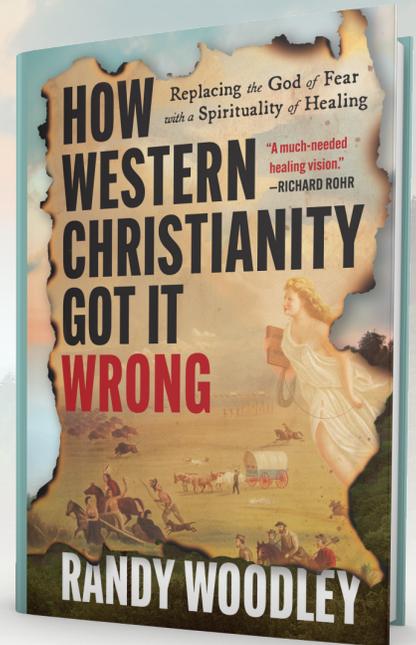


# DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## *How Western Christianity Got It Wrong: Replacing the God of Fear with a Spirituality of Healing*

*Randy Woodley isn't trying to fix Western Christianity—and he hopes you won't either! That has been tried, and it has failed each time, because it begins with the same Western assumptions—the same DNA. Western Christianity is likely broken beyond repair. But the Spirit-Man Jesus is alive, and his teachings remain central to living in harmony with the whole community of creation and repairing a broken world. As you read this book alone or with others, contemplate and discuss these questions.*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND INTRODUCTION

- 1. Bob's wisdom:** Bob's deathbed advice—about looking back to see “either the hands that you stepped on to get where you are, or the hands that lifted you up”—becomes author Randy Woodley's life compass. Take inventory of your own journey: Whose hands have lifted you? Whose hands might you have stepped on, even inadvertently? What practical steps of acknowledgment or repair are you being called toward?
- 2. The violence paradox:** The author quotes political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, who wrote, “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence.” Can you name some historic examples of this? How has your own religious community (or communities you're familiar with) either confronted or avoided this historical reality? What specific practices or conversations might move a faith community from acknowledgment into genuine repair work?
- 3. Following Jesus as a Western Christian:** The author suggests it's “extremely difficult” but possible to follow Jesus while remaining a Western Christian. What tensions do you experience between your cultural formation and Jesus's teachings? Where do you find yourself having to choose between being accepted within Western Christian spaces and embodying Jesus's radical welcome of outsiders?
- 4. The insider-outsider dilemma:** The author dedicates this book “to the outsiders, inside the box and the insiders, outside the box.” Reflect on your own experience of these categories. When have you been an outsider to a system, or an insider who felt exiled? How did those experiences shape your understanding of belonging, power, and truth-telling?

## CHAPTER 1: HOW I STARTED MY PATH TO TRUTH

- 1. Jesus the refugee:** The author retells Jesus's story, emphasizing his status as a refugee, homeless teacher, and executed criminal. How does centering these aspects of Jesus's identity challenge or confirm the version of Jesus you were taught? How might your life or community change if you were to take seriously that Jesus lived and died as a threat to the establishment?

2. **The Jesus movement vs. Christianity:** The earliest followers called themselves “followers of the Way” and were distinguished by “actionable care for the poor and marginalized,” not correct beliefs. If your faith community were evaluated solely on this criterion—care for the poor, widows, orphans, and immigrants—what grade would it receive? What would need to change to embody this Way more fully?
3. **A hermeneutic of suspicion:** The author writes about developing a “hermeneutic of suspicion”—learning to question the context, background, and power dynamics behind how Scripture has been interpreted and applied. He shows how missing context (like the holy triad of foreigner, widow, and orphan in the Lost Sheep parables) changes everything. What interpretations of Scripture have you inherited without questioning their context? Choose one familiar passage and investigate: Who benefited from the traditional interpretation? Whose voices were silenced? What changes when you recover the fuller context?

## CHAPTER 2: HOW PLATONIC DUALISM RUINED EVERYTHING

1. **The split between body and soul:** The author traces how Platonic dualism created a destructive separation between spiritual and physical realms. Map out the practical consequences of this split in your own life and worldview: How does it affect your relationship with your body, with the earth, with pleasure, with work? What might integration look like?
2. **Philosophy’s hidden hand:** Western Christianity absorbed Greek philosophical categories that Jesus never used or taught. What other invisible philosophical frameworks might be shaping your theology without your awareness? How can you begin identifying and questioning these inherited assumptions?
3. **Indigenous wholeness:** Indigenous worldviews maintain what Woodley calls an “integrated understanding” of spiritual and physical reality. Describe a moment when you’ve experienced this kind of wholeness—where the sacred and the ordinary weren’t separate. What prevents this from being your consistent way of seeing?

## CHAPTER 3: HOW PEOPLE STOPPED SEEING THE BIBLE AS STORIES

1. **Stories vs. propositions:** The shift from experiencing Scripture as story to treating it as a collection of doctrinal propositions fundamentally changed Christianity. Choose a biblical story you know well and explore: What gets lost when it becomes primarily a vehicle for teaching abstract truths? What wisdom emerges when you encounter it as story, myth, or poetry instead?
2. **Truth in narrative:** Indigenous traditions understand that sacred stories carry truth without requiring literal, historical accuracy. What resistance do you notice in yourself to this way of understanding? What fears arise? What possibilities open up when you release the need for Scripture to function as a history or science textbook?
3. **Your own sacred stories:** Consider the stories that have shaped your life and faith—family stories, community stories, personal experiences. How do these narratives carry truth that couldn’t be captured in propositions or doctrines? What authority do you grant your own story, compared to official religious teaching?

## CHAPTER 4: HOW THE CHURCH WAS OVERTAKEN BY DOCTRINE

1. **Belief as boundary:** The author argues that the church’s obsession with correct doctrine has led to division, violence, and spiritual abuse rather than unity. Examine your own relationship to doctrinal statements: Where have they provided genuine help? Where have they become weapons of exclusion? What would shift if your faith community replaced doctrinal tests with “fruit inspection”—looking for where love, justice, and

mercy show up?

2. **Vulnerability over creed:** Randy and Edith's experience with an interfaith group showed that vulnerability creates trust and friendship in ways that shared beliefs cannot. When have you experienced this truth? What keeps religious communities from prioritizing vulnerability and authentic sharing over doctrinal agreement?
3. **The fruit test:** The author acknowledges that by this point in the book, you might be wondering, "What's so wrong with beliefs? Nothing, really—if you don't insist others believe the same as you do, and if your beliefs lead to righteous actions." Trace the connections (or disconnections) between your stated beliefs and your actual practices. Where do you see alignment? Where do you see hypocrisy—in yourself and in the broader church?

## CHAPTER 5: HOW THE WEST WON A MONOPOLY ON SIN AND SALVATION

1. **Sin as broken harmony:** Indigenous understandings frame sin as "broken harmony" or mistakes we learn from, rather than immutable guilt requiring blood payment. How might this reframing change your understanding of your own failures and growth? What would shift in your spiritual life if you truly believed you weren't fundamentally broken?
2. **Salvation from what?:** Western Christianity's salvation narrative often focuses on escaping hell and gaining heaven. Woodley suggests Jesus was teaching about restoration of shalom—right relationships with Creator, community, and creation. What are you seeking salvation from, really? What would it mean to be saved *into* something (restored harmony) rather than saved *from* something (punishment or reward)?
3. **The monopoly problem:** The title of this chapter suggests Western Christianity claimed exclusive ownership of both the problem (sin) and the solution (salvation). How has this exclusivity shaped Christian attitudes toward other religions and wisdom traditions? What opens up when you consider that Creator might have covenants with Lakota, Cherokee, Choctaw, and others, as the author suggests?

## CHAPTER 6: HOW HELL WAS BORN

1. **Fear as control:** The author traces how hell theology developed as a tool of social and spiritual control. Examine your own religious formation: How much was motivated by fear of hell versus love of Creator? If you removed fear of eternal punishment from your faith, what would remain? What would change?
2. **Gehenna's true meaning:** Jesus's references to Gehenna were about a literal burning trash heap outside Jerusalem, not eternal conscious torment. How does recovering this historical context transform your reading of Jesus's warnings? What was Jesus actually warning people about?
3. **Hatred as unity:** The author quotes Eric Hoffer: "Hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all the unifying agents." How have you seen fear of hell and hatred of "the other" function to create group cohesion in religious communities? What alternative foundations for unity might Jesus have been offering?

## CHAPTER 7: HOW ATONEMENT THEORIES FALL SHORT

1. **Covenant vs. transaction:** Woodley presents covenant-making as gift, healing, and mutual relationship rather than as transaction, payment, and appeasement. Walk through your understanding of Jesus's death: Is it primarily transactional or relational in your imagination? What changes when you shift from one lens to the other?
2. **All my relations:** The Indigenous concept of interconnectedness means that broken harmony with any part

of creation affects all our relatives. When have you experienced this truth—that your well-being is tied to the well-being of land, water, animals, plants? How does this expand your understanding of what needs healing or atonement?

3. **Three dimensions of atonement:** The author discusses how atonement must address sin (broken harmony), historical trauma and injustice, and suffering creation. Which dimension has been most emphasized in your religious formation? Which has been most neglected? What would holistic atonement require from your faith community?

## CHAPTER 8: HOW DESTINY THEOLOGIES DECEIVE US

1. **Manifest destiny's legacy:** The author connects theological claims of chosenness and divine destiny to colonization, genocide, and ongoing oppression. Where do you see “destiny theology” still functioning in American Christianity and politics? How does this theology shape attitudes toward immigration, environmental destruction, and foreign policy?
2. **Consensus vs. hierarchy:** Indigenous governance often functioned through consensus and interdependence rather than hierarchical control. Describe your experience with these different models in churches, workplaces, or communities. What makes consensus-based decision-making difficult for people formed in Western hierarchical systems? What might we lose if we never learn it?
3. **God's omnipotence reconsidered:** The author questions whether God's lack of control makes God less powerful or actually more loving. How does your image of God change if you release the need for God to be all-controlling? What becomes possible in your relationship with Creator and with others?

## CHAPTER 9: HOW TO UNEARTH JESUS'S MESSAGE

1. **Jesus in context:** The author emphasizes understanding Jesus as a first-century Palestinian Jew teaching about shalom, sabbath, and jubilee restoration. What elements of Jesus's actual historical and religious context are least familiar to you? How might recovering these contexts change which of Jesus's teachings you prioritize?
2. **The Universal Christ:** Drawing on the work of Richard Rohr, Woodley explores Christ as the animating presence in all creation, not limited to the historical Jesus. When have you experienced the sacred in creation, in other people, or in unexpected places? How does this expanded Christology challenge or liberate your faith?
3. **Peace teachings across traditions:** The author shows how Jesus's peace teachings echo Indigenous wisdom from many cultures and spiritual leaders worldwide. What does this pattern reveal about truth and revelation? How might Christians honor these parallel wisdoms without colonizing or dismissing them?

## CHAPTER 10: HOW ALL CREATION GETS RESTORED

1. **Jesus the Indigenous boy:** Woodley invites us to imagine Jesus as “a brown-skinned, Indigenous tribal boy from Nazareth who never outgrew his intimate relationship with the whole community of creation.” Sit with this image. What possibilities emerge when you picture Jesus this way, observing beetles and bird nests with the wonder of a Native child?
2. **Creation as kin, not resource:** Western Christianity has largely treated creation as backdrop or resource rather than as kin and a participant in redemption. Describe a moment when you've experienced creation as

relative, teacher, or sacred presence rather than as object. What would it require for your faith community to center creation care as spiritual practice?

3. **Global Jesus:** The author explores how different cultures interpret Jesus through their own wisdom—African Ubuntu, Asian concepts of harmony, Latin American liberation. How does your cultural location shape your understanding of Jesus? What might you learn from engaging seriously with non-Western Christologies rather than assuming that Western interpretations are universal?

## CHAPTER 11: HOW WE RECOVER FROM WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

1. **Unity and diversity in creation:** The author observes that quarks never exist alone, and nothing in creation is singular; everything operates as part of a complex system. How does this reality challenge Western individualism and the “personal relationship with Jesus” emphasis? What would shift in your spiritual life and community if you truly believed we’re designed for interdependence?
2. **The community of Creator:** Woodley’s trinitarian theology emphasizes God as communal relationship rather than singular authority. How does this model challenge hierarchical power structures in church and society? What practical differences emerge when we organize around mutual deference and preference rather than top-down control?
3. **Recovery work:** The author lists specific recovery work: listening to those harmed, repairing damage, changing worship practices, centering marginalized voices, returning stolen land. Choose one of these and explore: What would this actually require in your context? What fears or resistance arise when you imagine doing it? What might become possible through this work?

## CHAPTER 12: HOW TO FIND COURAGE FOR THE DAYS AHEAD

1. **Hopeful realism:** Woodley doesn’t offer cheap optimism but points to examples like Theodore Weld and Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose truth-telling and narrative imagination created “an unstoppable force against American slavery.” Where do you see this combination of exposing truth and creative reimagining at work today? What’s your role in this kind of transformation?
2. **Walking the good road:** The author describes his identity as “both White and a Keetoowah descendant, a follower of Jesus, a bridge-builder” and says that he finds wholeness in complexity rather than singular categories. What tensions or multiplicities do you carry in your own identity? How might embracing rather than resolving these tensions be a source of strength and wisdom?
3. **Working together:** Woodley insists the only hope for our collective future “requires us all working together.” What, in your experience, prevents collaboration across difference? What specific practices or commitments might help your community move toward genuine solidarity rather than superficial coalition? Where are you being called to show up as an accomplice rather than an ally?
4. **Take an inventory and make a plan:** Consider how this book has affected your whole self—your spirituality, your body, your mental reservations about Western Christianity, your social relationships, your relationship with the community of creation. What’s different now than when you started reading? What’s been confirmed, what’s been unsettled, what’s been set free? Is there a path forward for you that involves reimagining following Jesus with others in a different context—perhaps outside the structures that have tried to contain him? What are the first steps along this journey for you? Who might walk it with you? What do you need to release to begin? Keeping in mind the ten pathways to collective healing in chapter 11 (pp. 225–227), make a plan of your own, starting with your own Step 1, Step 2, etc. Discuss your plan with like-minded people. Be courageous!