

Connecting Heart to Heart Part III: Building Bridges By Sharon Rapp

Leader's Guide

PURPOSE: The goal of this Bible study is to help us examine our own attitudes about cross-cultural interactions and to challenge us to build bridges to, and friendships within, groups beyond our present boundaries – connecting Heart to Heart. **NOTE:** All references are from the NIV.

NOTE to Leader: In order to have enough time to complete the study of Part III in a half hour or less, it may be necessary to limit discussion of the Opening Activity. Please see additional NOTES within the text below.

Introduction:

*How wide the love of Christ! It knows not class or race
But holds our one humanity Within its broad embrace.*

*How long the love of Christ! Its patience will not cease
Until this broken world is bound In everlasting peace.*

*How high the love of Christ! Beyond all thought it soars,
And yet upon our passing lives Unmeasured mercy pours.*

*How deep the love of Christ, Descending to a cross!
He bears within His wounded hands All human pain and loss.*

*All praise to You, O Christ, For love whose depth and height,
Whose length and breadth fill time and space With endless life
and light!*

"How Wide the Love of Christ" [LSB 535, stanzas 1-5]

NOTE to Leader: Since the focus on Part III is action, you may want to ask the entire study group to read the opening and/or closing prayer aloud together.

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to respond to the question "How shall they hear?" in the knowledge that Your Great Commission includes all I meet in "to all the world." Lamb of God who died for all, grant me forgiveness for missed opportunities and courage to be bold in those ahead. Holy Spirit, enable me to answer the question "Whom shall I send?" with a heart full of "Here am I. Send me!" Amen.

Opening Activity: Discuss with a partner or small group the following situation.

A family in your congregation is excited about plans and preparations for hosting an exchange student for the secondary school year. The Sunday after pick up at the airport, the congregation holds an end-of-summer picnic and the new student and host family attend. During the meal time, you notice a couple of preteens whispering

and discover that they are marveling at the international guest—who is trying to cut corn off the cob with a table knife and fork. When you mention that both the chicken and the vegetable may be held with the hands at an outdoor event, she shakes her head "no" and appears shocked at your suggestion.

How do you help to bridge the gap between her table "rules" and ours?

Sample answers: ask questions to learn about etiquette at the table in her country; discuss informality of outdoor picnic; offer "corn holders"; answers will vary

Between the preteens and a new member of the church family?

Sample answers: involve preteens in conversation; if knife is held continuously in left hand, suggest preteens try eating that way; answers will vary

The Focus of Part III of our study is twofold. First, we are reminded that all of us have sinned and that the gospel invitation is to be taken to all people and cultures. Then, we rejoice in our adoption through faith into the unity of one body, Christ's church. With these goals in mind, let us explore Scripture.

All Sinners, All Invited

Read **Luke 15:2**. To whom is the Great Redeemer's outreach here? **sinners (each of us)**

There is one common culture that we all share. We are all sinful and need forgiveness. "*There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:22b-23). Fortunately for us, "*God does not judge by external appearance*" (Gal. 2:6), because "*... all our righteous acts are like filthy rags*" (Is. 64:6). Fortunately for us, "*... God does not show favoritism*" (Rom. 2:11). Fortunately for us, "*... God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*" (John 3:17).

List some of the words and phrases used in the New Testament to indicate that God's love and mercy are impartial and universal.

NOTE to Leader: If time is growing short, ask participants to suggest words and phrases that answer the question above from general knowledge and look up only one* or two of the references. Study of the additional references below can later become part of personal quiet time study and devotions.

Mark 16:15 all the world, all creation _____

Luke 3:6 all mankind _____

Luke 24:47 all nations _____

John 4:14 whoever drinks the water I will give him

Acts 1:8 Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth

*Romans 10:12-14 everyone who calls on the name of the Lord _____

Galatians 2:9-10 Gentiles, Jews, poor _____

1 John 5:1 everyone who believes

Read **Revelation 14:6**. To whom is the Gospel to be proclaimed?

those who live on the earth — every nation, tribe, language, and people

Read **1 Timothy 2:3-6**. Why must we speak the Good News to all? God wants all to be saved

So it has been from Jesus' birth: shepherds, angels, wise men. Simeon, through the power of the Holy Spirit, recognized the Lord's Christ and praised God in the temple courts: "*For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people,*" and Anna "... *gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem*" (Luke 2:25-38).

All Adopted, One Body

Read **Ephesians 1:4-8**. By what process does a person become the child of God? adoption

Read **Romans 8:15-17**. What blessings belong "to those who are led by the Spirit of God"?

Spirit of sonship; God's children, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ; share in His glory

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13).

(If time allows, see also: Acts 2:21; Rom. 8:23; 9:4; 2 Cor. 6:18.)

Read **Ephesians 1:22-23**. Who is Christ's body? the church

Read **Romans 12:4-8**. How does this body function? in Christ, many form one body; each member belongs to all the others; they have different gifts; answers will vary

(If time allows, see also: 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Col. 1:24-28.)

Read **Colossians 2:2-5**. Why is unity vital from a practical standpoint?

people are orderly; they are without dissension; there are no divisions; they are able to work together; answers will vary

From a spiritual standpoint?

they will have the full riches of complete understanding; they will know the mystery of God, namely, Christ; they will live in harmony; they will be united in mind and thought; they will have conduct worthy of the Gospel; so that the world may believe

Galatians 3:28: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you [we] are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Jesus Himself asks the Father, in John 17:23: "*...May they [believers] be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*"

Closing: God has given us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to prepare us for works of service "*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:13). May we be willing and eager to be transformed to the likeness of Jesus the witness and to

share the Good News of the source of our salvation with all whom we meet.

Say or sing together: “Alabaré – II” [LSB 800], “Hark, the Voice” [LSB 826, LW 318, TLH 496], or the Peter Scholtes praise song, “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love.”

Closing Prayer: Father of all who believe, remind us to see new cultures as opportunities, not walls which separate. Good Shepherd, we know that this is Your way. Lead us as we walk in it and seek to be Your faithful witnesses. Holy Spirit, keep us in the unity of our adoption. Grant us power, love, and self-discipline that we may not be afraid or ashamed to speak the gospel to all and tell of the grace we have received through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We ask these things in His name. Amen.

For Further Study, Discussion and/or Action:

NOTE to Leader: More information concerning the suggestions below may be found in the “Additional Resources” on the last page of the Leader’s Guide.

Practice speaking of your faith (“elevator speech”) with one or more members of your Bible study group.

Identify one or more bridges that you will begin to build toward those God has brought into your life.

Enjoy the poems “Hug O’War” and “No Difference” by Shel Silverstein, published in his book Where the Sidewalk Ends.

Locate and read the children’s book And to Think That We Thought We’d Never Be Friends by Mary Ann Hoberman. It was published in 1999 by Crown Books and in 2003 by Dragonfly Books.

Try learning some words and/or phrases in another language. There are sites on the Internet, which provide limited basic instruction. Some libraries have “travel courses” available for check-out and most bookstores sell “mini-courses.” While many towns provide introductory courses through adult education, it is not necessary that this be a full-fledged course to experience a sense of what is involved in becoming fluent in another language.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

LEADER'S GUIDE

Parts I, II, and III

(I) What's So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey was published in 1997 by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. While Chapter 12 is particularly appropriate to this study, all the chapters are thought-provoking.

(I) The poem "Outwitted" is the first one in Markham's book The Shoes of Happiness and Other Poems (Publisher: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1915). The full text of the poem (four lines) may be found at several locations on the Internet.

(I) In the musical *South Pacific* (1949, composed by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Hammerstein and Joshua Logan), Lieutenant Cable sings "You've Got to be Carefully Taught." If it is available to you, play the song for participants. If not, find the words on line. Listen/read/sing and discuss.

(II) To research the Internet for varied cultural attitudes toward interrupting, non-verbal communication, typical distance between conversationalists, physical touch, discussing money, try entering a phrase such as: <cultural differences; eye contact>.

(II) In Angel Unaware, first published in 1953, (special edition 2004; Publisher Revell), Dale Evans Rogers tells the poignant story of daughter Robin Elizabeth, who died of complications of Down Syndrome. Evans was very influential in changing public perceptions of children with special needs and served as a role model for many parents.

(II) "Jesus Loves the Little Children" was written by George F. Root (1820-1895), who wrote the words and music for several well known hymns. The chorus may be found in The Other Song Book, Revised Edition, published in 1987 by The Fellowship Publications. Words are also available on line.

(III) The children's book And to Think That We Thought We'd Never Be Friends, written by Mary Ann Hoberman, was illustrated by Kevin Hawkes. It was published in 1999 by Crown Books and in 2003 by Dragonfly Books.

(III) Enjoy the poems "Hug O'War" and "No Difference" by Shel Silverstein. If you don't own and can't borrow his book Where the Sidewalk Ends, published by Harper Collins in 1974 and again as the 30th Anniversary Edition in 2004, you may be able to locate the poems on line.

(III) The song "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" was copyrighted in 1968 by Peter Scholtes and

has been recorded by several Christian artists, including Jars of Clay and Rebecca St. James. It has been published in several collections, including Concordia Publishing House's Hymns For Now I and Singspiration's Folk Celebration. If you have a recording or know the melody, words are available on line.

(III) Try learning some words and/or phrases in another language. There are sites on the Internet, which provide limited basic instruction. Some libraries have "travel courses" available for check-out and most bookstores sell "mini-courses." While many towns provide introductory courses through adult education, it is not necessary that this be a full-fledged language course to experience a sense of what is involved in becoming fluent in another language.

It is possible that one or more speakers of another language would consider providing a one-time experiential session for a group. Such a session might include learning to pronounce the Spanish words for "Jesus Loves Me" [LSB 588] and/or "Alabaré – II" [LSB 800].