

Walking with Jesus
in Tough Places:
A Study Companion for
The Insanity of Obedience

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*A student is not above his teacher,
but everyone who is fully trained
will be like his teacher.
Luke 6:40*

Introduction

Following the release of *The Insanity of God* in 2013, *The Insanity of Obedience* was published the following year. Nik Ripken's first book, *The Insanity of God*, followed the pilgrimage of Nik and his wife, Ruth. After a long season of sacrificial (and seemingly unproductive) ministry in the Horn of Africa and reeling from the tragic death of their sixteen-year-old son, Nik and Ruth returned the States grappling with unanswerable questions – and wondering what their next step might be.

Within a brief time, however, Nik and Ruth were given the opportunity to travel the world to learn from brothers and sisters in Christ who had survived – and were continuing to survive – in settings of severe persecution. Much to their amazement, Nik and Ruth discovered that these fellow followers of Jesus were not merely surviving – they were thriving in their faith. Over the next few years, Nik visited over seventy-two countries and interviewed over six hundreds followers of Christ. Those interviews were meticulously transcribed and analyzed.

Coming out of an environment of debilitating persecution in the Horn of Africa, Nik and Ruth set out to visit other believers in similar settings to learn the life lessons of victorious living in the face of suffering. *The Insanity of God* told that story and highlighted some of the dramatic testimonies of believers who had come to know God intimately as a powerful and faithful friend. *The Insanity of Obedience* was written to unpack the lessons of those testimonies – and to glean from the stories instructive teaching that can assist every follower of Jesus who desires to be serious about the Great Commission.

The question behind *The Insanity of God* was simply this: *Am I willing to give my life to Jesus so fully that I will go across the street or go across the ocean to tell others about Jesus' love?* The second book was driven by the rather obvious follow-up question: *Now that I have gone across the street – or across the ocean – to share Jesus, what do I do next?*

And that is a crucial question.

It is wonderful when followers of Jesus are willing to share their faith! Not only is it wonderful, the sharing of our faith is expected, commanded, required. But as good as it is to be willing to go, it is essential that we know what to do *once we have gone*. *The Insanity of Obedience* was written for that very purpose.

The book that you hold in your hands is a study guide for *The Insanity of Obedience*. Many readers have found *The Insanity of Obedience* to be a challenging book. Some of the lessons that are presented in the book are difficult to understand. Figuring out how to apply those lessons is sometimes ever more difficult. This new book is written to help.

The chapters of *Walking with Jesus in Tough Places* will correspond exactly to the chapter of *The Insanity of Obedience*. Ideally, readers will read both books simultaneously, reading a chapter at a time in *The Insanity of Obedience*, followed by reading the corresponding chapter of the study guide.

The structure of the study guide will follow a consistent format. Within each chapter, there will be three sections.

The first section of each chapter is called “Understanding the Information.” This first section will simply highlight the main points of the chapter. Readers will be asked to answer questions and fill in blanks using information found in *The Insanity of Obedience*.

The second section of each chapter is called “Figuring Out What It Means.” This second section will invite the reader to begin to process the information. It is one thing to understand what we are reading; it is another thing altogether to begin to see the implications of the information. The questions in this second section will generally require more personal responses.

The third section of each chapter is called “Deciding What to Do Next.” At this point, we will be grappling with application, working to make connections between the lessons learned from persecuted believers and the living out of our faith here and now. Again, these questions will generally be quite personal. And the questions in this section of each chapter might sound similar from chapter to chapter. Essentially, the challenge is to arrive at this crucial point: *What will I do in response to what I have just read? In light of what I am learning, what is my next step?*

As important as this study might be, our hope is that your encounter with these books will not simply end with some additional information that you have gained. Our real hope is that these lessons from persecuted believers will spur all of us on to a deeper commitment and a greater passion for sharing Jesus with the world.

It is exciting to read new books. It is even better, though, to be changed by what we read. Our hope and prayer is that *The Insanity of Obedience* and *Walking with Jesus in Tough Places* will make a difference in the lives of followers of Jesus. Our hope is that this study might, in fact, help us be more obedient and actually motivate us to walk with Jesus in tough places.

How to Use This Resource in a Small Group Setting

Walking with Jesus in Tough Places: A Study Companion to The Insanity of Obedience is ideally suited to be used by individuals, but it can also be easily adapted for the use of small groups.

If you are working with a small group, first make certain that all of your group members have access to both *The Insanity of Obedience* and *Walking with Jesus*. As a group, decide on a schedule and on the number of times that you will meet. Ideally, you will want to read specific chapters in *The Insanity of Obedience* along with the corresponding sections of *Walking with Jesus*. During the week, participants will do individual study on their own. Then the group will gather once a week to reflect, share, and pray together.

You may choose to read the books more slowly (increasing the number of group meetings) or you may choose to read the books more quickly (reducing the number of group meetings). To assist you in developing a plan, here is a suggested approach:

Initial group meeting: use this gathering to enlist participants, to distribute or secure copies of the books, to set a schedule for both individual study and group meetings, and to pray that God will use this shared experience for his purposes.

During the following week, participants will be asked to read a portion of *The Insanity of Obedience* and work through the corresponding chapters in *Walking with Jesus*.

The same pattern will be followed each week. The chapter numbers and titles are identical in both books. After each week of individual study, there will be a small group meeting.

For the remainder of your study, read through designated chapters of *The Insanity of Obedience* and the corresponding chapters of *Walking with Jesus*. It is probably best to complete two or three chapters each week, though your group may want to cover more – or less – material each week. Feel free to match your schedule with the needs and comfort of your group.

During your small group sessions, take time to reflect together on the material that you have read. Devote special attention to the questions from the study guide. Be sure to allow extended time for prayer together as a group.

As you study, keep these questions at the forefront:

How will I respond to what I am encountering in these books?

What would God have me do in light of what I am learning?

How will my life be different because of this study?

And perhaps the most important question of all is this: *What do I do next?*

Figuring Out What It Means

The Prologue of *The Insanity of Obedience* is introduced with a conversation that Nik has with a believer in China. Nik has commented on the high number of “believers” in China – and the Chinese believer has called Nik’s figures into question. In explanation, the man essentially says that church members *are not really followers of Jesus* until they have led others to Jesus and until they have helped plant additional house churches.

Do you agree with that definition of a “follower of Jesus”? Why or why not? Would you offer an alternative definition? In other words, what do you think it means for someone to be a follower of Jesus? What would be the evidence of a relationship with Jesus in an individual’s life?

Deciding What to Do Next

The personal question that the Prologue calls to mind is a crucial one: *Are you a follower of Jesus?* What exactly does that mean? For you, is being a follower of Jesus mostly a matter of what you believe? Or it a matter of how you live? Or is it mostly related to things have happened to you or decisions that you have made in the past? Or is it something else? Is it some combination of several things? In your view, what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? What would the Chinese believer in the first story of the Prologue say about your answer?

What would your life look like right now if you *passionately* and *faithfully* followed Jesus? Is it your intention and desire to follow Jesus?

One: Our Marching Orders

Understanding the Information

Chapter One of *The Insanity of Obedience* is grounded in Jesus' instructions to the Twelve in Matthew 10. As he sent them out, Jesus gave his disciples some instructions that might seem unusual to us. In addition, Jesus was as clear in telling his disciples what would happen to them as they went out.

If we were to send someone out on our behalf, we might want to assure them of an easy road; we might want to encourage them by explaining that everything would work out fine. Jesus, though, is disturbingly frank about the certainty of persecution and opposition. He is so frank, in fact, that we might wonder how the disciples had the courage to follow Jesus' command to go!

Read Matthew 10. After reading the entire chapter, list some of the specific instructions that Jesus gave his disciples. Then, list some of the outcomes that Jesus said would happen to those he was sending out.

Specific instructions that Jesus gave his disciples:

What did Jesus say would happen to those who went out in his name?

Figuring Out What It Means

In light of the first list that you made above, which instructions from Jesus do you see as most unusual? What did he require of his disciples that seems odd to you? Can you think of any reasons for these requirements that Jesus placed on those he was sending out?

In light of the second list that you made above, why would the disciples be willing to go out on Jesus' behalf *when he had made it clear that suffering, persecution, and opposition would come their way*? In other words, what would motivate someone to obey Jesus' command to go when such difficult outcomes are certain?

Deciding What to Do Next

It is one thing to read about the disciples being sent out by Jesus. Is it possible, though, that the deep truths of Matthew 10 apply to us as well? Are Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10 – which clearly force us to rely on God's provision – instructive for us as we go? And are Jesus' words about the outcome of witness applicable to us as well?

Chapter One claims that “an intimate relationship with Jesus necessarily leads to a life of ministry and service and mission for **all believers**.”

In what ways do the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and the words of Matthew 10 apply to you?

Are you willing to obey Jesus' instruction to go?

What will be the likely cost for your obedience?

Two: Where's the Parachute?

Understanding the Information

Nik and Ruth's opportunity to interview persecuted believers around the globe grew out of a long and difficult season of living as "sheep among wolves" in the Horn of Africa. Despite the best of intentions, hard work, spiritual grounding, and excellent training, Nik and Ruth experienced heartache, loss, and failure. Added to that were devastating personal losses.

God graciously provided Nik and Ruth with a way to use their painful experiences for a good purpose by allowing them to travel the world and learn from believers who also knew what it was like to live as "sheep among wolves."

Briefly summarize some of the lessons about faith and persecution mentioned here in Chapter Two of *The Insanity of Obedience* that Nik and Ruth learned from persecuted believers.

Take a few minutes to review the five major sections of *The Insanity of Obedience* that are noted on pages 13 and 14. Which one of these five sections are you most interested in studying? Why?

Figuring Out What It Means

On page 14, six “life questions” are mentioned. These questions are core concerns that will surface throughout *The Insanity of Obedience*. Even beyond that, it is the intention of this book to *answer* those questions. Right now, at the very beginning of our study, select one of those questions and provide your answer to it.

Assumptions are beliefs that define our lives. Assumptions might turn out to be true or false. In either case, assumptions are very powerful in shaping the way we live. In Chapter Two of *The Insanity of Obedience*, Nik explains that his interviews with persecuted believers sometimes affirmed his assumptions. At other times, the interviews sometimes challenged some of his strongly held assumptions. This often happens when we encounter new things and hear new stories.

What are some of your strongly held assumptions about following Jesus? And what are some of your assumptions about persecution? (Specifically, is it possible for a follower of Jesus to avoid persecution? How central is suffering in the life of a believer? Why is the experience of believers in different settings so varied?)

Deciding What to Do Next

If you had the opportunity to talk with persecuted followers of Jesus, what questions would you ask them?

If those same persecuted believers were to ask you about your suffering as a follower of Jesus, what would you say?

Three: Did I Sleep Through This Class in Seminary?

Understanding the Information

The heart of Chapter Three in *The Insanity of Obedience* is the simple (but startling) claim that persecution is normal. As simple as that sounds, that truth is almost impossible to grasp for believers who do not happen to live in settings of persecution. The statistic cited by Paul Marshall of Freedom House (page 21), however, is revealing. If eighty percent of the world's believers who are practicing their faith live in persecution, then a word such as "normal" is a fair description of the reality. Some believers would suggest that persecution is unusual and that it can be easily avoided – and even that it is the result of "doing something wrong." The insights of Chapter Three, however, call that thinking into question.

According to the believers in Russia and the Ukraine, persecution is "as normal as the sun coming up in the east." Those who follow Jesus should expect persecution. The simple truth is that obedience to Jesus will result in persecution.

According to the book, it would be quite simple and easy to eliminate persecution. How could that be accomplished – and why should we be unwilling to let that happen? (page 22)

What are the five different prayer responses to persecution that are suggested on pages 24-28 in the book?

What, according to the book, is the ultimate purpose of persecution? (page 28)

How can a believer's silence in sharing his or her witness accomplish the same purpose of persecution?

Finally, what are the five typical responses of believers when persecution is encountered? (pages 31-32)

Figuring Out What It Means

Do you believe that persecution for followers of Jesus is “as normal as the sun coming up in the east?” Why or why not?

If persecution is normal, how would you explain the fact that some followers of Jesus do not currently experience persecution? In other words, why is Paul Marshall’s statistic on page 21 eighty percent . . . instead of one hundred percent?

Which of the five prayers responses to persecution that are listed on pages 24-26 would you probably be comfortable praying? Why? To make this question more valid, imagine that the persecution is happening to you or to members of your family.

Deciding What to Do Next

The book claims that the ultimate goal of persecution is to deny people access to Jesus. If that is true, what choices can you make and what actions can you take that will guarantee that people in your neighborhood and around the world have access to Jesus?

Which of the five responses to persecution noted on pages 31-32 is your typical response when you hear about the persecution of believers around the world? In light of the insights shared on pages 32-34, how *should* you probably respond to persecution?

How bold would you be in your witness if you did not have the political freedom to share your faith?

How bold are you in your witness right now given the political freedom to share your faith that you now have?

Four: Defining the Conversation

Understanding the Information

Chapter Four focuses on the essential work of defining important terms. Using your copy of *The Insanity of Obedience*, write brief definitions of the following concepts in your own words.

Persecution: _____

Census Christian: _____

Member Christian: _____

Practicing Christian: _____

Believer: _____

Hidden Christian: _____

Martyr: _____

Church: _____

Unengaged and Unreached Peoples: _____

Muslim Background Believer: _____

What are the six components suggested by the book that define the word “martyr”?

Figuring Out What It Means

The words defined in this chapter are key words in the conversation about faith and persecution. To this point, we have discovered that persecution is normal and expected. We have also learned that persecution happens because people give their lives to Jesus. If people were to stop making that commitment – or if they were prevented from having that option – then persecution would come to an end. In light of what we learn in Scripture, the only way to stop persecution is to prevent people from coming to faith in Christ – which, of course, is the exact opposite of what followers of Christ are commanded to do.

Because sharing the faith and persecution are tied so closely together, believers who follow Christ command to share their witness will necessarily *cause* persecution, suffering, and martyrdom. This is a startling and sobering insight; the faithful witness of believers will lead to persecution – because the ultimate cause of persecution is people coming to Jesus!

While we might struggle with the high cost of sharing our faith, we must also consider *the high cost of not sharing our faith*. Chapter Four makes it clear that people who do not yet know Jesus are already suffering because they do not know Jesus. Clearly, believers do not legitimately have the option of withholding Jesus from the world.

Consider the five categories of “Christians” suggested by Paul Marshall on pages 39-40. Which one of those categories describes you? Which one of those categories describes many of the people in your church or in your community? Are Paul Marshall’s categories sufficient – or would you suggest other ways to define those in our culture who call themselves “Christians”?

What is required for a “church” to be a “church”? What did the church look like in the Book of Acts in the New Testament? What does the church look like in your world? What might the church look like in settings of persecution where the faith is not yet well established?

Why do you think certain groups of people in the world are “unengaged and unreached”?

Deciding What to Do Next

How do you personally deal with the high cost of witness? Are you willing to share your faith knowing exactly what that might mean for the people with whom you share? Are you willing to be obedient to Jesus and *cause* persecution through your witness? Is silence ever an option for followers of Jesus?

Chapter Four makes the claim that “every believer is a sent out one.” Does that apply to you? What are the implications of that for your life and witness? At this point in your life, where exactly do you believe that are being sent? What is your response to that high calling?

Which one of these obstacles seems to you to be the most difficult to overcome?
Why?

Can you think of any other obstacles that might be added to the list?

Figuring Out What It Means

In your faith community, how important are “results” that can be counted and measured? Are ministries in your faith community ever evaluated by how “successful” they are? How is success determined? How would you decide whether or not a particular ministry or mission work was worth continuing?

Should the security, safety, and comfort of workers *ever* be a consideration in deciding where to place personnel involved in witness? Is it fair to ask overseas workers to make sacrifices that sending churches are not willing to make?

Deciding What to Do Next

An important claim about going and staying is made at both the beginning and the end of Chapter Five: “Going is an excellent first step. But going is not quite enough. What is required next is *staying* in the midst of an unreached people group.” (page 58) What would motivate a believer not only to go to a challenging work among an unreached people group, but also to stay among that group? What motivates you to be faithful in your witness? Would you be willing to move to a new place if God were to lead you in that direction?

Think about the seven obstacles described in this chapter (and any additional obstacles that you added above). Is there anything you can do *now* that would help overcome those obstacles that prevent unreached people from coming to Jesus. Consider the obstacles one by one. What could an individual believer – or a faith community – do to help deal with these barriers that stand in the way of people coming to faith?

Figuring Out What It Means

There is, of course, nothing wrong with giving consideration to the concerns of the workers or the concerns of the sending body. At the same time, Chapter Five makes a compelling case that the needs of the lost should always be our primary focus. Even more pointed is this claim: *The need for the lost to hear the good news always exceeds the needs of the witnesser.* (page 64) If that claim is valid, then those who witness are explicitly called to embrace lives of sacrifices – lives that emphasize the needs of others over their own.

Do you agree with the claim that the spiritual need of the lost is more important than the needs of those who are sent out as witnesses? Why or why not?

Is that perspective modeled and taught in your faith community? Should it be? How would your faith community change if the needs of the lost were the highest priority?

Deciding What to Do Next

Using the three models described in Chapter Five, which one most accurately describes the way your church does its work? Give examples of how you can determine the true focus of your faith community.

Do you honestly believe that the need for the lost to hear the good news *exceeds* your needs? Why or why not? If you actually believed this startling claim, how would it affect the way you live your life?

Which of these lies is the greatest struggle for you personally? Why?

Figuring Out What It Means

The questions listed on page 69 are especially challenging. Take time to consider prayerfully these six pointed questions. How would you respond to each one?

Why is more than seventy percent of the world's evangelistic witness focused on the world's historically Christian countries?

Why does the church in the West retain well over ninety percent of God's resources for itself?

Why is the bulk of sacrificial offerings directed toward buildings, staff salaries, and educational materials for those already in the kingdom?

Why is the church in the West willing to share only the leftovers with the Nations?

Why do unengaged and unreached people groups today still lack even minimal access to the gospel?

Why do many seminaries in the West, filled to overflowing with capable and committed students, send fewer than ten percent of their graduates to the Nations?

Deciding What to Do Next

Consider carefully these words about fear found on page 91:

“Fear is devastating. Fear paralyzes. Fear causes people to run and hide. Fear is a black hole that will deplete joy from the soul of a believer. Fear is the deadly enemy of the church. *Your fear is the greatest tool you will ever give to Satan. Overcoming your fear is your greatest tool against Satan.*”

How significant a force is fear in your life as a believer? How are you limited by your fear? What steps can you take today to begin to overcome your fear?

Nik concludes the chapter with this challenging word: *Believers cannot always choose safety, but they can always choose obedience.* Is that true? Why or why not? If you were to choose obedience over safety today, what would your life look like? How would that choice affect your witness?

Eight: Staying Put

Understanding the Information

We all have ways of measuring success. Especially when it comes to ministry and missions, we tend to know how to determine whether something is a worthwhile investment. This chapter challenges us to submit those methods of measurement to the simple choice to be obedient to Jesus' call. Nik tells several sobering stories in this chapter about people who questioned the wisdom of staying in places that were perceived to be "unresponsive."

Ultimately, the decision to stay or not to stay is a very personal one – and a decision that is (hopefully!) guided by the Holy Spirit. It is not always up to us to determine whether we should stay or leave; that decision belongs to God himself. Furthermore, we are not always wise enough to determine whether the situation can be called "responsive" or "unresponsive." These matters are best left to God. Our obedience in going in the first place should be followed by radical obedience in making decisions about our next steps once we have gone.

There are a number of important Scripture passages mentioned in this chapter. Read the following verses and make notes about what the verses suggest about staying or not staying in a difficult setting. Based on what you read in each passage, what would you conclude about staying or not staying?

Matthew 28:18-20: _____

Matthew 10:14-16: _____

Acts 13:49-52: _____

Romans 10:1-15: _____

1 Corinthians 16:8-9: _____

2 Corinthians 2:12-13: _____

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5: _____

Matthew 9:35-38: _____

Figuring Out What It Means

In one of the stories that Nik tells, someone questions the wisdom of using precious resources in an unresponsive setting. More to the point, this person says, “There is no way to justify *wasting* personnel, money, and witness in a place that is so unresponsive.” In terms of ministry, how can you determine whether something is “a waste”? How would you have responded to this person’s comment?

In the New Testament, there are examples of believers “shaking the dust off their feet” in certain settings. That is a powerful image of leaving a ministry setting. Based on what you have read in this chapter – and based on what you have read in Scripture – what are the situations when it would be appropriate and God-honoring to shake off the dust? How would you personally go about making that difficult decision?

Deciding What to Do Next

What would cause you to step away from an unproductive ministry or an unresponsive person? Have you ever reached that point? What were the exact steps that you followed in making a decision whether to stay or to leave? How exactly did you pray? What was your sense of God's answer to your prayers?

The example of the apostle Paul mentioned near the end of Chapter Eight would lead us to believe that staying in a difficult setting is often the preferred choice. Are you willing to continue your service and ministry even if people seem to be unresponsive? How is it possible to serve in that difficult situation with a kind heart and a godly attitude?

Nine: The Persecutors

Understanding the Information

Chapter Nine of *The Insanity of Obedience* defines three distinct forms of persecution. As you work through the chapter, make notes here about these three types of persecution that have been present throughout the history of Christianity and are happening in the world today. For each type of persecution, note some of the significant characteristics. What does this type of persecution look like? How does it work? Where can this type of persecution be seen in history or in the world today?

Top-down persecution (when the State perceives the church or individual believers as a threat to order, control, or its own existence):

Persecution that involves the State working with an ideological partner:

Bottom-up persecution (when the State and an ideological partner work in concert with the family):

Figuring Out What It Means

Why is it important to understand the different types of persecution? More to the point, why is it important to understand persecution at all? How can this understanding of persecution affect individual believers as they live out their faith?

Church planting movements (defined on page 45) are characterized by rapid and exponential growth of indigenous churches. As these churches are born, they in turn plant additional churches. We are told in Chapter Nine that “church planting

movements are happening today *within settings of persecution.*” We might think that severe persecution would prevent this from happening. How is it possible for the church to grow in the presence of persecution?

What is the benefit in reaching families and communities for Jesus – instead of simply reaching individuals? What are some of the practical differences between those two approaches?

Deciding What to Do Next

It is only natural for persecutors to believe that they have the power to determine how believers will live and how bold believers will be in their witness. Amazingly, though, the interviews revealed that it is the persecuted – and not the persecutors – who determine how believers will live and how bold they will be in their witness. Even more, persecuted believers consistently claimed that they were free to share their faith *regardless of the presence of persecution.* The clear implication is that believers are *always* free to witness. There may be consequences for the witness, of course – but believers are free to witness nevertheless.

How does this truth affect the way you see your witness? Are you willing to embrace the truth that no one can prevent you from sharing your faith? Is that realization freeing – or is it convicting – for you? Why?

Ten: God's Spirit in Present Active Tense Today

Understanding the Information

As preparation for the study of Chapter Ten in *The Insanity of Obedience*, read the story of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The historical event described in Acts 2 is used in this chapter as a model for understanding the history of salvation. Three different movements in the story are described. There is, first, the world before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Second, there is the historical moment when Pentecost happened. Third, there is the world after Pentecost. That construct serves as a helpful guide to make sense of the situation in many parts of our world today. In addition, this model helps us understand what might be most needed at each stage in the process, the impact of persecution at the various movements in the story, and the role of workers who are attempting to share Jesus.

As you study this chapter, try not to be overwhelmed by the details. Instead, look for the big picture – and attempt see how the Pentecost story (and the realities of the world before and after Pentecost) can help us understand the growth of faith in our world today.

As you read the three major sections of this chapter, jot down descriptive phrases that define each movement in the story. Notice that the characteristics of the different movements of the story in Bible times will mirror characteristics of the different movements of the story of salvation today.

The Pre-Pentecost World (beginning on page 118):

The Pentecost World (beginning on page 123):

The Post-Pentecost World (beginning on page 127):

Figuring Out What It Means

Using this model of Pentecost as a guide, it is clear that most of us who are studying *The Insanity of Obedience* live in a post-Pentecost world. How is it possible for people in a post-Pentecost setting to share Jesus in a pre-Pentecost setting? What are the significant challenges? How might those challenges be overcome?

One of the central themes of the Pentecost story in Acts 2 is the overcoming of barriers. For example, even though the people present in Jerusalem at that time spoke many different languages, they were all able to hear and understand the gospel. What would a barrier-destroying “Pentecost-type event” look like today? What are the significant barriers that the Spirit of God would need to overcome?

Why is the presence (or birth) of a believing community so crucial in settings of persecution?

Deciding What to Do Next

To appreciate fully the impact of the historical event of Pentecost described in Acts 2, we need to imagine what it was like to live before that event. That is perhaps difficult to do because believers today are so dramatically affected by

what happened at Pentecost. Try to imagine – and then describe – what it would have been like to live in the period of time before Pentecost.

If your description of that pre-Pentecost world is accurate at all, you have just described reality for millions and millions of people in our world today. Can you envision ways of bridging that gap between two different worlds that seem to have very little in common in terms of faith? If you were called by God to serve in a pre-Pentecost setting, how would you approach your assignment?

Eleven: Supernatural Conversions through Western Eyes

Understanding the Information

Based on the interviews, this chapter describes in general terms how Muslims and Hindus typically come to faith in Jesus. There is not a single pattern for these conversions, of course. At the same time, there are some common trends. Recognizing and understanding these trends is extremely helpful as we grapple with ways to share our faith effectively – especially with people who come from backgrounds different than our own.

List some of the *faulty assumptions* about conversions that Nik notes on pages 138-139.

What are the three major components identified for Muslims in their journey to faith in Jesus?

Describe in general terms what the interviews revealed about the typical journey of Hindus coming to faith in Jesus.

Figuring Out What It Means

In light of the insights of this chapter, what is the appropriate role of an outside believer (or a Western worker) in the process of a Muslim or a Hindu coming to faith in Jesus? Why is this important to understand?

Why is it important to hear and understand the conversion stories of others – especially those who come from different backgrounds? Why is it important to realize that God can reach people in so many different ways?

Deciding What to Do Next

Spend some time remembering and reflecting on the process of your own conversion. What happened when you met Jesus and responded to his invitation? Which parts of that process would you consider essential for any person – from any background – coming to faith? And which parts of your conversion process might have been important for you but not quite essential? (For example, a Muslim background believer might say that dreams and visions are essential – but dreams and vision might not be part of your faith story. You might say that “walking down the aisle” in a worship service was essential to your conversion experience – but a Muslim background believer would have a hard time making sense of that.) What is truly essential for any person who comes to faith in Jesus?

Can you explain to someone exactly how to respond to Jesus’ invitation to life?

Figuring Out What It Means

On pages 158-159 of Chapter Twelve, there is a discussion about the indicators of a “serious faith in Jesus” in the lives of MBBs and HBBs. For each group, list some of those indicators.

There is evidence of a serious faith in Jesus among MBBs when:

There is evidence of a serious faith in Jesus among HBBs when:

Deciding What to Do Next

Consider the same question about that “serious faith in Jesus” for yourself and for your context. In your life, what is the evidence of a serious faith in Jesus? What attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs in life indicate your serious faith?

It is likely that you live in a setting where most people are literate learners. In that setting, for example, you might expect that people would be able to read the Bible. Are you equipped to share your faith in literate *and* non-literate settings? Do you have oral tools that you can use in the sharing of your faith? In other words, are you prepared to “tell” the story when it might not be effective to “read” the story? If not, are you willing to develop those tools?

Most people are surprised (and disappointed) to learn that local Christian churches can actually be barriers that make it difficult for the faith to move from one generation to the next. Read through the comments on page 172. Do you see any attitudes in these comments that are present in your own heart or in your own

church? How can you overcome these attitudes that make the sharing of faith more difficult than it needs to be?

Figuring Out What It Means

In an attempt to understand the impact of all of these barriers, we are introduced to a hypothetical group of one hundred MBBs on page 176. From that group of one hundred believers, we can identify reasons why many of them might struggle to share their faith. The conclusion of that conversation is that only a few of the original one hundred believers would be in a position to share their faith broadly and effectively. Do you find that illustration discouraging? Can you see any reasons for hope? In light of that illustration, how will it be possible for faith in Jesus to spread and grow? In other words, is it even possible for these barriers to be overcome?

Deciding What to Do Next

If you were helping to train believers who were about to move into settings of severe persecution, what specific advice would you give them about dealing with the barriers discussed in this chapter? What would you suggest that they do to address these obstacles to the growth and spread of faith in Jesus?

What are the barriers that make the sharing of your faith difficult? In your context, what makes it difficult for the story of Jesus to be heard and received? What can you do to overcome those barriers?

Fourteen:
An Historical Case Study:
Persecution and Its Aftermath

Understanding the Information

Chapter Fourteen presents a cursory case study of two very different historical stories. In broad terms, recount what happened to the faith communities in the USSR and in China. What happened in each setting? What kind of leadership was in place? What was the response to persecution? What were some of the outcomes?

USSR:

China:

Figuring Out What It Means

Speculate on the reasons for the different outcomes in these two settings. What do you think led to the different results? Was the nature of the persecution different – or were there differences in the preparation and response of the believers?

Deciding What to Do Next

If you were responsible for preparing your faith community (or your family) for persecution, what would you do to make certain that you were ready? Using the historical examples of the USSR and China, what lessons would shape your approach? What skills would you teach? What behaviors and attitudes would you model? What would you do to be prepared for persecution before it comes?

Figuring Out What It Means

It is important to note that what is described in this chapter is more than a difficult person or someone who has different opinions. The kind of betrayal described here is intended to destroy faith and damage people. Based on the truths that you wrote in the previous section, how would you deal with a “Judas” in your midst. To be fair, imagine that you are in a setting of severe persecution – and imagine that the stakes are very high. Imagine that lives may be in danger – and imagine that the future of the faith is at risk.

What will you do? As a community, how will you handle the situation?

Deciding What to Do Next

Whether or not “Judas” shows up is not always up to us. Even if you do everything right, “Judas” might still appear. At the same time, what can you do *before Judas shows up* to make his appearance less likely? In other words, are there specific ways that you can live in community that will both prepare the community for the betrayal that may come – and make the possible betrayal less likely? Are you working to build that kind of community in your own setting right now?

An MBB is quoted on page 202: “Everyone who followed Jesus in the New Testament *gave up* something.” What are you prepared to give up to follow Jesus? What have you already given up?

Sixteen: Bring on the Water

Understanding the Information

Chapter Sixteen of *The Insanity of Obedience* deals with the important matter of baptism. It turns out that, in settings of persecution, baptism is crucial in establishing churches and helping the faith move from one generation to the next. Especially in settings of severe persecution, baptism is understood to be a radical identification with Jesus and a defining step of becoming part of a community of faith.

Beginning on page 206, Nik offers six observations about baptism. List them here and, if possible, state them in your own words.

Figuring Out What It Means

Why do you think there is such debate and disagreement about baptism within and between faith communities? Why do think believers will often cooperate in matters of ministry – but will break fellowship on the matter of baptism?

Deciding What to Do Next

How is baptism practiced in your faith community? What does it mean? How is baptism understood? How significant is baptism for a believer – and how significant is baptism for your church?

How did you understand your baptism *when you were baptized*? And how do you understand your baptism now? Has your understanding changed over time?

Seventeen: “I Have Come Home!”

Understanding the Information

The discussion of baptism continues in Chapter Seventeen. Especially in settings where baptism is closely tied with conversion, the act of baptism itself can often lead immediately to intense persecution. While we might see baptism as a natural next step, people dealing with actual and potential persecution *because of baptism* will see it quite differently. In that setting, it is not surprising that baptism might be delayed, avoided, or at least done in secret.

Chapter Seventeen begins with a conversation about persecution and its causes. Though it is not possible to establish direct connections between specific events and persecution, it is clear that there are precipitating causes. A distinction is drawn here between persecution for *secondary reasons* and persecution for Jesus himself. While baptism is crucial, it is fair to grapple with issues surrounding baptism and the persecution that follows it. Because baptism is seen as “the point of no return,” it is no surprise that it would be a flashpoint for persecution. Indeed, it is.

What are some secondary reasons for persecution? Some of these are mentioned in the chapter; you might be able to suggest others on your own.

According to Chapter Seventeen, why would believers in persecution choose to be baptized more than once? There may be several reasons for this.

Figuring Out What It Means

We encounter two “concluding observations” about baptism at the beginning of page 223.

First, “the interviews suggest that baptism should be practiced in and among the host, believing community.” Why do you think this would be important? Practically speaking, what difference does this make?

Second, “Reflecting on both the interviews and the New Testament record, it is clear that ideally an in-culture or near-culture believer should baptize MBBs.” Why would this be important? What difference does this make?

Deciding What to Do Next

Is it possible for believers in the West to be so preoccupied with debates about the proper mode of baptism and about the proper meaning of baptism that we neglect the role of baptism in helping a believer enter into community? Seeing baptism in this community context seems to be utterly central for believers in settings of persecution. How might we recapture this important aspect of baptism in our faith communities?

What does it mean for you to be part of a church? What does it mean for you to belong to a faith community? How important is that identification with other believers in your walk with Jesus? How important are those relationships to you? Could you be a follower of Jesus without that connection? Why or why not?

Eighteen: Wise Servants, Tough Places

Understanding the Information

When Nik and Ruth began their journey among persecuted believers around the world, their expressed aim was to learn from these believers. They went not as teachers, but as students. Chapter Eighteen highlights several significant observations from persecuted believers about Western workers. Daring to be honest and straightforward, these believers in settings of persecution shared insights about what they had seen and experienced.

According to persecuted believers, the most basic requirement for Western workers is that *they embrace lost people as family*. Beyond that basic requirement, four additional characteristics are essential. These four characteristics are described in this chapter.

List the four characteristics that are essential for workers serving in settings of persecution.

Figuring Out What It Means

It is easy to talk about learning another language so that communication in another country might be possible. But closer to home, what “language” do the people in your community and neighborhood speak? Are you able to communicate with those in your circle of influence? Depending on where you live, this might mean literally learning a new language – or it might mean finding creative ways to communicate across cultures even though the actual language might be the same. What languages are needed for the sharing of your faith?

Are there other “essential characteristics” for believers who are on mission that you would add to the ones listed in Chapter Eighteen? What attitudes and behaviors do you see as absolutely necessary for a follower of Jesus who is attempting to cross the ocean – or cross the street – to share the gospel?

Deciding What to Do Next

Using the characteristics mentioned in Chapter Eighteen, how are you doing?
Evaluate your walk and witness.

My willingness and ability to become family with the lost:

My competence in language and culture:

My ability to trust and to be trusted:

My commitment to stay among the lost:

My ability and desire to express my faith in the local culture:

On pages 236-237, there is a revealing conversation about the role of individuals in creating – or damaging – community. Which category best describes you? How do you influence (positively or negatively) community? How might you become a person who creates and enhances community?

Nineteen: On Our Faces before God

Understanding the Information

There is no way to bring people into experiences that we have not experienced ourselves. There is no way to share realities that we do not know. As followers of Jesus charged with sharing his grace with the world, we must first be certain that we have personally encountered his grace. And the desire to lead people to worship him will necessarily be built on our commitment to that very same worship.

Chapter Nineteen describes some spiritual practices that reflect a healthy, growing faith. Before listing those practices here, read Acts 2:42-47.

What are the hallmarks of life within the faith community that show up in Acts 2:42-47? What were the common behaviors and practices of those believers?

What were the results that grew from that way of living?

What are the six “essential components” in a life a worker (or any believer!) mentioned on pages 240-243?

Figuring Out What It Means

In addition to the six “essentials” listed in this chapter, what would you add to the list? In your view, what spiritual disciplines and practices are essential in the life of a believer?

In your faith tradition, how are those disciplines and practices taught and modeled? How would a new believer learn to live that way? How did you learn to live that way?

Deciding What to Do Next

Using the list of the six “essentials” in this chapter, evaluate the health and vitality of your walk. The exact situations described in the book may not fit your setting exactly, so feel free to draw principles from the situations described in the book.

My daily devotional time:

My commitment to worship with my family:

My commitment to worship with my church:

My interest in fellowship with other believers outside of my immediate church family:

My commitment to fostering and modeling community:

My personal commitment to workers that my church has sent out:

Do you see your spiritual life more as an individual effort – or as something that happens in community? Why?

Twenty: Jesus and Money

Understanding the Information

Chapter Twenty tackles some sensitive issues related to money. While the context of the conversation in Chapter Twenty relates to an overseas setting, the issues that are raised also speak to us as individuals and churches. With the Acts 5 story of Ananias and Sapphira in the background, this chapter calls for honesty, integrity, and wisdom in stewardship.

What are the four guiding principles related to money that are noted in this chapter?

According to the book, why is it important to remind people “that the book of Acts did happen”? (page 248)

What would the stories in the book of Acts suggest about God’s power and presence in your life and in the life of your church today?

Figuring Out What It Means

In the second half of Chapter Twenty, Nik relates a surprising story about the love of some MBBs for a particular worker. It turns out that their hearts were touched not by their need for him – but by his need for them! Does it make you uncomfortable to express need in your faith community? Why or why not? Is it easier for you to meet the needs of others or to have your own needs met? What might that reveal about the character of your faith community?

Deciding What to Do Next

What does your personal budget reveal about your priorities?

What does your church budget reveal about your church's priorities?

Deciding What to Do Next

Review the story on pages 255-256 that describes the evening that John and Joan have with their friends. Are you willing to live out your faith that way in front of your neighbors and friends who do not yet know Jesus? What would that look like for you? How could live out your faith before others in a way that is natural and winsome?

Are you willing to make changes to your schedule or adapt your regular activities for the sake of witness? What are you willing to change in your life in order to increase opportunities to share your faith?

What would it mean for you to be more *intentional* about your witness? Is that a choice you are willing to make?

Twenty-Two: Recognizing and Equipping Local Leaders

Understanding the Information

In contrast to our typical *unintentional* approach to sharing our faith and growing others, Chapter Twenty-Two argues for a purposeful, intentional approach. Rather than waiting for someone to express an openness or an interest, followers of Jesus should always seek ways both to share their faith (evangelism) and to help others grow (discipleship).

There are three main sections in this chapter. The first section makes some general observations about leadership in settings of persecution. (pages 264-269)
List the five general observations.

The second section (pages 270-272) highlights five cultural qualities of leaders in settings of persecution. List those five cultural qualities.

The final section of the chapter (pages 272-273) notes three spiritual qualities of leaders in settings of persecution. List those three spiritual qualities.

Figuring Out What It Means

According to the book, believers living in settings of persecution have discovered that evangelism is “their most effective survival tool.” Why would that be true? Why would evangelism be the best response to persecution?

If evangelism is, indeed, the best response to persecution, how does that truth affect the way we might pray for believers in settings of persecution? When you hear of persecution, do you typically pray for the salvation of the persecutors? Why or why not? How would persecuted believers advise us at this point?

Deciding What to Do Next

How much of the sharing of your faith is focused on the transfer of information?
What else (besides the sharing of information) should be involved in the sharing of your faith?

Use the three spiritual qualities of leaders in settings of persecution to evaluate your spiritual health today.

Is my life controlled by the Holy Spirit and am I producing the fruit of the Spirit?

Am I intentionally multiplying myself in others?

Am I equipping new believers to be prepared for the challenges that will inevitably come their way? As I help new believers grow in their faith, am I preparing them for persecution and suffering?

Figuring Out What It Means

What stands out to you in the story of Dmitri?

Deciding What to Do Next

This chapter claims that it is possible to live victoriously in settings of persecution. What will victorious living look like in your setting?

Look through the list of the eleven signs of victorious living. Which of the eleven signs describe your life?

Which of the eleven signs of victorious living are not present in your life right now – but should be?

Are you willing to devote time and energy to the memorization of Scripture and the music of faith? What would that choice mean for your spiritual walk?

Chapter Twenty-Four: Our Marching Orders

Deciding What to Do Next

For this concluding chapter, simply read through the list of truths on pages 299-300 prayerfully and slowly. After you read each one, stop and pray. Ask God to show you what this truth might mean for you. Decide how you will be willing to change your life in the light of each truth.

Our final questions are both important and intensely personal:

Will you play your part in what God is doing?

Are you willing to take the clear command of the Great Commission seriously and personally?

Are you willing to go across the street and around the world?

Will you choose to be obedient no matter what the cost?

In other words, *what will you do next?*