

STUDY GUIDE

Christ-Followers in Other Religions

The Global Witness of Insider Movements



Darren T. Duerksen

NOT FOR SALE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Study Guide

Discussion Questions

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Study Guide - Discussion Questions

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Introduction

Welcome to a study of *Christ-Followers in Other Religions*. As Christ-followers we are all part of God's mission, and we all seek to live out that mission in the contexts in which we were born and live. As you may know, many persons born into families of other religions, whether Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, indigenous, and many others, have put their faith and trust in Christ. And, as you will soon learn, many of these choose to while follow Christ while remaining in these religious families and communities. It is not an easy journey. And many of them would agree that it may not be the path that all should take. But, for them, it is their way to be a part of God's mission – to witness to their friends and families about the goodness and life-transforming power of God through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

You may not have been born into the same context as they. Or perhaps you were and took a different path of discipleship. In any case, this book is an invitation for us to listen to and learn from these Christ-followers about the variety of ways God can be at work inside and through other religious traditions and communities.

Each chapter of this guide includes "general questions" and "missions-related questions." Though there is some cross-over between the these, missions-related questions are designed for those who have some experience in cross-cultural and cross-religious ministry, and perhaps have some personal familiarity with some of the related issues and discussions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

1. As you begin each chapter, pray that God will speak to you through that chapter's stories and ideas.
2. After reading a chapter scan the general questions and pick one or two that seem most relevant to you. If you want to dive deeper, consider one or two of the missions-related questions as well.
3. Consider writing down and keeping a journal of some of the main ideas that stand out to you and your answers to the various questions.
4. Do not get distracted by footnotes. These are meant to help clarify certain concepts and guide those who want to engage academic ideas more deeply. Read them if you are intrigued with these academic discussions, but they are not necessary to follow the main ideas.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

1. Come to the study prepared. Follow the above suggestions for individual study. You will find that coming prepared, and jotting some notes or journaling your responses to some of the questions will greatly enrich your discussion.
2. Be ready to participate in the discussion. Your group may have a facilitator, but he or she will not be lecturing. This is an opportunity for your group to learn from each other.
3. Be sensitive to the opinions and feelings of others in the group. Some may have strong reactions, positive or negative, towards some of the stories and ideas in the book. The point is not to agree with everything in the book, nor to create "pro" or "anti" sub-groups, but to build and affirm relationship with each other as members of the body of Christ, even when we disagree with each other on various issues.

4. Expect God to teach you through the stories and ideas in the book, and through others in the group. In what ways does God want to deepen your faith in Jesus and your part in God's mission? Trust God's Spirit to guide you through this process.

I am grateful to many who have given me feedback on the book and helped me form questions for this guide. In particular I am grateful to the many questions and suggestions made by Emily Simmons at Frontier Ventures.

If you have further questions or would like to dialogue with me on some of the concepts of the book feel free to contact me via email at duerks@gmail.com.

I pray that you are as encouraged, enriched, and challenged by our brothers and sisters in Christ in other religions as I have been. Peace to you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Darren Duerks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chapter 1: Introduction, New Missiological Realities

General questions

1. What are your initial reactions to the idea that a person can/does follow Christ without converting to Christianity and may instead remain a part of and identify with his/her religious community?
2. Everyone has imaginaries that picture the way the world should work. For example, you probably have a “restaurant imaginary” that pictures the right way patrons and servers interact (serve the patron, give a good tip, etc.) This imaginary in-turn guides your expectations and actions. But consider how you feel when someone doesn’t follow this – when they work from a different restaurant imaginary (perhaps not friendly, not giving tip). What are some aspects of your imaginary about the way a Christian interacts with other religious traditions, such as their beliefs, texts, worship, etc.? How do you feel about Christ-followers like those in this book work from a different imaginary?
3. Duerksen states that part of the purpose of this book is to consider what (Western) Christians can learn from the imaginaries of insider Christ-followers (page 15). What do you think *you* might learn from insider Christ-followers via this book?
4. In what ways do you agree or disagree that some western Christian traditions “have their root in Western culture more than the Gospel” (page 10)?

Missions-related questions

1. Duerksen mentions on page 8 that many insiders “critique reducing their identity and their relationships to a strategic tool.” Consider the phrases that missions groups sometimes use, like *unreached* and *frontier*, and the implicit meanings they could have in contexts with legacies of colonialism. What might it feel like to be categorized as a *frontier* people group? Or an *unreached* people group? Do you like these terms? Can you think of other terms, or another system, to use, if you do not like them?
2. In what ways do you agree or disagree with Duerksen’s assessment of the strengths and limitations of people group and contextualization theories?

Chapter 2: Religion and Hybrid Religiosity

General questions

1. What are some things that you think about when you hear the word “religion”? How are they similar or different from how Duerksen characterizes that concept?
2. How do you respond to the idea that all religions and their expressions (religiosities) are in some ways hybrid?
3. Can you think of ways Western Christian traditions have been shaped in-part by aspects of culture, other religions, politics, etc.? If it is challenging to think of examples, consider the annual practices done during Christian holidays. Where are some of those practices rooted?

Missions-related questions

1. Duerksen asserts that hybrid religiosity is not something we need to fear and is indeed unavoidable (page 18), and is something that God could be involved in. Does the idea of hybrid religiosity raise for you a sense of concern, freedom/trust in God, or something else?
2. Consider this quote from page 24, “It is true that the gospel derives from outside all contexts. It is, however, always and in every case revealed *within* a context.” What reaction do you have to this statement?
3. Consider this quote from page 25, “even while the gospel transforms peoples and their context and traditions, those same traditions help them in turn see aspects of God and his purposes that were perhaps latent in other contexts.” Similar to Paul quoting Greek philosophers in Acts 17, can you think of any aspects of your culture, whether it be a type of music, a book, a movie, etc. that help you see or worship God in ways meaningful to you?

Chapter 3: God's Activity in Hybrid Religiosity

General Questions

1. What do you know and think of the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian tradition? In what ways does chapter 3 expand or challenge your understandings of the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. Duerksen references Johnson's three primary sources of revelation; *creation, conscience, and culture* (page 36). Can you think of examples where God has revealed himself to you through each of these mediums? Thinking of those experiences, would you agree that "revelation occurs because God's Spirit is there, at that moment, in that experience" (page 37)? Or would you say it is the medium itself that does the revealing?

Missions-related questions

1. What do you think of Duerksen's characterization of the Spirit in the early parts of chapter 3 (pages 31-36)? Would you agree that the Spirit is "not only involved in the work of creation, but also instrumental in the ongoing work of re-creation" (page 35)? If not, why? If so, what are the implications of that?
2. What do you think of the assertion that the Muslim offering *zakat* or a Hindu harvest celebration are records of God's Spirit's past revelation to people (page 38)?
3. At the beginning of this chapter Duerksen asks "Is [hybrid religiosity] an aspect of a broken creation that needs to be protected against" (page 31)? Having finished the chapter, what do you think of this question? Is it something that we need to guard against, or something that God is doing and inviting us to lean into?
4. Read through Acts 17:16-32. In light of that passage, what is your reaction to this statement on page 39, "Theologically speaking, religious traditions are created by persons as part of their search for and response to God (Acts 17)." Would you agree or disagree?

Chapter 4: Insider Christ-Follower Imaginaries in History

General Questions

1. How do you feel about how Black Elk continued to embrace his Lakota culture and religiosity, and about Chetti's decision to not be baptized or join the formal church structure? What emotions does this raise in you?
2. What reaction do you have to Black Elk's hybridization of the Sun Dance? What emotions arose in you in response to Black Elk's story?
3. Why is it significant that for Black Elk, being Lakota was a holistic identity (page 55)? How is that similar or different from the typical Western way of understanding a national or ethnic identity (like German, Mexican, Japanese, etc.)?
4. What resonates from the lives of historical insider Christ-followers in chapter 4? What parts of their stories do you have difficulty with? What are some of the reasons why some things resonate and others give you difficulty?

Mission-related Questions

1. Chetti suggests that Christians can better show Christ to Hindus by looking for "something towards which [Hindu's] heart may leap forth as it were in recognition of a long-forgotten kinship" (page 55). What would it look like to start evangelism, be it cross-cultural or not, by first looking for something to affirm, as opposed to first looking for something to correct? Can you think of the impact that might have in your own context?
2. Duerksen concludes by saying both Black Elk and Chetti were "critical... of the colonial and structural powers of their day and the ways in which these had subjected and caused hardships for their people, as well as the dominance of the Western interpretation of the gospel" (page 63). How might these colonial experiences impact someone's view of the gospel? What does the introduction of alternative missiological imaginaries allow for those with these experiences?

Chapter 5: Insider Christ-Followers Today

General Questions

1. What do you think of Yussef's journey as a Muslim who becomes a Christian but then turns back to Islam as a Jesus-follower? What questions or concerns does this raise for you?
2. Duerksen has written a series of questions Vichika asked when Surya first spoke with him about Jesus (page 74). What do his questions indicate about the perception of Jesus and Christianity in his context? How would you answer his questions?
3. Duerksen described the vision Casey Church had on page 80. Imagine Church's background, the tension he feels between his two contexts, and having this vision. What emotions would that raise up in you, if you were in his shoes?
4. In Chapter 5, what did you find challenging about the stories of contemporary insider Christ-followers? What pieces were most difficult for you to understand? What did you appreciate about these stories from insiders?

Missions-Related Questions

1. How do you think the churches and missions organizations you are familiar with would react to the testimonies of this chapter? Why?
2. How do the testimonies in this chapter challenge the standard "conversion testimonies" told by Christian converts from other religions? Is there a way to affirm both types of testimonies and, if so, how?

Chapter 6: Insider Imaginaries and Religious Revelations Part 1

General Questions

1. How would you summarize Duerksen's discussion of the way that Christ/the Spirit can provide revelation through the practices, stories, and sacred texts of other religious traditions? What questions, concerns, or fears does this raise for you?
2. Dayanand Bharati describes his relationship with Hindu sacred texts, saying that "My faith in the Lord helps me to integrate the valuable things in Hinduism both for my private spiritual life and [to] apply it in my relationship with others. The best of Hinduism enriches my new faith in the Lord" (page 87). What emotions rise up in you when you read about Bharati's relationship to Hindu texts? Fear? Joy? Compassion? What do you think is behind this reaction?
3. Duerksen says "The Spirit uses the canon of biblical scripture to help reveal truth in other scriptures and also uses other scriptures to illuminate biblical truths sometimes obscured by Western colonialism and cultural influences" (page 94). This is a summary of an insider's relationship with sacred texts. Put yourself in the shoes of one of the insiders we have read about. What might this statement do for your faith? What could be the impact of this on your spiritual life?

Missions-related Questions

1. Mallouhi expresses his desire to "not pit religions and scriptures against each other, but to make Christ the supreme authority over all and interpretive key for all" (page 88). Do you think it is possible to do this? What does this imply about the status of Christianity when compared with other religions?
2. Much of this chapter puts Christ at the center of our faith as opposed to the Bible. Do you feel that this discredits the Bible, or enhances its truth?
3. Recall Duerksen's assertion in chapter 3 that the Muslim offering *zakat* or a Hindu harvest celebration can be records of the Spirit's past revelation to people. What do you think about this same principle being applied to sacred texts? Does putting Christ at the center, as opposed to the Bible, influence how you answer this question?

Chapter 7: Insider Imaginaries and Religious Revelations Part 2

General Questions

1. Can you think of an example of how someone has recently used an intertextual “strategy” in a conversation, text, social media post, etc.? Which of the four intertextual strategies would you say it is most like?
2. What questions or concerns does the discussion of intertextuality in religious scriptures, art, speech, etc. raise for you?

Missions-related Questions

1. When relating to another religious tradition’s resources (texts, music, art, etc.) which of the intertextual strategies described in chapter 7 would you feel most comfortable using? Which would you feel most uncomfortable with or cautious about? Why?
2. Duerksen describes discernment as something that is deeply relational. He says it is “not simply a rational question or exercise” and that we are instead “dependent on God relating to us, and us relating to God, to discern the Spirit’s presence in other scriptural traditions” (page 106). Is this consistent with your view of discernment? What might it look like to practice discernment in this way?
3. Duerksen says that “insiders are particularly mindful of the way in which their co-religionists will respond to their Christ-oriented interpretations of [their texts]” (page 106). When Christ-followers re-interpret religious texts or use music or other cultural-religious styles, how concerned do you think they should be about the opinions of others? Why?

Chapter 8: Insider Imaginaries of Salvation

General Questions

1. What are some key phrases and images that your particular Christian tradition or church uses to describe salvation? What is one idea, phrase, or image of salvation from chapter 8 that stands out to you? How does it agree with and/or expand your normal way of understanding salvation?
2. In Duerksen's description of salvation, he says "God intended his salvation to be broad enough to address the wide range of distortions that were introduced into God's creation through sin" (page 111). Do you agree?
3. Randy Woodley says, "The problem when the Europeans came is that they believed they had all of Jesus and the natives had nothing of Jesus. But if the church believes that Jesus is the Creator, then they have to affirm that Jesus has been here all along, in the Sun Dance, the Stomp Dance, the Midewiwin Lodge. It's not the task of the church to change those ways but rather to accept them as truth where they are" (page 115). How do you respond to this statement? Do you think we can, or should, envision Christ as being at the center of rituals such as these? Why or why not?
4. What emotions arise for you when reading about Pba and Vichika's idea of karma in their Christ-centered faith (page 125)? Is there any part of their experience that you can relate to?

Missions-related Questions:

1. To what degree might the ideas and images that we might use to describe salvation in our evangelism reflect our own cultural context?
2. What is one idea/image of salvation from chapter 8 that is somewhat new to you? What would it look like to use that in an evangelistic conversation or presentation?
3. Duerksen says that many Muslim Christ-followers "prefer to refer to Jesus as 'word of God' rather than 'son of God,'" and that they have a "'high Christology' that affirms all that the Bible affirms about who Jesus is and the nature of salvation, using their own questions and categories" (page 122). Do these two claims seem mutually exclusive to you? Or can they be in agreement?

Chapter 9: The Journey of “Conversion”

1. Richard Twiss learned that God had a high regard for his Native American identity and culture, and says that this was “contrary to what he had been taught” in his church experience (page 128). Woodley similarly had to learn that he didn’t need to convert away from his Native American heritage to have faith in Jesus. What can we learn from these stories?
2. If you agree that neither Woodley nor Twiss needed to convert away from their heritage, does that mean the Christians who brought them to faith and led them to convert away are “bad?” What can we learn about teaching and humility here?
3. Duerksen brings us back to Pba’s story. He says “Jesus had been patient with her, bringing her blessing and gradually prompting changes in her life” (page 130). He also mentions that she invited others to pray as she had *at the beginning of her journey*, implying that her conversion was a journey that involved change from where she began. In what ways might your own conversion be a journey? For instance, do you have the same convictions and practices as you did the day you decided to follow Jesus? Do you consider your experience to have been a one-moment conversion, or a transformative process? If you view it as more of a process, in what ways does transformation continue?
4. What do you think of Woodley’s claims about the Genesis story and truth on page 138? What resonates with you? Why? What are you uncomfortable with? Why?

Missions-related Questions

1. Duerksen asserts that many evangelists are frustrated that there is “no on singular biblical pattern for conversion” (page 132). Is that frustrating to you? If so, why? If not, what emotion would you use instead? Encouraging? Confusing? Why?
2. In your opinion what from Duerksen’s discussion of conversion is new and promising for evangelism and mission? What might you and/or others involved in Christian work find difficult, or with what might you/they disagree?
3. Notice that Duerksen does not use common Christian categories such as “justification” and “sanctification” in his discussions of salvation and conversion. Why do you think that is? What might be some strengths, and weaknesses, to not using these categories?

Chapter 10: Insider Missiologies of Family

1. Reading this book so far, have you had any thoughts about biblical passages regarding family, community, and/or persecution? Have any of the family (or “anti-family”) passages Duerksen references come to mind as you were learning about Christ-followers of other religions?
2. How do you understand the term family and Biblical texts related to family? What other understandings of “family” have you come to appreciate? What did you think of some of the ways and lenses that Duerksen used to unpack the term “family” in various contexts?
3. Consider this quote: “The key insight here is that Jesus is not necessarily calling into question particular items... Rather Jesus is concerned that his disciples re-evaluate their *relationship* to these” (page 150). Some might say that Jesus asks his disciples to consider their heart-posture. Compare this interpretation of Jesus’ teachings to Jesus’ interpretations of Old Testament Law in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7). Are there any similarities? Does the phrase “the heart of the law” apply here?
4. Consider Yusef’s statement, “We are born in a Muslim family. This is a God-given identity. He could have allowed me to be born in a Christian family, and then I would’ve had a Christian identity” (page 154). Compare this with Acts 17:26 (though read 17:16-32 for context). Is there overlap here? What thoughts does this prompt in you about God’s sovereignty and/or our identity?
5. Consider Mohammed’s reflections on Matthew 9 (page 157). What emotions does this stir up in you? Is there anything you can relate to, or that resonates with you?

Mission-related Questions

1. Western Christians honor and admire stories of converts who have to leave their families to become Christian and join the church. How do you think this might implicitly shape our understanding of how the gospel relates to other religious traditions? Or our understanding of what is required of a Muslim, Buddhist, etc. to follow Christ?
2. Consider two quotes. In describing those who have converted to Christianity from Islam Ismail says “They cannot do what Jesus tells us to do, to go and help others believe, because they cannot grow roots into their own culture” (page 155). Reflecting on this and other examples David Anthony says, “Rejection from one’s *oikos* may be a result of striving to fulfill the great commission, but it is not the objective. The objective is to go and make disciples of all nations” (page 156). How does this reframe for you the reason that at least some insider Christ-followers have for staying in their family and religious community?

3. How do you respond to Duerksen's, and some insider's understanding of ancestors and ancestor veneration? What might be the potential value, and dangers, of affirming the presence, and even honoring, of ancestors?

Chapter 11: Conclusion

1. Consider this quote: “The presence and work of God throughout his people, Jesus indicates, is something that spreads throughout a new context and enriches it. The kingdom of God comes not to displace, overtake, or control a context, but to infuse and transform from within it” (page 165). Having read through the entire book, would you agree with this statement?
2. Re-read the final questions posed by Duerksen on page 175. In particular, how would you answer his final question, “What would it look like if Christians, solid in their commitment to Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, felt free to explore what the Spirit may be stirring through such questions.” How would you answer this?
3. What emotions does this final statement prompt in you: “Insiders and their imaginaries help us see a glimpse of God’s mending and patient mission among those who have been “marginal” to the dominant forms of Christianity. And they invite us, should we choose, to quietly listen, learn, and join with that mission as God leads” (page 175)? How will you respond to that invitation?
4. As you conclude this book, what most excites you, and what topics or action steps are you most eager to pursue?
5. As you conclude this book, what are your principal concerns or critiques? What do you think is weakest in this book, or is wrong, and why?

Missions-related Questions

1. To what degree do you think the various missiologies described by Duerksen - a mending missiology, patient missiology, marginal missiology – describe the missiology of Duerksen’s book? Which of these missiologies resonate with you, and why?
2. What is your response to Duerksen’s book? Does it call you to do anything differently? Does it call you to change anything about your thinking, processing, or posture in ministry?