

btw

Getting Serious
about Following Jesus

study guide by
Derek Vreeland

USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

By the Way was designed to be a discipleship book read by individuals and discussed in small groups. Through our mutual sharing and learning, we can encourage one another and learn from one another.

Small group discussions can be powerfully transformative if the group can agree upon some basic ground rules. To get the most out of this study guide and small group experience, adhere to the following **five ground rules**:

1. Speak only from your own experiences and feelings.
2. Create space for everyone to share by keeping your comments brief.
3. Preserve confidentiality: what is said in the group stays in the group.
4. Find ways to encourage one another and avoid trying to fix one another.
5. Press into moments of silence with personal reflection.

At the beginning of each session, groups or leaders can:

1. If leadership is rotating, select a leader to facilitate the discussion for the next session.
2. If the people in the group do not know each other well, invite everyone to share their name and something interesting about themselves.
3. Ask one person to offer an opening prayer.
4. Ask one person to read the five ground rules.
5. Ask one person to summarize the chapter.

The questions associated with each chapter appear both in the book itself and in this study guide. They serve as a guide to get your group talking and reflecting on the material in each chapter. Feel free to follow the conversation wherever it may lead. Some people may want to discuss parts of the book that are not represented in the questions. Follow the relational flow of the conversation. The best small groups prioritize “people study” over Bible study.

Each chapter’s set of questions begin with icebreaker questions that get everyone talking. Then the bulk of the questions invite participants to reflect on key concepts in the book. The last question for each chapter invites people to consider how to put into practice what they are learning.

As the author of *By the Way*, I pray that God would multiply and use it to make disciples of the Jesus Way.

—Derek Vreeland

1 DISCIPLE: THE WAY OF JESUS

1. Did you ever play follow-the-leader when you were a kid? Did you like it? What was your favorite childhood game?
2. What were the circumstances around your coming to Jesus and choosing to follow him? How did you feel? Was the process quick or gradual? Or did it have twists and setbacks?
3. What do you find most attractive about Jesus? What draws you to follow him?
4. If following Jesus is being an apprentice who does while the master watches, what is Jesus watching you do these days?
5. Who are the weakest, most vulnerable people in your world? How should followers of Jesus care for them?
6. How has your experience with the love of God brought change in your life?
7. What does the life Jesus offers look like? How does walking in the Jesus way help you experience that life?
8. Imagine Jesus as the landlord of your life. How does that change what you do and don't do?
9. What do you want Jesus to do for you? What are you willing to do for him?
10. What steps do you need to take this week to walk in the ways of Jesus?

2 STORY: THE WAY OF THE GOSPEL

1. Describe a time when you were really sick. What was that experience like?
2. When you think about your own story, what are some important details in the beginning, middle, and end?
3. How do you feel knowing that God is continually writing and rewriting your story?
4. What is one of the "big news" events in your life? How did you feel in sharing this news with others?
5. If Jesus is King as the gospel proclaims then how should we live as citizens of God's kingdom? What is the proper way to respond to Jesus as King?
6. In what ways does the Bible provide answers for you? In what ways does it provoke questions?
7. How do you see the Bible leading you to Jesus?
8. What does it mean for you to experience salvation at the intersection of the Jesus story and your story?
9. What are the key differences between seeing sin as rule breaking and sin as a sickness?
10. How do you need to rework the telling of your own story in light of the Jesus story?

3 CRUCIFORM: THE WAY OF THE CROSS

1. What do you do to express your faith in public?
2. In what ways does the cross of Jesus demonstrate the presence of the kingdom of God?
3. How have you seen sin as a drawing away from love?
4. What does it mean to believe Jesus takes away our sin at the cross?
5. How does the cross show us what God is like?
6. What does Christian vulnerability look like?
7. Do you consider yourself a patient person? What does delayed gratification look like for you?
8. How do you see God rescuing the world through Christians who look like Jesus?
9. What do you need to do this week to grow in the way of the cross?

4 LIFE: THE WAY OF RESURRECTION

1. What Easter traditions did you practice as a child? What do you continue to practice today?
2. How does the resurrection of Jesus confirm God's commitment to creation and humanity?
3. What kind of change, if any, did you see in your life after your baptism?
4. What was one of the first things you started doing when you first became a Christian?
5. How does your awareness of God change, knowing all creation participates in the life of God?
6. In three words how would you describe God's new world?
7. We don't all learn in the same way. How do you learn best?
8. What is one thing you have unlearned as a follower of Jesus? Was it easy or hard to unlearn it?
9. When you are working to figure things out, how do you do your best thinking? Talking out loud to another person? Writing things down? Sitting quietly alone? Something else?
10. What can you do this week to be fully alive in God's new world?

5 TRINITY: THE WAY OF LOVE

1. Outside of God, Jesus, and your family, what did you love the most as a child?
2. Describe what a person looks like when they have a lot of knowledge, but little love. How can we avoid being that kind of person?
3. Why is love confusing? Describe in your own words the different kinds of love you have experienced.
4. When you reflect upon the nature of God as a holy community of persons, what stands out to you the most?
5. What are the differences between rendering judgment from a place of anger and rendering judgment from a place of love?
6. What would it look like for you to prioritize other people in your world over yourself?
7. What person or group of people would you consider enemies? What can you do to actively love them?
8. With whom do you need to create an emotional boundary in order to resist codependency?
9. Is it easier for you to have mercy on yourself or others? Why?
10. What area of your life looks the least like love? What can you do to work on making it more loving?

6 THINKING: THE WAY OF THE MIND

1. What were some of the silly things you would say or do as a child? If you have children, what are some of the silly things they say?
2. Do you feel more connected to the thoughts in your head or the feelings in your heart? Or both? Explain.
3. What does it mean to think both clearly and Christianly?
4. Does the challenge to grow in the life of the mind intimidate you? Why or why not?
5. How have you experienced the renewing of your mind? For example, what established cultural norms did you once hold but have rethought since following Jesus?
6. How would you describe someone with mature thinking?
7. Do you think out loud? Write things down? Talk to yourself? What does thinking as reflection look like for you?
8. How would you describe your thinking? Do you compartmentalize your thoughts? Do you think more in ideas or images?
9. What do you do when your thinking is unclear and fuzzy?
10. How can you grow in thinking thoughts like Jesus?

7 CHANGE: THE WAY OF TRANSFORMATION

1. What is the hardest lifestyle change you have had to make in your life? Perhaps it is related to diet, exercise, spending habits . . . or is it something else?
2. Why do so many people seek to make outward changes in behavior before experiencing the inward changes of character?
3. Does an openness to God's Spirit encourage you, or cause you to pause cautiously?
4. Considering the perfection of Jesus, do you feel intimidated or encouraged in trying to pattern your life after his?
5. What brings you the most joy in life?
6. How do your friends who are following Jesus encourage you in your pursuit of King Jesus?
7. How does loving people who are not like you make you more like Jesus?
8. What spiritual pathways have you found to be the most helpful for you?
9. What are the key differences between trying to be Christian and training to be Christian?
10. What do you need to quit trying to do in pursuit of Jesus?

8 GATHERING: THE WAY OF COMMUNITY

1. In the past, have you experienced the good, the bad, or the ugly of the church? Or some combination of all three? Explain.
2. What is your church experience like these days?
3. What have you grown to appreciate about other churches or other Christian traditions?
4. What are the key differences between the church having a discipleship ministry and the church being a discipleship ministry?
5. In what ways have you served your local church?
6. What are some practical ways to practice hospitality at home or at church?
7. Why is unsolicited advice given prior to the establishment of a relationship detrimental to Christian community?
8. Why is it challenging to honor and respect someone with whom we disagree?
9. What is the best way to encourage someone with whom you go to church?
10. How can you begin to pray for your church in a new way this week?

9 HABITUS: THE WAY OF LITURGY

1. What are some bad habits you have overcome? How did you break them?
2. How would you describe habitus in your own words?
3. Have you experienced the formation of certain character traits by practicing them? Explain.
4. Describe a time when you have become unconsciously competent, when you have so mastered a skill that you can do it without thinking about it.
5. What value have you found in the traditions of the church?
6. What is your prayer life like today? How do you think a liturgy of scripted prayer may help you?
7. What steps can you take in order to let your Bible reading lead you to Jesus?
8. What parts of worship do you find the most difficult to engage in? What can you do to overcome that difficulty?
9. What has your experience with communion been like?
10. What new habits can you start this week to begin to form new character traits in your heart?

10 JUSTICE: THE WAY OF RECONCILIATION

1. Who were your heroes growing up? How did you honor them?
2. Who are your heroes today? How do you honor them?
3. How does war represent the brokenness of our world?
4. What are the key differences between justice as punishing lawbreakers and justice as setting right what's wrong in our world?
5. How has your background and upbringing shaped how you think about justice?
6. How do acts of justice prove we are disciples of Jesus?
7. What are the best ways to make disciples fit for God's mission?
8. Why does living at the overlap of the ages, between the present evil age and the future age to come, make doing justice so difficult?
9. What are some of the top needs for justice and reconciliation you see in our world?
10. What can you do to be an instrument of peace in your family, neighborhood, and church?