

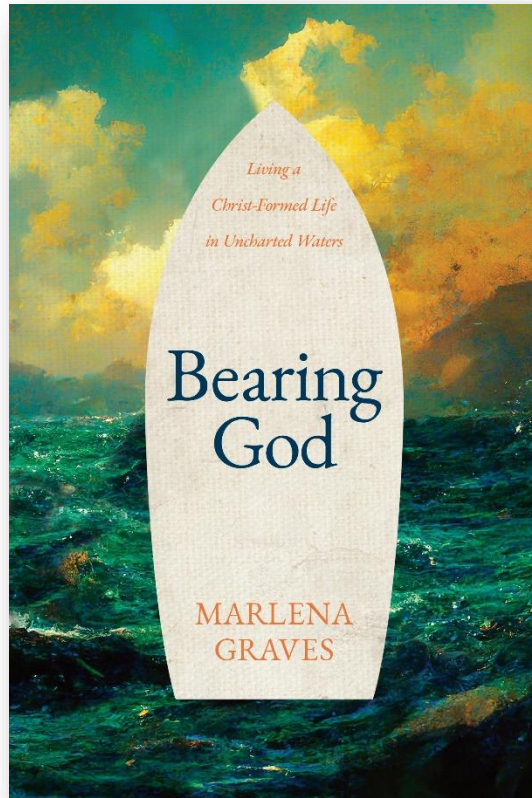
*Living a
Christ-Formed Life
in Uncharted Waters*

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bearing God

MARLENA
GRAVES

Bearing God Leader's Guide



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

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Dear Reader,

I wrote this book so that together we can better understand what it means to bear Christ in our lives amid the storms. We all experience trials and suffering, and at times, life feels extremely hard to bear. Committing our lives to Christ doesn't make us immune to the day-to-day struggles of life. **Sometimes Jesus feels far away, and we need to be reminded that He is with us.**

One day as I listened to the Gospel story in Mark 4, I didn't see myself as the disciples, terrified and wondering why Jesus was asleep in the boat amid the storm; I saw myself as the fishing boat carrying Jesus in the storm. **We are all, in fact, God bearers, carrying Jesus within us as we journey through the storms of our lives.**

I found myself wanting to share this insight with others because the implications of seeing ourselves as the boat are vast. For one, boats are made for the water. They are not meant to remain tethered to the shore but to go out to sea—and storms are unavoidable. Secondly, we are not the captains of our ships or of our souls. **God is our captain, and we must be careful not to send him overboard.**

We all have different reactions to the trials in our lives, and while I cannot fully understand the challenges you are facing, I hope that what I have written in my book will help you come to peace with your own journey.

My hope is that *Bearing God* is not read in solitude but together with others—your neighbors, your friends, your family, your Bible study, or your church group. As we figure out how to traverse stormy seas bearing Christ within us, use this book as navigation instructions. **It is always best to practice together so that we can help one another see with clarity.**

I have tried to make it as easy as possible so people with busy lives can find a way to consider how the message of this book forms us. This Leader's Guide is for any leader, even if it's your first time. There are helps for planning and getting started, discussion and reflection, and even a [bunch of graphics](#) that you can use to promote your group or keep people engaged in between your times meeting together.

Know that I come to you with open hands, and I am praying that we can help each other along the way. You can find me at marlenagraves.com and connect with me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#). Search #bearinggod on social media.

Together, may we learn how to live Christ-formed lives in uncharted waters.

Marlena Graves

Overview

Imagine yourself with Jesus, in a boat on the sea, as a sudden storm fills the other passengers with fear.

When the priest read this Gospel story in Mark 4, Marlena Graves didn't see herself as the terrified disciples, lacking faith. She wasn't Jesus, peacefully sleeping through the danger. She wasn't the wind or the waves. According to Graves, "I was the little fishing boat. . . . As I sat there in shock, it occurred to me that, like Jesus' mother, Mary, . . . I, too, am a God bearer."

When you commit to this journey, you'll discover:

- We are all vessels that carry Jesus as we journey throughout our lives.
- Boats are made for the water—they have a mission—and it always involves others.
- Jesus is not disturbed by any storms (or our reactions to them).
- Our lives, which carry Christ and the gospel, are to bring salvation to others, especially those who have been thrown overboard in life.
- There is a destination—life with God—at the heart of spiritual formation. As we bear God and go out to sea, God is also bearing us into oneness with him.

Bearing God is a short and enthralling read that will awaken you as a disciple of Jesus to a sense of adventure in your calling. Using the metaphor of Christians as vessels for Christ, *Bearing God* is packed with inspirational lessons and principles to help readers grow in their spirituality. An ideal discipleship resource for churches, small groups, and personal devotion.

Bearing God has the following features built into the book, making it ideal for group use:

- A biblical perspective on a specific Gospel story (Mark 4) is weaved throughout the book, as well as personal stories to bring home key points.
- *Bearing God* helps people discern God's will, which is a helpful process to do together in a group setting as you process internally at the same time.
- This leader's guide, a variety of graphics for promoting your group read, memes to share, and downloads are available [here](#).

Bearing God is available at your favorite bookstore. [Bulk discounts](#) are available at navpress.com. Free shipping on orders over \$50. Based on \$10.99 retail price. Email csresponse@tyndale.com for ministry and retail discounts.

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Quantity	Discount
10-49	\$8.79 (20%)
50-99	\$8.24 (25%)
100-499	\$7.14 (35%)
500+	\$6.59 (40%)

Contents

<u>PLANNING</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Format</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Timeline Options</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>PREPARATION</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Structure Your Time</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Making an Impact</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Group Discussion Questions</u>	<u>13</u>

PLANNING

Format

As you think about hosting/leading these discussions, here are a few tips to help you:

- **Start by praying about who to invite to your group.** Consider someone you might not normally think would be interested—maybe a friend or family member who is going through tough times or a neighbor you’ve been wanting to connect with. How can you love your neighborhood through this group? You never know where people are at; so many just want to be invited. Be brave and ask people to join you!
- **Decide on a regular place and time** for your gathering and how many chapters you will discuss in each meeting. There are six chapters in the book, so your group could choose to do one a week. You could also choose to do it “book-club style” and have everyone read the whole book before you meet for discussion. Decide what works best for you and those who are joining you in your respective seasons of life.
- **Consider that if needed, the group could meet over Zoom** or another virtual platform.
- **Communicate the details** to your group. Include:
 - Dates and times (start and end)
 - Location (or link for virtual meeting)
 - Expectations of commitment. How much time outside of group will be needed to prepare for each week?
 - The facilitator(s)
- **Consider planning a fun gathering** prior to your first session together so that people can get to know each other.
- **It is helpful to have two facilitators**, whether you share duties or one person leads and the other serves as backup in case the lead facilitator cannot make it. Two facilitators also provide a sounding board for supporting each other and to troubleshoot issues that may arise.
- **Consider a post-group activity** to help keep the momentum of what you all learned together while reading *Bearing God*. Your group may be interested in personal spiritual formation or getting together to serve your community.

Timeline Options

There are a variety of ways to structure your group experience. A book club could discuss the entire book in one night. Here are two options for more in-depth study.

Six-Week Format

DATE	PURPOSE	DETAILS
Six Weeks Prior	Initial leaders' meeting	Choose dates, times, location; create online registration
Four Weeks Prior	Announce group	Encourage sign-ups
Two Weeks Prior	Order books (on their own or in bulk. The best bulk discounts are at navpress.com).	
One Week Prior	Email group	Provide details of group
Launch Week One	Intro: Get to know you; Journey with Jesus into Uncharted Waters	Hand out books (if buying in bulk) Spend time getting to know each other Discuss chapter 1
Week Two	Led by Love of God and Neighbor	Discuss chapter 2
Week Three	Led by Our Loves and Joys	Discuss chapter 3
Week Four	Led by Our Place	Discuss chapter 4
Week Five	Led by Discernment	Discuss chapter 5
Week Six	Final Night Led through Our End	Discuss chapter 6

Four-Week Format

DATE	PURPOSE	DETAILS
Six Weeks Prior	Initial leaders' meeting	Choose dates, times, location; create online registration
Four Weeks Prior	Announce group	Encourage sign-ups
Two Weeks Prior	Order books	Arrange pickup spot or have them buy on their own
One Week Prior	Email group	Provide details of group
Launch Week One	Intro and Journey with Jesus into Uncharted Waters	Brief Intro and discuss chapter 1
Week Two	Led by Love of God and Neighbor; Led by Our Loves and Joys	Discuss chapters 2-3
Week Three	Led by Our Place; Led by Discernment	Discuss chapters 4-5
Week Four	Led through Our End	Discuss chapter 6 and final thoughts

PREPARATION

Structure Your Time

There are so many ways you could structure your time together. Here are a few ideas:

- Welcome and fellowship. You might share a meal, a snack, or a drink.
- Allow an open-ended sharing time for people to discuss anything that stood out in that week's assigned reading.
- Refer to the [Group Discussion Questions](#) for the corresponding chapter you read.
- Share any prayer requests. If your group is large, consider having prayer partners.
- Ask participants what, if anything, they would like to take from this material into their lives, communities, or churches.
- Close in prayer.

Making an Impact

You will want to create a safe space for those who come, and you'll also want to keep the conversation moving forward. Inviting people into this challenging conversation is vital for a healthy and redemptive community—and oh, the hope that you can experience together!

Here are practices we recommend:

- **Make humility a non-negotiable, and avoid judging others** (while missing the planks in our own eyes!). Remember that not everyone will be coming from the same background or share the same assumptions or starting places. Each of us needs to uncover our own blind spots and reconsider what following Jesus looks like in our real lives.
- **Make a group covenant.** It needs to be articulated clearly, but it doesn't need to be formal. Consider spending a few minutes at your first meeting discussing some guidelines for your time together, such as confidentiality in what is shared and being a safe space free of judgment.
- **Ask everyone to read the chapter(s) you will be discussing in advance.** When people come prepared, it is easier to stay on topic and make the most of your time together. (That said, sometimes life gets crazy, and people will not have read in advance. Encourage them to still come!)
- **Make sure everyone knows to share the talking time** (no talking-dominators, please), and gently redirect someone who may be preventing others from participating in the conversation.
- **Keep the discussions on topic by moving through the questions.** Encourage those who may not have had a chance to talk by asking them what they think.

Group Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: Journey with Jesus into Uncharted Waters

- 1) Read Mark 4 together as a group. How do you respond to the idea of seeing yourself as the boat, carrying Jesus in the storm? How does this interpretation change the way you view this story in Scripture?
- 2) What storms have you faced (or are you currently facing) in your life? If you feel comfortable, share with the group.
- 3) What would it look like for you to see yourself as a God bearer? How might your outlook toward life's storms be different if you saw yourself as a vessel carrying Jesus?

Chapter 2: Led by Love of God and Neighbor

- 1) If our posture toward and treatment of other people is a good indicator of the level of our transformation, then what does this mean for our own spiritual lives? What does it mean for the Christian church in general?
- 2) Marlena writes that loving God and loving our neighbors often requires inconvenient sacrifices. Thinking about your own life, what are some sacrifices you've been avoiding?
- 3) How might your view of success and achievement need to change in order to make room for God's will, which is bound with the flourishing of our neighbors?

Chapter 3: Led by Our Loves and Joys

- 1) Has there ever been a time when you became overwhelmed with making a decision in your life due to fear that you might get it wrong? Or perhaps you made a past decision that you regret and wonder if you disappointed God. With that in mind, how did it feel when you read, "The Lord is good to us. God is understanding and patient. It is often we who are exacting and impatient with ourselves"?
- 2) If you haven't done so already, take some time to think about what brings you joy in life. What are your loves, desires, and natural proclivities? If you feel comfortable, share with the group.
- 3) What stuff or activities might we need to give up in order follow Jesus more closely and spend more time listening?

Chapter 4: Led by Our Place

- 1) Have you ever found yourself called to a specific place, even though it was a difficult place to be? Maybe you are there now. Did you (or do you) see any glimpses of God's grace and glory, even amid the difficulty?
- 2) How do you react to the idea that we must love our religiopolitical enemies within our spheres of influence? Does that come easily to you, or not? Reflect together on the statement: "Of all people, we Christians ought to be defined by our love for enemies and by the way we leave the world better than we found it."
- 3) How have you seen the myth of individualism affect you, your family, the church? Are there changes you can implement now (or in the near future) to become more deliberate

about your place—where you live and who you are surrounded by? What are the potential benefits of this?

Chapter 5: Led by Discernment

- 1) Have you ever felt God calling you to a new path but couldn't quite put your finger on what it was? Perhaps you are feeling this now. If you feel comfortable, share about how you have approached situations like these in the past.
- 2) Of all the practices in this chapter, which one resonated with you the most? Which ones do you see yourself turning to in the future when you need help with discernment?
- 3) Think about the fact that Jesus took time to rest—even in a boat in the middle of a storm! We all need to learn how to be still and know that God is God. What practices can you employ to encourage rest and prevent burnout?

Chapter 6: Led through Our End

- 1) Have you ever known someone who felt they couldn't pull off their calling in life due to an impossibility—whether real or imagined? Maybe that person is you. Maybe it's someone in your community. If you feel comfortable, share what kind of impossibilities you've seen or encountered in life.
- 2) How do you respond to the idea that knowing and following God's will is not just for those who are well-off of the world but for everyone, no matter their economic or social status?
- 3) If we believe, as Dallas Willard said, that the Kingdom of God is the safest place to be, then we can go out to sea with peace and expectation. If you are someone who has been facing storms for some time, how have the ideas within this book given you peace? Or if you are someone who has stayed safe at shore out of comfort, what is one step you can take to begin venturing out to sea with expectation?

Reader and Leader

Always remember that, in a very real sense,
bearing Christ entails bearing our neighbors.

Marlena

#bearinggod