

*Brand
New Bag*

STUDY GUIDE

Dear group leader,

This companion to Brand New Bag has been designed for use in small group study. We have attempted to formulate questions that will stimulate discussion and lead you into practical application. As you read each chapter, you will most likely discover some more pertinent questions of your own. If so, we would love to hear your ideas for possible use in future versions of the study guide.

The following idea might be helpful in leading your small group discussion: Rather than going through the study guide for the first time when you meet, encourage the members of the group to read and even begin answering the questions before you come together. This will give everyone more time to think and perhaps find questions that are more relevant to your group.

Some of the chapters include a Box Breaker exercise, intended to help you find creative ways to challenge status quo. These are not meant to create new boxes. Avoid using ideas that you come up with to create new doctrine or witnessing tools. Rather, use the exercise to break old patterns in your thinking.

We pray that this study guide will be a helpful tool in bringing an active awareness into your journey with God.

We appreciate any feedback. Please feel free to write to us at the following email address.

May you be experience a great hunger for the ways of God as you continue the journey.

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Introduction - Tangibly Adventurous

Take a few moments to consider these first 4 questions for yourself:

Do you believe it is realistic to hope for a Christian life that is tangible and adventurous? Is it feasible to impact your world through the life you live in Christ? Do you have a desire to live that life? Are you willing to be confronted with Christ's message and reconsider what it means to follow him?

In answering the following questions, consider these two scenarios:

Andersen and his meeting with Ron

Jesus' challenges to his disciples

Are there risks involved in a vibrant journey with the living Messiah? What are some of the risks you have experienced? What are some of the risks that you can foresee ahead?

How do non-Christians view Christianity? How do those involved in churches view Christianity: safe, correct, radical, dangerous, or something else? What is Christ's version of Christianity? How does that compare to yours?

Have you ever received a challenge or question from God as a result of praying for an answer? Did God's question eventually help you see beyond your difficulty or even provide an answer?

Have you ever found yourself in an uncomfortable situation by following God's lead? Explain. What was the outcome?

How could one's confidence in a set framework for Christianity stand in the way of being challenged by Christ? How can Christian lingo, associations with other Christians, and going to church make one feel like a follower of Christ? Are those feelings a legitimate way to evaluate a relationship with Christ? What are some better ways to evaluate the journey?

Is there someone in your life, like Ron, who makes you feel uncomfortable? Describe your relationship with that person: antagonistic, cold but congenial, formal, warm and friendly, religious, or intimate?

Is your life continually being challenged and transformed? What is one area in your life where you feel 'stuck' in a nonmoving position? What is one area that you are seeing continuous transformation?

Chapter 1 - Welcome to the Real World

Andersen made plans that he believed were right, only to have God throw him a curve ball. Has that ever happened to you? Are you open and willing for that to happen? Discuss what one can do if he/she is uncertain that an idea is from God?

As a Christian and new kid in town, Andersen realized he was stepping onto someone else's turf. In what way is that relevant to your life? Are there areas in your life where you should be more sensitive to someone else's perspective? (workplace, school, etc.) Is compromise positive or negative? Or can it be both? Explain.

What did Andersen do that allowed God the opportunity to turn this theater situation into a positive learning experience for him? Can you learn from people who are not Christians?

Remember a time in your life when it would have been better for you to keep your mouth shut. Shortly relay this experience if possible. What did you learn?

Andersen talks about overcoming barriers. When have you built barriers around your own life for fear of being affected by the world? Discuss possible ways of overcoming specific barriers.

The actors in Andersen's company were hostile toward Christianity. Think about one person you have known who was antagonistic toward Christianity. How did his/her comments make you feel? How did you respond to him/her? Considering that aggressive behavior often stems from past injury, how would you now respond differently? Or would you?

The Bible says that God gives gifts freely to all men. Under what circumstances would you suggest that someone is not using his or her gift to the glory of God? Can you imagine someone who is not a Christian using his/her talent in a way that would honor God? Explain.

Three specific things caused Andersen to look into the mirror and see the differences between his character and that of Christ: obedience, silence, and observation. Which of those three is/would be most difficult for you?

Chapter 2 - Death of a Salesman

Andersen relates the story of the Bible school student whose witnessing technique was in fact a bad witness. Have you ever experienced a similar situation? Does the term 'witness' have a positive or negative connotation to you? Why? What is the difference between a good witness and a bad witness?

Shouldn't our great desire be for everyone to come into a living relationship with God? If so, then how could getting someone to that point possibly be a wrong motivation for friendship? Do you have any friends who are not Christians?

If God loves people though they do not believe in Him, is it a waste of time for us to love people even if they never become Christians?

Is it difficult for you to talk to non-Christians about God without it feeling forced or strange? Do you feel you have to change gears to speak about your faith?

Have you ever had someone befriend you only to realize later that he/she had an ulterior motive? How did it make you feel? How would you have preferred to be treated?

Have you ever found yourself trying to develop a relationship with a false motive? What are the obstacles, inner judgments, or perceptions that might be keeping you from developing a 'no strings attached' relationship with a non-Christian?

Consider two people you know who are not Christians. What do you consider are the barriers to their embracing Christianity? How have they or would they respond to a 'traditional' approach to witnessing?

What would be a creative and realistic approach to demonstrating God's love to each of those persons?

Box Breaker:

Without turning your ideas into a step-by-step approach to witnessing, write your version of the most important aspects of God's nature, His view of mankind, and His plan for our reconciliation with Him.

Chapter 3 - A Night at the Improv

What is the difference between scripted communication about God and non-scripted? What kind of preparation is required for both? When dealing with the acting company, what preparation helped Andersen respond in a new improvisational fashion?

Do you trust that the Holy Spirit can give you impressions at the moment when you need them? Do you trust that you can hear what the Holy Spirit is speaking to you? What can you do to increase both of these areas of trust?

How did daily prayer change Andersen's relationship to his fellow actors? How can praying for someone with an open heart change your perspective of that person? How have you experienced that?

Andersen's willingness to be God's witness caused him to lose his position with the theater company. Why didn't God prevent that happening? What are some potential risks in your life connected to choosing obedience to God? Does the Bible promise that obedience to God will produce the most personally gratifying outcome? What biblical events support your answer?

When speaking with the woman at the well, Jesus responded to her questions and frustrations. Are you uncomfortable when people speak of their frustrations about religious people and narrow views of God? On a scale from 1 – 10, rate your ability to simply listen? Can you listen to someone's questions about faith without feeling compelled to find an answer? In what way is that difficult? Discuss ways that you can become a better listener.

How did the weeks of keeping silent and praying for his friends equip Andersen for the part he played in Steven's life?

Box Breaker: Consider how you would explain to someone who isn't a Christian the concept of God's plan for reconciliation. Think of two people you know and attempt to find two *different* ways of communicating this idea to them.

Challenge: This week listen to the frustrations and problems of others without offering your solutions. Take their frustrations to God during your prayer time. Note any change that takes place in you, them or their situation.

Chapter 4 - Travelogue

Describe the journey that led you to a belief in God and Christ. What are some phases and crossroads that you have experienced since your decision to journey with Christ? Have you ever come to a place where you felt you 'had arrived'? How did you realize you had stopped journeying?

In this chapter Andersen makes the assertion that Andy, a non-Christian, was like the disciples: journeying with Christ without yet coming to the full revelation of who He is. Was this concept uncomfortable for you? If so, why? What caused Andersen to make this assertion?

A year later Andy confirmed Andersen's belief. Read his comment on page 50. Discuss your thoughts on his statement. Is it a valid confession of faith?

"When Jesus said 'Follow Me,' He never asked anyone what he/she believed. He presented the challenge of the journey and kept right on going."

How does this approach challenge conventional evangelistic methods? What are the positive and negative aspects/risks to this approach? Can discipleship begin before one makes a commitment to Christ?

Jesus said we would recognize good trees and bad trees by the fruit that they produce. What fruit is visible in your own life? Think of someone else you know who may or may not be a follower of Christ. What fruit is visible in his/her life?

Do you know someone, like Andersen's friend James, who is living a life of goodness but is clearly not journeying with Christ? How is his/her life different from someone who is journeying with Christ?

Andersen's director constantly challenged the company to make a conscious effort to consider what they had learned in each place. How can you become more aware of the progress you are making in your journey with God?

What hinders you from prayer? What things keep you from remembering the times that God has answered your prayers?

Has there been a time in your journey where you have gotten shipwrecked? What caused you to get to that place and how did you get back on the road?

Box Breaker:

Start a journal of your journey with Christ. Write down the first moment you consciously chose to step into the journey. Record where you are in the journey now and what you know about God. As detailed as you can be, answer the questions at the bottom of p. 55 in your journal. Recall and record times that you have cried out to God and He has answered you. This week create one memorial to remember a time that God has answered you or rescued you from certain disaster.

Chapter 5 - Risky Business

What reaction do you have when you hear the word ‘change’? What risks have you taken with God? How have you been challenged out of your comfort zone to make changes?

A journey implies movement and change. Looking back over the last 3 months, what movement do you see in your own journey?

Have you ever had an inner sense to say or do something, like Jack did with his co-worker, and wondered if it was the prompting of the Holy Spirit? Have you had a positive outcome by responding to that inner sense? Do you find that God often speaks to you in a specific way? How can you become more conscious of how God speaks into your life?

In Judges 6:13 Gideon expresses his doubt and frustration to an angel of God. Do you feel that this kind of interaction with God is irreverent or honest? Have you ever talked to God with this kind of earnest familiarity?

Describe the attitudes of the Christians in Laodicea. What was Christ’s challenge to them? (p. 67) Do you see a need for that challenge in your own life?

Risk can be terrifying, as the author points out in his commentary on the rich young ruler. Have you ever had such a great achievement in your spiritual journey that moving forward felt like a terrifying risk?

What causes many people to see Christianity as nice and comfortable? Is that Christ’s version of Christianity? Why or why not? Are you willing to get beyond any belief in a safe Christianity, out of your comfort zone and follow the radical, living Messiah? In what way is that question frightening? How is it exciting?

Has there been a time in your journey when you have taken a risk and seen the seemingly impossible take place? If so, consider how you were able to take that step. What kind of situation or crisis thrust you into that moment of faith? Has that situation continued to affect your journey with God?

What was the most challenging thing for you in this chapter? How do you hope to bring this challenge into your life?

Chapter 6 - Position is Everything

Why does righteousness by comparison have no place in Christianity? What can one do to remain in the humble awareness that without the grace of God, our situation is hopeless?

Jesus said, "Judge not lest you be judged." What is the difference between this kind of judgment and being aware of the fruit in a person's life? Are there situations or people you are still judging in the wrong way?

If you felt someone had done something so awful that he/she had gone beyond God's grace, would it change the way you relate to him/her? How? Is this a dangerous judgment? Why or why not?

Matthew 18:15-17 tells of relating to a brother caught in sin. The process eventually leads one to treating the other as a non-believer. Is there a timeline given in scripture for this process to take place? How does the Bible teach us to treat non-believers? In considering these two questions, does it change your view of what is meant by these scriptures?

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Forgive me as I forgive others." Why do you feel this is an important part of prayer? Do you approach God's forgiveness by considering those you need to forgive? Is there something especially difficult for you to forgive? What could be your next step in bringing about the freedom of forgiveness?

Prayer is very multi-faceted. Discuss what prayer is and what happens when you pray. Has your style of prayer changed as you have journeyed with God? As you pray for God to change situations, are you willing to hear God challenge you to change? Is that difficult? If so, why?

Read Hebrews 4:16 and then explain in your own words the difference between boldness and arrogance. In Jesus' story from Luke 18:14, why was the tax collector's prayer heard and the Pharisee's prayer not heard?

When he was working with the church in Texas, how did Andersen's thoughts and actions toward the pastor mirror those of Old Testament Jonah? Can you relate to Andersen's feelings? Have you ever prayed for God's judgment on someone instead of His mercy? How can you begin to see someone who has injured you in the light of God's mercy?

Chapter 7 - Big Black Book

Jesus said, “You love the scriptures because you imagine they will give you eternal life - but you are wrong.” Does this scripture seem shocking? What seems paradoxical to you about this verse? Does this scripture jolt any of your concepts of Christianity? How? What did Jesus mean by this statement?

Have you ever known anyone like the new mechanic at the beetle place? Describe him/her.

Why did the new mechanic get the cold shoulder from those around him? How could he have changed his tactics to be more natural? Have you ever quoted the Bible to someone and had it come across as harsh, unnatural or condemning? How did you feel afterwards? What was the response?

Everyone is at a different place in relationship to God’s word. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Consider these phrases and find one that best describes your weakness:

- I avoid parts I’m unfamiliar with and dwell on the familiar.
- I often see the Bible as confusing and unapproachable.
- I’m fascinated with study of the Bible but forget to see its transformational challenges.
- When I read the Bible, I often see things that others need to hear.
- I tend to play Bible roulette – reading wherever it happens to open.

Come up with one idea to help you break out of your weakness.

List some ways that your beliefs and lifestyle are formed. In what way is a life based purely on opinions and emotions unstable? How can a biblical perspective bring stability into one’s life? How can you transfer biblical truths into your life so that they alter your personal opinions?

On a scale from 0-10, rate your familiarity with the 4 Gospels. With the rest of the New Testament. With the Old Testament. Do you see a need in your life for gaining a broader understanding of what the Bible has to offer? Share ways you have found to make Bible study more interesting.

List 5 different characteristics of God. Compare and discuss your answers. Do you see ideas that you’ve never thought of? Are there ideas that make you uncomfortable? Do you see any characteristics that seem contradictory? Describe in detail how you see Jesus. Are there differences in how you perceive Jesus vs. God? If so, what are they?

Chapter 8 - Jesus and the Frisbee

During which activities do you feel a greater sense of God's presence: reading the Bible, speaking with a friend, playing a game, praying, washing the dishes.

Is God closer or more pleased during one activity more than another? Discuss your answers.

Imagine and describe God's pleasure over your life in at least 5 of the following situations: participating in a church service, eating with friends, working, cleaning house, working out at the gym, shopping, studying the Bible, playing a round of golf or another sport.

Do you find yourself categorizing life into moments of either sacred or secular or holy and less holy? What makes something holy? What makes a moment in your life pleasing or non-pleasing to God?

Does prayer before an event bring God into the moment? Other than through traditional prayer, how can you begin to make yourself more aware of God's presence during other moments in your life?

What can you learn about a person in informal, relaxed times that you may not see in other times? Why or how are casual moments important to your witness in the world? Do you find it difficult to relate to Christians informally? Do you find it difficult to relate to non-Christians informally?

Andersen suggests that the core issues of Christianity are life, love, and relationship. Is this different from your view of Christianity? If so, how? Is this view different from non-Christians you know? If so, how?

How are you actively seeking communion with friends and/or family? What are the enemies of communion with family and friends? How has your communion time become passive? Has the table, a main place of communion, been replaced by something else in your family or friendship circle? List 3 ways to bring real communion back into family time – whether for yourself or for someone else.

Box Breaker: List 3 words that describe the spirit of this current age and how they have affected you. List 3 contrasting aspects of God's kingdom. Express how you intend to increase the influence of at least one of those aspects in your life over the next month.

Chapter 9 - Brand New Bag

Jesus was radically different from what the spiritual leaders of the day expected. What might hinder us from seeing new things God does or new ways He reveals Himself? Just because an idea is 'new and radical' does not mean it is from God. How can we test to know whether something new is truly from God?

Consider the images and stories in the Bible as 'snapshots' of God. Besides the ones listed in this book, what other means did God use to express salvation to his people? List some images, means, or creative stories that were used to express something about God's character.

What was your reaction to the Lake Constance ship project? Why did some Christians consider it blasphemous? Think of a 'Bible Box' type of project with which you have been involved. How could it have been better?

In sending out the 70 disciples without provisions, Jesus challenged them to believe in God's ability to meet them in the moment. In what realistic way can we receive that same challenge? What is one thing you can do to allow for more of God's spontaneity in your life?

In Vienna, what were the differences between Andersen's approach to the couple and the pastor's? What risks were involved in Andersen's approach?

Do you think Andersen's explanation of the creation compromises the true meaning of the text? If so, how?

What crisis or event have you gone through that has changed your perspective of God? How did your image of God change?

Box Breaker: Consider the words you most often use to communicate God's ways. Find 3 different ways to describe what it means to be born of the spirit, and 3 different ways to describe an individual's need for God.

Prayer: This week consciously ask the Holy Spirit to help you find fresh images to express God's nature, to give you courage to live with Him in the moment, and to bring new revelation about God to your heart.

Chapter 10 - Brand New Church

Have you had an experience that has caused you to develop distaste for church? If you know others who have difficulty relating to any form of church, Bible study or fellowship, what are their reasons?

In Hebrews 10:25 we are encouraged to “not neglect meeting together.” Why is that important? Is it necessary to belong to an institutional/organized church to be a healthy Christian? Why or why not?

Do you feel comfortable bringing a non-Christian to your church? What are some things about your church or group that would be attractive to someone with anti church malaria? What things about your church might be unexciting? Thinking beyond high tech equipment, how can you make your church or group more relevant to visitors? How can your group/church create a more relevant presence in your community? How are you being relevant to your culture, neighborhood or community, or how can you be?

“Christianity is the tension of enormous diversity held together by love.” In what way is this concept frightening to you? Exciting? If you can, relate a situation in which you have seen the realization of love and diversity. In regards to church and church groups, what happens when there is diversity without love? What is the outcome of love without diversity?

Consider the example of the foot washing in John 13 and other examples of Christ’s leadership. Is it possible to follow his style of leadership in our modern world? What obstacles to this style of leadership can you imagine?

Elias had been the head pastor of a large church, was forced out by church politics and suddenly found himself working as janitor in a high-rise building. In that same situation, what would be your greatest inner obstacle in finding your way forward? How is ministry integrated into your daily life?

The picture of the church gathering from 1 Corinthians 14 reveals that everyone was allowed to participate. Without completely reformatting the service, what are some ways that more participation could happen in your large church gathering? How can one create an atmosphere in small groups to allow for greater participation? What would enable you to bring what you have to give and participate more openly in a small group meeting?

Box Breaker:

Look up 1 John 1:7-9 and James 5:16. These verses speak of transparency and confession of sins to each other. Do you know at least one person with whom you can speak openly about weaknesses, dreams and goals? Are you willing to receive his/her input into your life? Are you that person for someone else? If you have answered no to either of these questions, then what do you need to change in your life to be accessible to that kind of relationship? This week commit to taking the next step toward a relationship of accountability.

Consider the people in your life with whom you are most open, and ask God to show you with whom you might begin this relationship of transparency. If you already have a relationship that is going in this direction, then make clear your desire for more openness and true accountability in the relationship.

Chapter 11 - Mission Impossible

Consider the paradoxical partnership of human limitations and God's infinite possibilities. Knowing that there are things impossible for you to accomplish, how does that make you feel? (Hopeless? Relieved? Etc.) In bringing the essence of God's kingdom to your environment, what is your role and what is God's role? Thinking of a very specific situation that you currently face, what is your role?

Neo was given the choice: red pill and you see the adventure and its challenges – or blue pill and you blindly accept status quo. What thoughts make you want the blue pill? What thoughts make you want the red pill?

In the story of the French vineyards, Andersen gives a powerful image of the human condition and the solutions offered in Christ. What are you doing to receive a daily infusion of His life? How are you remaining open to life-altering adjustments from God? What is the fruit of God's kingdom?

Recall the last situation in which the direction you naturally wanted to go was in contradiction to God's ways. How did you respond and what was the outcome? Have you ever feared that God might demand you to change who you are rather than how you act? What is the difference between the two? Has your understanding of God's expectations for your life changed?

Discuss Rookmaaker's statement: "Christ died for us in order to restore our humanity...All of life is Christian, unless we would make Christ very small."

Andersen writes that authentic Christianity is a pilgrimage that turns an every day existence into an extension of Christ's life. In what way has this recently been evident in your life? How are you attempting to be more of a living example to those around you? How has this book helped you to view the journey aspect of Christianity in a more significant light?

Box Breaker

Write a short 'time capsule' statement that would help the next generation understand the core of what it means to remain engaged in this journey with Christ. Attempt to use concise, yet non-religious language.