

# FEARING BRAVELY

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RISKING LOVE

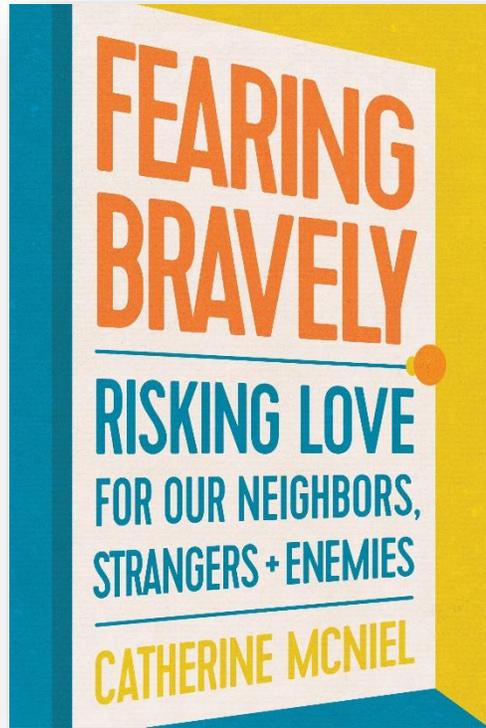
LEADER'S  
GUIDE

FOR OUR NEIGHBORS,  
STRANGERS + ENEMIES

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CATHERINE MCNIEL

## *Fearing Bravely* 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 learn about, wrestle with, and overcome the fears that get in the way of love. I wrote out of my longing for us to choose to be brave with our fear and courageous with each other.

Conversations about love, fear, neighbors, strangers, and enemies always come from a particular place and perspective. I am a white American citizen, a practicing Christian, and I know that my words and thoughts and stories reflect that particular place and perspective. People from different backgrounds experience the dynamics of power, fear, love, and courage differently. I cannot fully understand or express the dynamics you may face, but I hope that what I've written here will help you arrive at language for your own journey.

My vision is that this book is not read in solitude but together with others—your neighbors, your friends, maybe your family, and okay, even people you may not be that crazy about. People who look different than you or make choices that you don't fully agree with. (After all, the title is *Fearing Bravely*, so you might as well start practicing even as you read together.)

I have tried to make it as easy as possible so people with busy lives can find a way to gather around this message. 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 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 [catherinemcniel.com](http://catherinemcniel.com) and connect with me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#). Search #fearingbravely on social media.

Together, may we find the love that overcomes all our fear.

*Catherine*

# OVERVIEW

Jesus commands us to love our neighbors. So, why are many Christians taught to fear their neighbors?

God instructs us to welcome strangers. Christians are not to withhold hospitality or help from anyone in need. So why do we fear strangers, especially those needing hospitality, afraid that their presence may threaten what we have?

Jesus taught us to love our enemies. Instead, we grow suspicious of anyone who thinks, believes, looks, or lives differently from us, viewing them as dangerous, a threat to our way of living.

In all these ways and more, “Love your neighbor” can feel complicated these days. We’re weighed down by suspicion and tribalism and political affiliations. We are so easily disciplined by fear. But Jesus invites us to more—to life abundant where enemies and strangers become neighbors we love. Not because this world is safe, but because we are following Jesus, living for God’s kingdom. Because we’ve found God’s love to be stronger than all our fears.

In *Fearing Bravely*, Catherine McNiel writes with conviction, illuminating the Scriptures, looking closely at our real-life realities, and considering redemptive steps we can take—together—to risk love and bring healing and wholeness to our real world: neighbors, strangers, and enemies alike.

*Fearing Bravely* has the following features built into the book, making it ideal for group use:

- Each of the book’s four sections ends with a “Brave Steps” guide for reflection and discussion, including conversation-starting questions, next-step practices, and a “Look and Listen” section with music and art recommendations.
- A biblical perspective with Scripture throughout the book, as well as personal stories to bring home key points.
- This leader’s guide, a variety of graphics for promoting your group read, memes to share, and downloads are available [here](#).

*Fearing Bravely* is available at your favorite bookstore. Bulk purchases at competitive discounts are available at [navpress.com](http://navpress.com).

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**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 your favorite barista, or someone in the neighborhood you’ve been wanting to connect with. How can you love your neighborhood and reach out to strangers 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 twelve chapters, so your group could choose to do one a week. Or you could read one section (three chapters per section) each week for a four-week commitment. You could also choose to do it “book-club style” and have everyone read the whole book before discussion. Decide what works best for you in your season of life and those who are joining you.
- **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** so that people can get to know each other prior to your first session together.
- **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 support and to troubleshoot issues that may arise.
- **Consider a post-group activity** to try one or more of the practices together. Whether your group is more interested in personal spiritual formation or getting together to serve your community, the practices at the end of each section give plenty of options to actively fear bravely.

# TIMELINE

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

## Eight-Week Format

DATE	PURPOSE	DETAILS
Eight Weeks Prior	Initial leaders' meeting	Choose dates, time, 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 <a href="http://navpress.com">navpress.com</a> ).	
One Week Prior	Email group	Provide details of group
Launch Week One	Intro: Get to know you	Hand out books (if buying in bulk)
Week Two	Don't Be Afraid	Discuss chapters 1–3
Week Three	Neighbors	Discuss chapters 4–6
Week Four	Strangers	Discuss chapters 7–9
Week Five	Enemies	Discuss chapters 10–12
Week Six	Final Night	What have you learned? How have you changed? Or get practical and use this final session to try one of the practices in the book together.

## Four-Week Format

DATE	PURPOSE	DETAILS
Eight Weeks Prior	Initial leaders' meeting	Choose dates, time, 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	Don't Be Afraid	Discuss chapters 1–3
Week Two	Neighbors	Discuss chapters 4–6
Week Three	Strangers	Discuss chapters 7–9
Week Four	Enemies	Discuss chapters 10–12



**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.
- Read the "Brave Steps" introduction for the corresponding section you read for this meeting.
- Select a few "Reflect and Discuss" questions in "Brave Steps" for the section or chapter you are discussing. Then discuss! You can pick and choose questions based on your group's interest or time limit.
- Read through the "Practice" section in "Brave Steps." Do one or more of these strike the group as worthwhile? Try one together, or have participants choose one they would like to try during the week.
- Play a song and/or look up the artwork in the "Look and Listen" section of "Brave Steps" and follow the prompts provided. Spend a few moments in reflection, then discussion.
- 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, community, or church.
- Close in prayer.

# MAKING AN IMPACT

Wrestling with ideas such as fear, love, and changing the way we relate to our neighbors, strangers, and enemies will be challenging and vulnerable for many people. The narratives we've been taught and carry with us are strong and deeply rooted; reconsidering what following God in our current context looks like can be threatening. But we believe that the gospel is *good news*, that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance, God's grace that invites us to try and fail and try again, God's love that is stronger than anything in the world—even stronger than the grave.

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 plank in our own eyes!). Remember that not everyone will be coming from the same background or share the same assumptions or starting place. 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.
- **Remember to try out the practices together, in addition to the discussion questions.** Allow the content to move from your mind into your heart, hands, and feet. God's kingdom doesn't impact how we think only, but how we live in the world together.

Learning to face our fears and live out of love towards neighbors, strangers, and enemies is not a task we can do on our own. Expanding Jesus' description of *neighbor* to encompass anyone we encounter who has a need—even and especially strangers and enemies—will not come easily. Not only will our beliefs need to change but also our language, our priorities, the way we spend our time and energy, the posture we take toward the world around us. We cannot do any of this alone; we need a local church community and the global body of Christ . . . and more intimate discussions and practice groups like this one. Together, explore what it looks like for Christians to actively love, not fear, the people in your real lives and communities.

# BRAVE STEPS QUICK LOOKUP

**Brave Steps** are listed at the end of each section to offer reflection and discussion, including conversation-starting questions, next-step practices, and a “Look and Listen” section with music and art recommendations.

## **Section One (Chapters 1–3)**

Pages 43–45

## **Section Two (Chapters 4–6)**

Pages 85–87

## **Section Three (Chapters 7–9)**

Pages 137–140)

## **Section Four (Chapter 10–12)**

Pages 191–195

# KEY SCRIPTURE

These passages may be helpful to share with the group or to encourage them in follow-up emails or texts. The verses help us to remember God's unfailing love for us, and Jesus' invitation to abundant life—in other words, the inspiration behind why we have decided to follow Jesus down such a hard but joyful road.

1 John 4:7-12, 16-21

Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

John 15:9-17

Romans 8:31-39

Luke 10:25-37

Luke 24

John 14:27

Hebrews 13:1-6

Luke 12:22-34

Matthew 25:31-46

Leviticus 19:33-34

1 Peter 4:8-11

Matthew 5:43-48

Jeremiah 22:15b-16

1 Corinthians 13:12-13

## READER AND LEADER

Together, may we find the love  
that overcomes all fear.

*Catherine*

#fearingbravely