

Fear of the Other – Study Guide

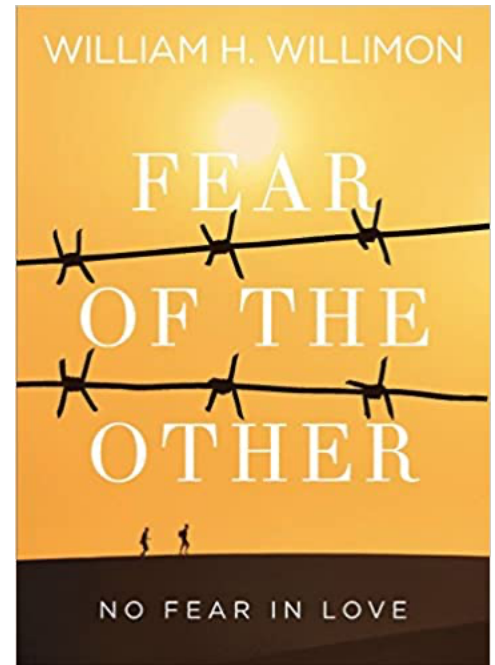
Book by William Willimon

In this no non-sense book, reliable spiritual guide, Will Willimon, invites readers to consider the Gospel command to love (and not merely tolerate) those considered to be “Other” or outside mainstream Christian culture.

Rooted in the faith of Israel and the Christian story and vision, Willimon brings a Wesleyan perspective to bear on what may be the hardest thing for people of faith to do: keeping and loving the "Other" as they are - without any need for them to become like us.

Emphasizing biblical teaching to receive Others for who they are and their differences as gifts and mysteries bearing the grace of God, Willimon also offers a strong critique of the privileged who all too often rush to speak of reconciliation and evade the injustice of huge inequalities faced by foreigners and strangers - as well as the antagonism the stranger experiences. He identifies concrete, everyday ways persons are formed in welcoming others without annihilating their differences.

With the New Testament understanding of Gentile outsiders grafted into the covenant community, Willimon invites readers to an on-the-ground faith that remembers the God who comes to us again and again through so-called outsiders, strangers, immigrants, and those without status. Beyond welcome, Christians must become “other” to the world, shaking off the dominant culture’s identity and privilege through practices of listening, humility, and understanding.



Introduction

1. Before you start, take some time to read and pray through 1 John 4:7-21. What sticks out to you from this passage? Is the Holy Spirit convicting you of anything as you read it?
2. After reading the introduction, what are your feelings and expectations about this book?
3. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why?
4. What is it you hope to get from this study? Write out your goals, individually and as a group, so you can review them when your study is over.
5. Take some time to pray and invite God into your study. Ask him what HE wants you to get out of this and add those things to your list. Ask him to speak to you and to give you open eyes, ears, mind, and heart to receive all that he has for you, in humility, as you move forward.

Chapter 1 – Saved by the Other

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. “An important function of Christian preaching and church life is to render *me* into the Other. I am the enemy of God.” Describe a time in your life where you were apart or alienated from God. How did it feel? What happened to bring you out of it (if anything)?
3. What does it feel like to be the “other”? Do you have any experience being the outsider? Explain.
4. Who is an “other” in your life today? Who is an “other” to the group you’re meeting with right now? Write these people down and commit to praying for them every day while you go through this study. These answers will be referred to in future chapters, so keep them handy.
5. At the heart of this book is 1 John 4:18, which includes the phrase “fear expects punishment” (CEB). Think of a time when you were afraid. What punishment were you afraid of? Did it come to pass? Have you ever tried to control (oppress, exploit, confine, hurt, etc.) a situation or an Other in order to protect yourself from fear? What was it like?
6. What kind of security does your church adopt for self-preservation and protection? What message do your security policies send to others outside your community? How do you balance self-preservation with unconditional welcome?
7. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
8. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 2 – The Other, My Enemy

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Think of your answer to the question in the previous chapter, asking who the Others are in your life. Are these Others close or encroaching on your life or are they remote and removed from your daily life? Explain and consider if you or they might be directly and intentionally keeping each other close or remote.
3. What are you afraid of in relation to these particular Others? Are these fears justified? Are these people really as powerful as you fear or are you simply fearful because they are different from you?
4. Is your fear of the Other causing you to turn inward upon yourself or to avoid doing things that you should do or would like to do?
5. What outside influences have added to your fear (media, governmental policy, peer pressure, parental influence, past experiences, etc.)?
6. How is God leading you in your relationship with the Others you mentioned? What does He expect of you? And how might Christ be attempting to make the Others your neighbors whom you are to love as yourself?
7. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
8. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 3 – Learning to Fear Like Christians

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Give some examples of attempting to “redefine the Other, or to ignore certain aspects of otherness in the Other so that the Other loses otherness.”
3. How is your church, neighborhood, or workplace identified with people who are the same in race, ethnicity, economic class, or cultural affinity? How are these markers a barrier to others?
4. Willimon identifies a problem with “thinking of the Christian faith as a technique for meeting individual needs and healing individual hurts.” How does this thinking inhibit or contribute to God’s mission for the Church as a whole? How does the focus on personal needs communicate with people who are Other, that is, different from your group?
5. Think of a person who is or was your enemy. What changed or would need to change for you to love your enemy?
6. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
7. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 4 – Loving the Other in Church

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What does it mean for the church to be “called out”? Do you think the church is “other” enough or does it look too much like the world? According to how you answered, how do you think this impacts the view of the church and Christianity by those who are outside of the church?
3. Have you ever thought it was easier to love someone outside the church than someone inside it? Have you found it easier to be offended by those inside the church or outside? Why do you think this is?
4. Take some time to go through the 10 suggestions on pages 79-81. How realistic are these suggestions in your church setting today? Brainstorm about ways these might work (or not work) in your context, and make a plan to implement at least one of them (besides #7 – you’re already doing that one!) within the next few weeks.
5. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
6. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 5 – Jesus, the Other

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Think of a time when you were traveling through an unfamiliar, strange place. Describe the people or situation that made you feel uncomfortable. How did you (or could you) overcome this fear?
3. Read the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. For the people within your reach, who is the neighbor that is served the least? Which neighbor poses the most risk? Which of your neighbors is most like the Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan in this parable? Share ideas about how you can overcome this fear and this risk to welcome the Other.
4. Now think back to the Others you wrote down in the first chapter. How has your perception of them changed as you've prayed for them during this study? Have you had any interaction with them over that time and has it been any different? What are your next steps for welcoming these people in your life and in your group? How can your group hold each other accountable in these relationships?
5. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
6. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you've just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Conclusion

1. What stuck out to you most from this study? What have you learned about God that you did not know before? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about others?
2. Take some time to review your goals from the beginning of your study. What goals have you accomplished, what are you still working on, and what do you need help with?
3. What questions do you still have after completing this study?
4. Finally, so what? What are you going to do with what you've studied, learned, and discussed? Be specific.
5. Now spend some time in prayer, asking God to awaken his purposes within you concerning this study. Consider whether you need to spend time in repentance, in a time of commitment and commissioning, or in a time of surrender. Add this to your prayer time as the Holy Spirit guides you.