## Chapter 9—One with Ourselves & Chapter 10—Return to Home

1. Riggs writes about the stress she felt in compartmentalizing each role in her life—“only bringing a part of me to each experience”—instead of being “fully engaged in each event”. Yet when she learned “to give my full attention to each event or situation” she found she actually had “more energy, more focus, and less stress as a result” (p. 154). On page 157, she finds inspiration through Jesus’ prayer in John 17 for “not only oneness among his followers but also for oneness within each follower” and teaches the way of integrity, that “we cannot be at one with others if we aren’t at one with ourselves.”
  - ▶ How often do you find yourself living with fragmentation or compartmentalizing, or “feeling exhausted before the day had even begun”?
  - ▶ What would need to change for you to be your fullest self in every moment, with every person you meet?
  - ▶ When are you most fully present to an event?
  - ▶ When do you feel most “at one” with yourself, or “at one” with others?
  - ▶ When do you feel most like the person God created you to be?
2. Dualistic thinking is very common for many of us—this is when we easily divide the world into “sacred and secular... This or that. Good or bad. Right or wrong. Holy or not holy.” Riggs confesses that “all this shifting from sacred to secular had me straddling a massive fault line that runs through the center of my soul. I end up fragmented, and I marginalize parts of myself from the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit (p. 156).”
  - ▶ Have you ever found a “massive fault line” in the center of your soul?
  - ▶ Have you ever kept part of yourself hidden from God’s love and mercy?
  - ▶ Can we see the presence and work of God in things that we typically consider “secular”?
  - ▶ Can things we consider “sacred” sometimes cloud our vision of God?
  - ▶ How can we be better attuned to God’s presence in all times, places, and people?
  - ▶ Is there such a thing as a “god-forsaken” person or place?
3. Riggs points out on page 159 that “all of these divides depend on the notion that a person or a group of people is less sacred than another. But the truth we’ve been given is that all life is sacred...in spirit, mind, and body. Every now and then, our culture needs to be reminded of certain members of our population and their value in the eyes of God.”

- ▶ Who in our culture or community seems to not be cared about?
  - ▶ Who is calling out and hoping for others to hear their stories and perspectives? If no one comes to mind, how would we find out who the “forgotten” people are?
  - ▶ How do you see the cross of Christ as God’s message to us about the value and sacredness of life?
  - ▶ What can you do to remind yourself of the teaching in Genesis 1 that each person bears the *imago Dei* (“image of God”)?
- 4.** On page 160, Riggs recognizes that a person’s “perspective on the world is the result of the sum of their life experiences at the moment you and I first encounter them.”
- ▶ When you meet someone with a perspective that is different from yours, what would it be like to “Turn to Wonder”? [See *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course Workbook* by Peter & Geri Scazzero, page 12]. This is when you ask yourself: I wonder what brought him/her to this belief?
  - ▶ I wonder what he/she is feeling right now?
  - ▶ I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?
- 5.** When I recognize the value God has given me, then I can also recognize that God has given that same value to you. From this point of view, Riggs teaches a key point on page 162 in moving towards unity: “I may not agree with your perspective, but I can be for you. We can be for one another. Imagine the message such support for one another could send to the rest of the world.” And then on page 164, “members of the body of Christ have only one true enemy, and it is not one another... We get tricked by those who say we should choose a side. It seems, however, that Scripture instructs us to choose to be for people. All people. Period. No exceptions. Consider all the things that could change if we were truly for people.”
- ▶ What kinds of things can we do to be *for one another and for people* even if we may not agree with another person’s perspective?
  - ▶ What kind of message would this send to the world: about God? about Christianity? about fellow church members? about people of different religious beliefs than our own? about non-religious people? about those who are suffering? about our enemies? about us as individuals?
  - ▶ What things do you think would change if we were truly for people?
- 6.** On page 165 there is a brief description of “the only time Jesus really got mad,” which was “at church people (see John 2:13–17)...who were making it difficult to get to God.” And Riggs reminds us that the key virtue of the Christian life is love, specifically loving God above all else: “When I strive to keep my comfort, power, or convenience intact, I am working for something that will eventually fade away. But when my goal is love, blessing, and prayer, my work is established in the kingdom of God... Loving God first makes it possible for us to love our enemies.”

- ▶ Do you have any spiritual practices that help you to love God first?
- ▶ Have you been able to love your enemies? If so, how long did this take? If not, what is standing in your way?
- ▶ How can we make it easier for people to get to God?
- ▶ When do we most want to make our top priorities things that will eventually fade away?

7. In Chapter 10, pages 168–174, Riggs describes two key spiritual practices that are necessary if we are going to be involved in God’s work of reconciliation and oneness: Furlough and Sabbath.

A *furlough* involves: returning to the people and places you call home  
 reconnecting with what is most familiar  
 returning to your roots  
 letting down your guard and fully processing the lessons you’ve learned  
 protecting your mental health  
 allowing God to transform you and renew your mind

Have you ever been involved in a career that included a furlough? If so, what was it like? If not, what benefits do you imagine furlough would provide? Where do you consider your true home to be? Reflect on Riggs’ definition of “home” (page 169)—“Home is where people know your story and don’t hold it against you. It is where you feel the least guarded.”

A *sabbath* or *sabbatical* involves: a fast, or break, from the ordinary trappings of our regular lives  
 vacation  
 a distinction between a change of scenery and a true sabbatical  
 shifting your focus  
 restoring your spirit, mind, and body

- ▶ Have you incorporated a Sabbath day into your weekly routine (ideally a full 24 hours, but shorter if necessary)? What does this do for your mind, body, or spirit?
- ▶ Does your job provide the opportunity for Sabbaticals? If so, what would you do with the sabbatical time? If not, how could you be creative to make a space for sabbatical time in your schedule?
- ▶ Reflect on the way Jesus modeled Sabbath time and the statement (page 175), “we cannot serve people well when our spirits are broken and our bodies are exhausted... The work of leading toward oneness is exactly that: work.”

## ▶▶ Take Action

Take time out of each day to quietly reflect on the status of your own heart. Close your eyes for a couple of minutes, focusing on the love of Jesus. Move toward desiring love over being right.

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