

*Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love*  
*Discussion Guide*

This brief book contains five chapters, which are suitable for discussion in a group setting. The group might meet for 2-4 hours on a weekend or during a five-week study.

Begin discussion in the group by asking what *xenophobia* means. The term describes people who are afraid of strangers, who are different or who are from an unfamiliar or uncomfortable place. Ask participants to turn to an unfamiliar person on the right or left and tell about a time when they observed or experienced xenophobia. Then ask the group to offer examples of where we see xenophobia in our culture at the present time.

The following discussion questions are located after the end of each chapter in the book. Use these discussion questions to guide the participants after the chapters are read and presented. Close each discussion with prayer.

*Session One: Discussion Questions*

1. The authors states that “an important function of Christian preaching and church life is to render *me* into the Other. I am the enemy of God.” Describe a time in your life where you were apart or alienated from God. How is this otherness evident to you? How is God’s otherness apparent to you?
2. At the heart of this book is 1 John 4:18, which includes the phrase, “fear expects punishment” (CEB). The author observes, “In deep fear of the Other we separate ourselves from others in order to better oppress, exploit, expulse, confine, hurt, or deny justice and access to others whom we have judged to be so Other as to be beyond the bounds of having any bond between us or any claim upon us.” Think of examples in your life, church, community, or nation of how fear expects punishment.
3. For most Christians, “God is righteous, holy, high and lifted up, glorious and good. We are not.” Is this an appropriate way to think of God’s relationship to human beings? What alternative ways of thinking are supported in scripture?
4. What kind of security does your church adopt for self-preservation and protection? What message do your security policies send to others outside your community? How do you balance self-preservation with unconditional welcome?

*Session Two: Discussion Questions*

1. Is the one you fear fast approaching or encroaching? Or is this one remote to you, making slim your chances of being harmed by this one?
2. Is the one you fear really as powerful as you fear or is this one relatively powerless to do you harm?
3. Is this one truly a threat to you or are you simply fearful because this one is different from you?
4. Is your fear of the Other causing you to turn inward upon yourself or to avoid doing things that you should do or would like to do?

5. Is your fear due to another's attempt to manipulate you and your fear to their personal advantage?

Above all, Christians ought ask:

1. How is God leading me, and what does God expect of me in my relationship with this Other?
2. How might Christ—the strange God we did not expect, the God who welcomed me, the stranger—be attempting to make the Other my neighbor whom I am to love as myself?

### *Session Three: Discussion Questions*

1. Give some examples of attempting “to redefine the Other, or to ignore certain aspects of otherness in the Other so that the Other loses otherness.”
2. How is your church or workplace identified with people who are the same in race, ethnicity, economic class, or cultural affinity? How are these markers a barrier to others?
3. The author identifies a problem with “thinking of the Christian faith as a technique for meeting individual needs and healing individual hurts.” How does this thinking inhibit or contribute to God's mission for the church? How does the focus on personal needs communicate with persons who are Other, that is, different from your group?
4. Think of a person who is or was your enemy. What changed or would need to change for you to love your enemy?

### *Session Four Discussion Question*

The author gives ten practical suggestions for welcoming and receiving strangers. If you are reading this book in a group, you have implemented suggestion number seven. Of the ten suggestions, put a mark or highlight next to the practices that your church is implementing. Then select one or more suggestions that you will personally champion for the sake of your church and community.

### *Session Five Discussion Questions*

1. Think of a time when you were traveling through an unfamiliar, strange place. Describe the people or situation that made you feel uncomfortable. Share ways to overcome this fear.
2. Read aloud the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. For the people within your reach, who is the neighbor that is served the least? Which neighbor poses the most risk? Share ideas about how God can help you overcome the risk for the sake of the Other.