



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Study Guide

for **Whole: A call to unity in a fragmented world**

Four Weeks—Chapter by Chapter

Understanding **Who We Are** As Disciples of Christ

We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us. - Disciples Statement of Identity



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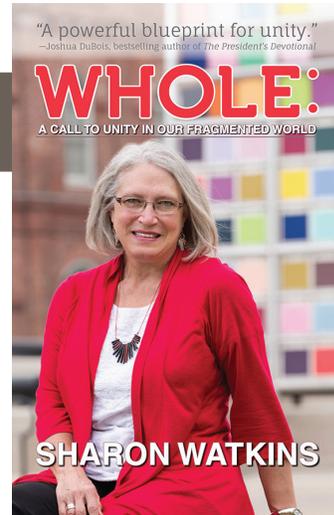
For more information on the work of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), go to www.disciples.org

Study Guide

Four Weeks - Chapter by Chapter

NOTE TO LEADERS:

This study is intended for use during an identity emphasis in your congregation along with other materials as posted on www.disciples.org under “Who We Are – Our Identity.” Included there are short videos with accompanying study guides for groups or individuals; sermon and worship resources. You are encouraged to share the results of your study as noted on the “Who We Are – Our Identity” page on www.disciples.org



You may want to review your lesson well in advance as the materials here are likely more than a typical 45-minute session would allow.

Suggested plans for an identity emphasis include:

4 Week Plan	8 Week Plan	12 Week Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a midweek study using the short book study plan. • Use a video in worship followed by a sermon on that same concept. Repeat for all four. • Have a culminating brainstorming session with your board and evangelism team to work on a slogan. • Use the “telling tactics” materials with your evangelism committee to revamp your presence in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with the short book study (four weeks) either during the week or in a Sunday School setting or with other groups (elders, deacons). • Follow with four weeks featuring a Sunday sermon and worship emphasis on a topic and a midweek discussion group using the videos during the same four week period. (i.e. Movement sermon on Sunday, movement study on Wednesday, etc.) • Have a culminating event to come up with your own congregations’ slogan or identity statement. • In Week Nine turn your evangelism or communication teams loose with a revamp of your presence in the community using the “telling tactics” materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the book and questions as written for a six week study in small groups. • The following week have a retreat-style meeting of two to three hours to view videos and discuss in small groups (20 minutes) with sharing in the larger gathering after each discussion. • For four consecutive weeks, highlight an identity concept in worship and the sermon. • Have a wrap up session at a potluck (emphasizing welcome and table) where your congregation comes up with a new slogan for your own church. • Hand it off to a communications/ evangelism committee to revamp your community presence using the “telling tactics.”

Many thanks to Teresa Crist and David Torres, authors of this study guide.



WEEK ONE

CHAPTER 1-TABLE & CHAPTER 2-WELCOME

Objectives:

- To *articulate* the value of the table metaphor
- To *connect* the table metaphor as an expression of God's love
- To *identify* the specific activities in daily life that represent the table metaphor
- To *verbalize* how you foster individual communion with God
- To *articulate* the connection between spirituality of individual communion and true community – love in action
- To *define* the particular actions you individually or as a congregation do in order to “expand your neighborhood.”

Reading Selections:

Chapters 1 (Table) and 2 (Welcome)

Pages 7-41

Questions to Consider:

Chapter 1 - Table

1. What does “the table” symbolize for you?
2. What were some of the details that Watkins used to describe “the table” metaphor?
 - a As individual communion?
 - b As communion with God?
3. What are some words you would use to share with someone unfamiliar with the church what “the table” means to you?
4. (Watkins 1) “Recall tables that have been important in your life. Why were they important? Was it the food, family activities, experiencing friendship, special celebrations, or other unusual events or activities?”
5. (Watkins 3) “What meanings do the communion table and communion service convey? To long time members? To newcomers? To you?”
6. Sharon speaking toward gathering at the table stated, “many come as weary travelers through life. Some come looking for an answer to loneliness.” What does this message mean to you?
 - a Discuss some possibilities of the “weary traveler” in our normal day-to-day lives.
 - b How does “the table” provide sanctuary for these folks?



Chapter 2 – Welcome

1. (Watkins 2) “In your experience, how does personal communion with God relate to experiences of God in community or to more public sharing of God’s love?”
 - a When you read about individual communion with God, what do you immediately think of? How would you express your process of individual communion with God?
2. Watkins (page 32) discusses two central elements of Christian community – the spirituality of God’s love and the model of Jesus as love in action. How would you describe to someone how you make space for these elements of Christian community in your daily life?
3. What are some challenges you experience when reaching out to those different from you? What have you done or what can you do to overcome these barriers?
4. Tell a story of an instance when it was difficult to reach out to someone different from you. How did you overcome these differences?

Activities:

Chapter 1-Table

1. *Draw* a picture of your ideal table. This could be an actual table from memory, one you’ve never seen, or even a table in the most abstract sense. Share these pictures with the group. (**Facilitator note: give examples. Table as 4 legs, table as picnic blanket, table as oasis in the desert, etc.)
2. *Silent reflection and free writing.* Provide an opportunity for silent reflection and free writing. Instruct participants to address Q4 of Watkins and Q3, Q6 above.
3. *Discussion and Role-play.* After reflection, have participants share their responses in pairs or small groups. Invite participants to role-play their responses to Q3 and/or Q6.
4. *Homework.* Assign “homework” for next session. Instruct participants to free write reflecting specifically on (Watkins) Q1 – Table.

Chapter 2-Welcome

1. *Discussion and Role-play.* Discuss responses to Q4-Welcome and invite participants to role-play improved scenarios for welcome.
2. *Small groups chat.* Invite participants to break into small groups to answer questions and share stories.
3. *Homework.* Instruct participants to take 30 minutes between now and next meeting to reflect on some of the taken-for-granted assumptions that may serve as boundaries to welcome and hospitality.



Going Deeper:

The openness of the table is created by our very maintaining it as open. We invite all who want to come to the table. Are there ways in which we might continue to battle the ideas of “tokens for the table?” Ways that we can combat exclusion created by non-welcoming manners?

WEEK TWO

CHAPTER 3 - WHOLENESS

Objectives:

- To *distinguish* the meanings of unity and wholeness (shalom)
- To *identify* taken-for-granted socio-economic structures that serve as barriers toward wholeness (shalom)
- To *provide* a definition of justice work as an act of wholeness (i.e., mending brokenness in others)
- To *understand* unity over uniformity within Disciples identity.

Reading Selections:

Chapter 3: Wholeness

Pages 42 – 65

Questions to Consider:

Chapter 1 - Table

1. Based on Watkins, what are some of the fundamental differences between the definitions of unity and wholeness (shalom)?
2. How does understanding the above differences help individuals and/or churches bring about wholeness in our daily lives?
3. How does Watkins define Justice? See pages 60-62.
4. What are some of the “human-made boundaries” that we take for granted? Discuss how these boundaries restrict from bringing about wholeness in others and/or in our communities.
5. The justice river story (p. 62) is a very telling one. How might you seek to locate causes, rather than effects of fragmentation?

Activities:

1. *Create.* In small groups, create a new justice platform. Imagine you have any resources you like, and develop a plan to help any oppressed group.



Now, think of ways to implement this in the real world, where you don't have all the necessary resources.

2. *Small group discussions.* In small groups, have participants provide the definition of justice as presented in Watkins alongside other definitions they feel are relevant. Allow time for discussion and then have groups report back their responses, leaving time for responses from others.
3. *Sharing stories.* Share any experiences with justice / action causes. Have you found the church to be active enough in these arenas? What about your experience outside the church? How do they compare?

Going Deeper:

How does one live as if the world is whole already when there are so many signs and symbols of fragmentation? Differences between haves and have-nots only increase, and the haves only hold on tighter to what they claim as their own. If living wholeness means changing a lifestyle or giving up some comforts, it's not hard to see why so many are resistant to it.

(Watkins 4) "Where do you see the promise of wholeness compromised by your own timidity? By the timidity of the church?"

WEEK THREE

CHAPTER 4 - MOVEMENT

Objectives:

- To *compare and contrast* socio-cultural influences between past and current generations
- To *identify* how generational differences may affect sharing God's love
- To *categorize* what processes, perspectives, and structures we need for our journey in the 21st century
- To *realize* that Disciples move forward together, constantly adapting with the times.

Reading Selections:

Chapter 4 – Movement

Pages 66-80



Questions to Consider:

1. Based on what we've read and discussed up to this point, what are some of the connections between table and wholeness?
2. What are some of the connections between wholeness and movement?
3. Knowing what we now know, at an individual/micro level, how can we actively participate in this movement for wholeness?
4. (Watkins 2) "What is different in the world today than it was in the world of your parents? How does this affect how we share God's love? Extend God's neighborhood of wholeness?"
5. (Watkins 5) "How can churches function effectively in the wake of the changes that are taking place in the world today? In our twenty-first century movement toward wholeness, what do we take with us from before? What do we leave behind? What do we invent that is new for this era?"

Activities:

1. *Paired discussion.* In partners, have participants share differences between parents' and current generations. Focus on contexts such as social (e.g., gender bias, school integration), material (e.g., urbanization, commercialism), technological (e.g., internet access, social media), and cultural (e.g., race relations, political rhetoric). Share your responses with the group.
2. *Brainstorm.* Keeping generational differences in mind, invite participants to brainstorm on what processes, perspectives, structures, etc. are needed, and which are not.

Going Deeper:

Movement is all about change. It is about going forward. What then is to be said of a movement trying to identify itself? Can a movement have a stable identity? How can you see that working? If church becomes an "oasis" as Dr. Watkins calls it, does it serve as an island of stability in a sea of turmoil? Or is the island more of a platform for developing and adapting our identity as a whole?

(Watkins 4) "Where do you see the promise of wholeness compromised by your own timidity? By the timidity of the church?"



WEEK FOUR

CHAPTER 5-DISCIPLES OF CHRIST & CHAPTER 6-CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DOC)

Objectives:

- To *identify* elements of God’s reign in the world today as described in Whole
- To *articulate* the manners in which we make space for Jesus Christ in our lives
- To *share* examples of offering “the love God has shown to humanity”
- To *describe* how people are intended to experience God’s love at your church.
- To *connect* the identity statement – and /or church slogan – as an expression of the church and expression of God’s love.

Reading Selections:

Chapter 5-Disciples of Christ and Chapter 6-Christian Church (DOC)

Pages 81-109

Questions to Consider:

1. What words would you use to describe God’s reign in the world today? How would you describe this concept to someone with a rudimentary understanding of faith?
2. Express how you describe how you make room for Jesus Christ in your life (in the doing).
3. Sharon describes church as a place of “periodic reprovisioning for the next phase of life’s journey.” Does church feel like that to you? How does church re-charge your batteries to continue the work of sharing God’s love?
4. (Watkins 4) “What are ways that you or your congregation make real the love of God outside the walls of your home or church? What are you saying about wholeness and hope?”

Activities:

1. *Create.* In small groups, develop a new metaphor for the church in the same way that Dr. Watkins likens the church to a fleet of boats (as opposed to the “body of Christ”). What imagery would you use on a flyer announcing to the world all the good about to come out of a church whose time has come?
2. *Interpret and re-read.* Re-read the identity statement. Is it strong enough – or perhaps expansive enough – to encompass all our differences? After having looked at all four aspects (table, welcome, wholeness, and movement), is there anything you would change?



3. *Chart and Discuss.* Chart answers to the following questions (Watkins 1): “What signs of God’s in-breaking reign do you see in the world today? In what ways does your church participate in a sign of God’s reign?”, using Q1 of study guide as a supplement.

Going Deeper:

In what ways have you seen progress in the DOC movement? Is it truly “the time” for this church?

