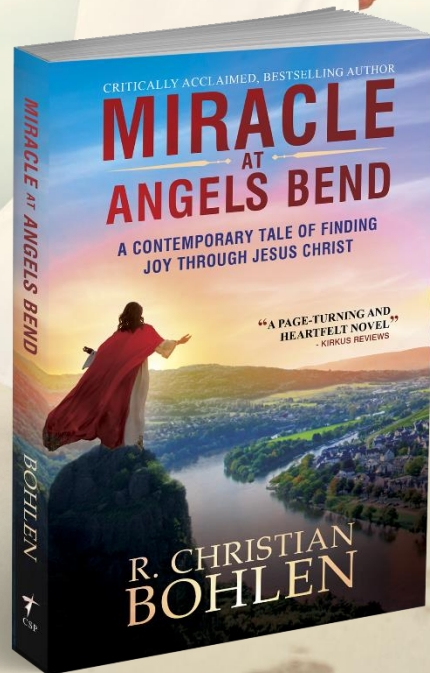


FACILITATOR GUIDE

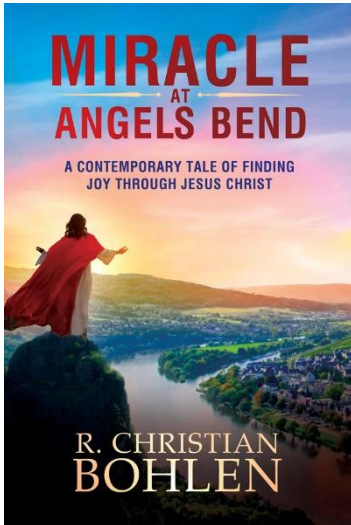
MIRACLE AT ANGELS BEND



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OVERVIEW



WELCOME

Whether you are a first-time facilitator or an experienced one, this guide can you prepare for spiritually rewarding discussions with the readers of *Miracle at Angels Bend: A Contemporary Tale of Finding Joy through Jesus Christ*.

You may choose to read the book on the same schedule as your group, but you will likely have a richer perspective if you finish the book prior to starting your first discussion.

STRUCTURE

We recommend a total of **five 1 – 1.5 hour** sessions, spaced either one week or two weeks apart. Recommended agenda and discussion topics for each session are described in more detail in the pages that follow.

1. **Kick-off:** This is essential if your participants don't know each other and optional if they do. You will briefly describe the book, facilitate introductions, and invite participants to share feelings about what they hope to learn about Christ and themselves.
2. **Learnings, experiences, and testimonies:**
 - a. **Part One Discussion:** Share thoughts related to Part One.
 - b. **Part Two Discussion:** Share thoughts related to Part Two.
 - c. **Part Three Discussion:** Share thoughts related to Part Three.
 - d. **Part Four Discussion:** Share thoughts related to Part Four.



KEY MESSAGES

Please pray about the following key messages and reflect on how you saw these illustrated in the characters' thoughts, decisions, and outcomes in their lives.



JOY IS FOUND IN CHRIST

This is essentially a book about joy: what it is not, what leads to it, and most of all—the Giver of it.

Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11, ESV). While we sometimes dissect what constitutes happiness vs. joy vs. blessedness, scripturally these concepts are similar and describe gifts of the Spirit for those who sincerely seek God and strive to serve Him first. (See Isaiah 32:17; Matthew 5:3-12; Psalm 1:1-3.)

Your discussions about *Miracle at Angels Bend* can enhance participants' understanding of joy and how to experience it.

INTEGRITY MATTERS



Jesus said, “Those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Paul also taught, “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man” (Acts 24:16, ESV).

In *Miracle at Angels Bend*, the reader sees into the thoughts and hearts of each character, witnessing the workings of their conscience and their wrestling with honesty and integrity before God and man. Each of the four characters showed integrity at times as they chose to trust and obey the teachings of Jesus, even at the risk of looking bad before others. Honoring God first means starting with an honest heart.

BELIEVING IS A CHOICE



No message in *Miracle at Angels Bend* was emphasized more explicitly than the importance of genuinely believing in Jesus Christ. Even earnestly professing Christians can fail to understand what it means to believe in the way the Bible uses the concept of the Greek word, “pisteuo,” meaning to accept, embrace, trust, and act accordingly.

Three of the four characters in the book grasped this concept and applied it (Josh, Dave, and Larina). With all compassion for Hannah's struggles, it was difficult for her to fully believe and trust Jesus.

FACILITATION BASICS

Group discussions can stimulate some of the most rewarding and enlightening gospel experiences a Christian may ever experience.

Keep these in mind as you prepare for and facilitate your meetings:

- Prepare yourself by privately praying to have the Holy Spirit guide your thoughts and touch the hearts of all in attendance.
- Begin each meeting with prayer to invite the Spirit of Jesus to be with you, as He promised.
- Your role is to:
 - Promote a loving atmosphere of respectful listening and participation.
 - Ask questions that prompt discussion. Your role is not to teach a particular agenda but to guide the conversation in a way that opens the hearts of participants to learn by the Spirit.
 - Model appropriate sharing of your thoughts, feelings, and experiences but ensure that your participants have most of the “talk time” available for them to express themselves.
 - Say “thank you” after participants share their thoughts, and acknowledge comments by saying things like, “That was really insightful,” as applicable. Gently redirect the conversation if participants say things that are not consistent with scriptural truths or become too personal or graphic.
 - Cultivate a climate of praise and worship and honoring God, while being sensitive to participants who may be new in their faith journey and still on the fence about Christ.
- Consult with your pastoral leaders if conversations become controversial or raise highly sensitive topics involving abuse, sexual behavior, illegal behavior, etc.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR MINORS

If you are facilitating discussions involving minors, request guidance from your pastoral leader regarding special considerations, such as legal requirements in your country (such as the United States) for reporting abuse to appropriate civil authorities, if a minor brings abuse to your attention.

Such sensitive discussions should not occur in the group. However, it is possible that minors will seek the attention of the facilitator before or after group discussions because they feel safe or the topics discussed trigger them to want help or comfort.

Adult facilitators are strongly advised to have two adults present any time minors are involved in a discussion and never to be one-on-one with a minor.

KICKOFF MEETING (30 MIN.)

SUGGESTED AGENDA

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer
 - Begin the meeting with a warm welcome, introducing yourself if necessary.
 - Open with a prayer to invite the presence of the Holy Spirit, seeking guidance and understanding for the discussion.
2. Icebreaker/Introductions:
 - Allow participants to introduce themselves briefly, sharing their names, and perhaps a sentence about what brought them to the group.
 - Consider using a fun fact or icebreaker question to help participants get to know each other. For example, “If you were a time traveler, where would you like to go? Forward? Back? When?”
3. Establish Group Guidelines:
 - Set ground rules for the group to ensure a respectful and safe environment. Encourage active listening, respect for diverse perspectives, and confidentiality. Sharing personal experiences with the reading and current life challenges is encouraged but not required.
4. Show and/or Hand Out Books and Establish Reading Schedule:
 - Agree on meeting schedule (recommended once per week or every other week).
 - Explain the four-part structure of the book and that it is a “story within a story,” which includes the entire, abridged historically accurate life of Jesus from birth-to-resurrection.
 - Allow time to read the “What Critics and Readers...” section in the first pages of the book. Consider sharing your own testimony of what you experienced if you have read it.
 - Read the *Introduction* together. Invite participants to share their feelings about it.
5. Ideas for Discussion Questions:
 - Do you tend to like reading fiction or nonfiction more? (By the way, this book includes both.)
 - Have you seen some or all *The Chosen* video series? What do you like most about it? (Like *The Chosen*, this book is designed to help you envision the life of and heart of Jesus like you’re there.)
6. Conclude the meeting with a closing prayer, expressing gratitude for the time spent together and asking for God's continued guidance and presence in the group.

Remember, adapt this agenda to suit the needs of your group. Flexibility and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading are crucial in creating a spiritual atmosphere during your small group discussions.

PART ONE DISCUSSION

SUGGESTED AGENDA

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer
2. Fictional Story Questions:
 - Which character(s) did you connect with most? What was it about their story (and your own life situation, if you'd like to share that) that made you feel that way?
[Leave ample time for this question. Invite participants to relate to their own life challenges.]
 - Were any of the characters actively looking for God to be a greater part of their life before they got involved with the mysterious book?
[It doesn't look that way, except possibly Dave.]
 - Recall that this entire story is metaphor for life. Even when we are not seeking God, He is always seeking us. What events, opportunities, people in your life have been evidence that God is dropping seeds of light from heaven to help you find Him?
 - How did Hannah, Dave, Josh, and Larina respond to the life story of Jesus? What did you notice about their thoughts that were helpful or unhelpful for them? What evidence is there that they are thinking about the content? In what ways have they been good examples for you, if at all?
[Recall that Hannah read about Mary and Joseph; Dave read about the birth story and shepherds; Larina read about John the Baptist; Josh read the temptations of Jesus.]
3. Scripture (Life of Jesus) Discussion:
[Pick one or more of these; you will probably not have time for all.]
 - **Mary** (Chapter 3: Hannah and Mary): We may fail to consider how monumental the angel's announcement was to Mary, as well as how brave she was to accept with such faith. What insights did you gain from the Mary and Joseph story?
 - **The birth story** (Chapter 5: Dave and the Lamb): What new insights did you gain about the birth story? [Details such as what "the inn" was like, the nature of the shepherds and their worshipful hearts, and Jesus being the Lamb who left glory in heaven to come to earth so humbly.]
 - **John the Baptist** (Chapter 7: Larina and the Wild Man): Larina wants evidence before she will believe. What did you think of John the Baptist as evidence that Jesus was the Lamb of God? Would that have gotten your attention?
 - **The temptations of Jesus** (Chapter 9: Josh and the Temptations): This chapter presented many insights into *why* these temptations were so crafty. Do you believe Satan is actively attacking you and your family? What was insightful for you about how Jesus dealt with temptation?
4. Agree on the next meeting date and invite all to read Part Two. Conclude with prayer.

PART TWO DISCUSSION

SUGGESTED AGENDA

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer
2. Part Two was titled, *Seeds of Light*. As you summarize Part Two, consider what seeds were planted.
 - Hannah lied to her mom about stealing the pills; she ran into the woods, remembered the treehouse project, and being lifted up as the architect, and she saw her father through tear-stained hands. Hannah read of Jesus's first miracles. She winced when the book stated, "Jesus remembered His purpose and mission at all times, without getting caught up in worldly distractions." She felt like a hypocrite and not a disciple.
 - We learned a great deal about what drives Larina, such as despising bullies, being an expert hacker, having a very famous great-grandfather (Abuelo Carlos), and comparing his political aims to Jesus's mission. She was thrilled by Jesus clearing the temple and felt fully aligned with Him.
 - Dave shared his dream of trying to see the statue of Christ but being unable. His marriage dilemma grew deeper. Ellen stopped a genuine intention to kill herself or she brutally manipulated Dave to torment him, leaving him rattled and longing even more for Larina.
 - Josh got into it with Nate when Nate broke into the house, resulting in a broken finger and splint, preventing him from playing guitar for weeks. After reading that the people of Nazareth tried to murder Jesus, he began to view Jesus as a real Man and he "perceived Jesus's strength and simultaneous goodness." Later, Josh and Hannah had a sweet romantic encounter.
3. [Allow plenty of time for this key question]: In what ways have you sensed God using this book to help you with what you need at this time?
4. Discussion ideas:
 - Integrity means we don't show one face to the world, while inwardly doing the opposite, such as the Pharisees, whom Jesus condemned. **Why are honesty and integrity so absolutely critical in the life of a disciple?** (John 4:24; Matthew 23:27; Psalm 26:1; Job 2:3, 9; Ephesians 6:6; 1 Timothy 1:5; Proverbs 28:18) What do you notice about Hannah that is very positive regarding her integrity? Is Dave honest with himself or do you think he's hiding his thoughts from himself?
 - **What do you think of Hannah's dad's saying, "God views weakness differently than rebellion. Saints confess their sins and believe. Hypocrites hide their sins up their sleeve."** (2 Cor. 12:9)
 - Jesus repeatedly suffered even when He did the right things, as in the Nazareth mob assault. **Does this happen in your life? How do you deal with it?** How did Jesus appear to deal with this?
 - **Which stories of Jesus touched you the most** (for example, gathering his disciples, healing Simon's mother-in-law, turning water into wine at the wedding, clearing out the temple)?
5. Agree on the next meeting date and invite all to read Part Three. Conclude with prayer.

PART THREE DISCUSSION

SUGGESTED AGENDA

Note: You may wish to be more open-ended and free flowing with this discussion than previously. Participants will have experienced a lot in the characters' thoughts and lives and have witnessed a great deal of the story of Jesus. Seek to uncover the things that most deeply touched your readers.

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer
2. Invite participants to share the stories that touched them the most, whether the characters in the modern tale or the stories of Jesus. The following are just thought triggers.
 - Jesus healed the leper and the man let down through the ceiling, and Dave felt hope.
 - Jesus taught the Beatitudes and then Hannah decided to extend mercy and kindness to her mom. Did the Beatitudes make more sense to you after reading these simple descriptions?
 - Jesus taught us how to be less selfish, and Dave struggled to apply that to his own situation.
 - Larina kept wondering what Jesus was up to, comparing His life to her great-grandfather Carlos. What was Jesus focused on? They tried to make Him a political king, but he said, "No!"
 - How is the story of Jesus making enough bread and fish for thousands relevant for us today?
3. Ask any of the following questions:
 - **Have you ever felt like you shouldn't pray and that you're unworthy to go to church or to call yourself a Christian?** What would you say to someone who says something like that to you? [In the book, Dave was struggling with unrestrained thoughts about Larina and almost quit reading the book because of it, but then he remembered the scripture, "Knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Replacing darkness in our life with the light of Jesus is empowering.]
 - **What did you think of the Lord speaking spiritually to Dave's heart in such explicit detail? Is this possible and realistic?** [It certainly is and hopefully someone can share their own examples.]
 - **In what ways do we look to spouses or boy- and girlfriends as the source of our happiness and pleasure in life, as though they can solve all our problems? What did the Spirit teach Dave about this?** [Hannah's dad was teaching her to look to Jesus instead of him for comfort and strength. The Spirit lovingly chastised Dave for A) trying to do everything on his own, without the Lord's power and, B) seeking to find happiness by relying on Ellen to make him happy.]
 - **How has God used external pressures and life circumstances in your life to get you thinking about repentance and submitting to God's authority?** [Josh struggled with the inability to play his guitar and fearing Nate's enemy Ricky; Dave felt pressure during the fire to come clean with the Lord.]
4. Agree on the next meeting date and invite all to read Part Four. Conclude with prayer.

PART FOUR DISCUSSION

PREPARATION

This final discussion will likely be the most impactful. Plead for the Holy Spirit to guide you and the participants as you reflect together on these final, deeply spiritual chapters.

There are so many important themes in this book—too many to discuss. As you review this list, ask the Spirit to guide you to select the ones that are needful for your participants.

- **Joy is found in Christ**, not in worldly distractions or other pursuits. Until we truly connect with Him and follow Him first, we won't experience the joy spoken of throughout the Bible.
- **Integrity must be foremost in a Christian's heart.** Self-deception and hypocrisy are deadly.
- **Believing in the name of Jesus is a mandate from God and choice we must make**, and doing it is more literal and intentional than many Christians realize. (See p. 291 in *Discussion and Application* for a list of the metaphors for believing in Jesus.)
- **It's easier to believe and follow Jesus when you know more about Him by studying His life**, in part because it stimulates a spontaneous holy fear and reverence for His greatness and glory.
- **Deciding to follow Jesus leads to real world solutions to real world problems** (for example, Josh giving up selling drugs and Dave coming clean before the law and learning how to love his wife when things are very difficult).
- **Consider how most of the main characters in this book illustrated the same basic process as Peter's audience on the Day of Pentecost.** They heard (or read) the word of God and declaration that Jesus is the Christ and has the power to save. They listened with open minds and chose to believe. They took sincere and bold action to obey what the Holy Spirit communicated to them, being willing to "repent and be baptized." (See Acts 2.) They were rewarded with an outpouring of the Spirit, which in our lives may not be as miraculous in Larina's or on the Day of Pentecost, but the Spirit brings unmistakable joy, peace, and deliverance to everyone over time.

SUGGESTED AGENDA

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer
2. Allow ample time for these important questions. The following may take up the whole meeting, depending on how willing everyone is to share their experiences:
 - Which of the characters touched you most deeply and why?
 - What did that character appear to learn and how did they learn it?
 - How do you think studying the life of Jesus made a difference for that person?
 - Would you like to share how you were personally helped with a challenging situation in your life as you read this book?

- In what ways do a change of heart and behavior in our lives qualify as miracles?
3. If participants struggle to answer the questions above, consider visiting the *Discussion and Application* chapter starting on p. 289 for thought triggers.
 4. Other topics to discuss include the following:

- **How has “seeing Jesus” as you read this book helped you have a holy, reverential respect and fear of the Lord?** Consider these added scriptures about the blessings of fearing God in the way the scriptures use that phrase:
 - “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10).
 - “Fear of the Lord is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death” (Proverbs 14:27).
 - “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever” (Psalms 19:9).
 - “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments” (Psalm 112:1).
 - “How great is the goodness you have stored up for those who fear you. You lavish it on those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world. You hide them in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them. You shelter them in your presence, far from accusing tongues” (Psalm 31:19–20, NLT).

Notice the promised blessings of fearing God: wisdom, escape from snares/sin, ability to become clean and endure in God’s word, delight in keeping God’s commandments (as opposed to chafing against them), and protection and security.

- **The four main characters in this story were metaphors for various attitudes and life situations.**
 - Hannah: Believing, Suffering, Superficial, “House Built On the Sand”
 - Larina: Worldly, Skeptical, But Open
 - Dave: Believing, Lost, Overwhelmed, But Seeking Godly Relief
 - Josh: Believing, Rebellious, But Open To Godly Influences

Hannah is perhaps the most tragic, because she needed God’s comfort the most, but she was the “house built on the sand,” and she resisted finding relief through Jesus.

How do you know if you are truly built on the rock of Christ or not? What evidence do we have that the others did in fact anchor themselves onto the rock of Christ, which will help them face future storms of life?

5. Close with prayer, as led by the Spirit, praising God for His greatness and grace in providing the Bible and other resources to draw us closer to God, justification through faith through Jesus, and sanctification.