

THE ADVENTURE CHALLENGE

UNLIKE A LOT OF BOOKS, whose authors hope that you “can’t put it down,” I actually hope you will.

Ideally, as your Christian imagination is ignited by small things, you’ll set this book down and respond to the Spirit’s tug by taking one small step. It is kind of cool that you are the only person in the world who can connect the dots between Jesus’ heart for a world in need and the neighbors whose lives touch yours. This study guide is meant to help you do that. Specifically, it can help you identify the particular ways in which the ideas discussed in each chapter can be fleshed out in your situation.

Spend some time with these questions, being expectant that the Spirit is inspiring, leading and equipping you. Jot down ideas as they come. Write the names of neighbors who come to mind or descriptions of the ones whose names you’d like to learn. Notice the kinds of opportunities that energize you. Share with a friend how God is leading you.

Then . . . put this book down!

Oh sure, you can finish reading it. You can even discuss it with your small group or Sunday school class. I hope you do. But then set it on the coffee table and go take that first small step with great love.



If you're studying the book as an individual, go to **Individual Study** to learn how to use The Adventure Challenge.



If you're studying the book with a group, go to p. 224, **Group Study**, to learn how to use The Adventure Challenge.



Individual Study

Note: Before you begin working through the study guide questions, go online to take our short quiz to find out how you rate as someone who engages with a world in need: www.margotstarbuck.com/smallthingsquiz.

USE AN OLD NOTEBOOK OR JOURNAL with some fresh pages left as you move through this study guide. Because you can *expect God to meet you*, you're going to want to have a written record of your prayerful musings. Your insights and questions and noticings and wonderings open you up to God's leading. A record of what God is doing in your heart right now will prove to be a treasure as you grow spiritually.

You can expect to meet God here.

For your journal work:

1. Pray

God of love, Father of Jesus, here I am. Open my eyes to see your face and open my ears to hear your voice. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

2. Reflect

- a. What struck you or stuck with you from the last study?
- b. Describe how you did or did not respond to the adventure challenge that you chose last week. What meaning do you glean from how you did or did not respond?

3. Questions

Work through the study guide questions provided. Be sure to keep your responses intimately tied to your particular life circumstances.

4. Adventure Challenge

Choose just *one* of the adventure challenges from this week's study and jot down how you hope to respond to it during this next week.

5. Pray

God of mercy, Father of Jesus, fill me with your love for the world. Guide me as I move toward your beloved ones. Grant me courage to love in your name.

One tip: keep your study focused on *your* role in bearing God's love to a world in need. This isn't a theoretical academic inquiry! It's all about paying attention to those particular places where God is leading *you*.

Group Study

Note: Before your group begins to study Small Things, encourage participants to take a short quiz to find out how they rate as someone who engages with a world in need. You can find the quiz at www.MargotStarbuck.com.

Discussing the quiz is a great icebreaker at your first meeting!

Do you know what a springboard is? It's that bouncy thing that gymnasts jump on before flying through the air toward some unwieldy apparatus. These questions are meant to be a springboard for your discussion of *Small Things*. Not all of the sections for each week will apply to each person. Group members should engage with the sections that are most relevant to their circumstances. The discussion can then—ideally!—be tailor-made to fit your particular group. We mention this to give you the freedom to let your conversation wander off where it may.

At the beginning of each group:

1. Prayer

Open with prayer, asking the Spirit to guide the group's conversation.

2. Reflect

Ask the group: What's one thing that struck you from last week's conversation? Was anything particularly surprising or convicting or challenging?

3. Challenge Check-In

Ask the group:

- a. Which adventure challenge did you choose last week, and how did you respond?

- b. Is there meaning to be gleaned for you in the way that you did or did not embrace the challenge?

During each group:

4. Discussion Questions

Move through the questions provided. The six-week study guide will help keep your group moving in the right direction.

5. Ending the Discussion

Stop the discussion ten minutes before the group is scheduled to end, to leave time for a leisurely wrap-up (see below). If it's helpful, designate the most anxious person in the room—or the one itchiest to get out on time—to be the timekeeper.

At the end of each group:

6. Think Back

Invite people to share one thing that they'll take from this week's conversation.

7. Adventure Challenge

Invite each person to share which adventure challenge they've chosen and how they hope to engage with it.

8. Prayer

Invite one member to close in prayer, asking both for God's guidance and for the courage to respond in love to a world in need.

One tip: Keep your study focused on *your* role in bearing God's love to a world in need. This isn't a theoretical academic inquiry! It's all about paying attention to those particular places where God is leading *you*.

A Six-Week Study Guide

WEEK I: CHAPTERS 1-5

The Big Idea and How We're Wired

1. THE PLAN

Read Matthew 25:31-46. Knowing what your daily life is like, begin to imagine (journal or discuss) what each of these might mean in your context:

- a. food for the hungry
- b. drink for the thirsty
- c. hospitality for the stranger
- d. clothing for the naked
- e. care for the sick
- f. visits to the prisoner

Don't be afraid to get creative! (For example: taking sippy cups to a local shelter, or serving lemonade to the crew doing landscaping at your church.)

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Choose one of these invitations above that makes sense for you to embrace this week.*

2. BIBLE

Read James 2. Which verse feels most surprising or radical or challenging? What would it look like to live it out?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Is there a "poor person" (James 2:1-8) in your life right now who you can shower with dignity, loving him or her the way you love yourself? Describe how you'll engage with this beloved one.*

3. AWARENESS

Read Luke 16:19-31. Where have you chosen to squeeze your

eyes shut to the world's need? Describe the opportunities, if any, you've had to see poverty up close and personal. How did these experiences affect you?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Make one small choice this week to stay aware of the world's needs. (Be specific; otherwise, you might not do it!)*

4. OUR OWN

Read Deuteronomy 15:7-8, noticing how God expects the Israelites to care for their "own." Other verses mandate the Israelites to care for the orphan, the widow and the alien. Which are the first faces that jump to mind when you think of those who are your own? Outside of this intimate circle, do you have a sense that there are *particular* people God has invited you to call your own? For example, it may be that you have a special heart for orphan care, or racial reconciliation, or nursing homes. Where do you sense God leading you today?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Prayerfully ask God to open your eyes to one person you might begin to love as your very own. Pray for this person daily.*

5. STRANGER

Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42 crosses boundaries of gender, race and religion. With whom do you find it hardest to connect: someone across lines of age, gender, race, language, class, education, income, religion, politics, ability or sexual orientation? What type of person, right now, feels most like a "stranger" to you? Where might you connect with someone like this?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Take one practical step this week to move toward a beloved child of God who is demographically different from you. (Share who this is with the group to give the challenge some real traction.)*

Remember, just choose *one* of these adventure challenges to embrace this week!

WEEK II: CHAPTERS 6-12

Noticing How We've Been Made

Answer questions for either chapter six or chapter seven.

6. EXTROVERTS

Look at the ministry opportunities happening in your own faith community and identify the ones most naturally suited to extroverts. If you're an extrovert, where has your extroversion been used for the kingdom good? Did any new possibilities in this chapter trigger your imagination?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: Extend yourself in friendship to one person—someone you cross paths with in your regular routine—who might be lonely. (What is his or her name?)

7. INTROVERTS

Look at the ministry opportunities happening in your own faith community, and identify the ones most naturally suited to introverts. If you're an introvert, where has your introversion been used for the kingdom good? Did any new possibilities in this chapter trigger your imagination?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: Of the six opportunities listed at the end of chapter seven, embrace one this week. Or create a fresh one!

Answer questions for either chapter eight or chapter nine.

8. MEN

Read Mark 10:35-45 and identify how you do or do not find yourself in this story. Name those areas of life in which you are most driven to be recognized as significant or important. King suggests that you convert the natural impulse toward greatness to become first in love, first in generosity.

What has or what could that look like in your particular situation?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *In one small way, step into upside-down kingdom greatness this week by choosing for smallness. What, exactly, will this look like for you in the next seven days?*

9. WOMEN

Read Matthew 5:14-16 and consider the impact you have in the world. Do you consider yourself a tiny candle flicker or a high-wattage spotlight? List some of the ways that you have real influence—in the way you use your time, energy and resources—both inside the home and outside the home. Did any of these surprise you? Also, name the places to which you have, by virtue of your gender, easier access than men. Unpack the kingdom possibilities.

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Go online and print off contact info for a local women's shelter. Post it in a public women's restroom in your church, school, grocery store or place of employment.*

Answer questions for one of the following chapters (ten or eleven or twelve).

10. YOUNG

Read 1 Timothy 4:12. Do you perceive that others look down on you because of your age? As you think about engaging with a world in need, what about your current circumstance lends itself to flexibility and possibility? What about your life today feels as though it keeps you from the poor? Prayerfully offer both of these back to God.

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *This week create a journal entry, saved as a file on your computer, that describes your hopes, dreams and commitments for engaging a world in*

need over the next decade. Ask a like-minded friend to do the same. Share these with one another, commit to pray for each other and check in regularly.

11. MIDDLE

Create a thorough list of the social networks to which you've belonged, past and present: clubs, organizations, teams, denominations, congregations, alma maters, employers, online networks, etc. How are you using these, now, for the good of others? Where do you see potential?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Do you know someone who's out of work? (If not, your church secretary can give you a name.) Choose one:*

- a. *Post "I have a friend who'd be great at _____ and needs a job!" as your Facebook status and see if you get any bites.*
- b. *Scroll through www.craigslist.com to see if you can find anything that looks like a good fit for this friend. (This can be super-fun treasure hunting!)*
- c. *Create your own plan to connect someone in need with the resources to which you have access.*

(Which one of these has your name on it this week?)

12. OLD

Read Psalm 92:12-15. Do you know anyone like Susan who, in retirement, has looked beyond her or his personal family circle and been "fruitful"? What is he or she up to? Name the places where your energies are being spent on those who are different from you. Where have *God's own* become *your own*? Where do you see possibilities?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Dream about what your life could be during this season by brainstorming a list of kingdom possibilities. Share this with someone you trust.*

Remember, just choose *one* of these adventure challenges to embrace this week!

WEEK III: CHAPTERS 13-18

Accounting for Our Current Locations

Answer questions for chapter thirteen or fourteen or fifteen.

13. SCHOOL

Read John 13:34. What “others” do you think Jesus means? From chapter 13, what is the first rule for loving a world in need? Who are the folks on your campus who are most easily overlooked? (How many of them can you greet by name?) What are the opportunities on your campus, both local and global, that allow you to engage with a world in need?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *In the next week, learn the name and story of one individual who works on your campus in one of the lowest paying jobs—e.g., grounds, food service or custodial.*

14. WORK

Read Colossians 3:23-24. What does this mean for you? Is there a way in which your particular job intersects with a world in need? How? If there’s not an overt connection, can you think of some ways that your work does, even tangentially, affect the experience of the poor?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Identify one small step that you can take in your workplace this week to either (a) connect personally with someone who is less affluent or (b) affect a system in your workplace that could positively change the experience of the poor.*

15. HOME

Read Hebrews 13:1-3. What are the ways that you are, or might be, moving outside your home to engage with a world in

need? What are the ways you are, or might be, inviting folks who are demographically different from yourself into your home? Describe the obstacles you anticipate or experience.

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Learn the name of one person in your weekly routine who you do not yet know—e.g., someone at the grocery store, cleaners or pharmacy. Describe which person, in your natural orbit, you plan to meet this week.*

Answer questions for chapter sixteen or seventeen or eighteen.

16. URBAN

If you live or work or worship or play or shop in an urban environment, in which particular places is the world's need unavoidable? Where do you brush up against it? How have you responded?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Visit a house of worship where folks in your community who might be marginalized by race or income worship.*

17. RURAL

Identify the people at the center of your natural social circle. Now: who are the other folks that are living on the far margins of your rural community? Where are the places that your lives do, or could, overlap?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Visit a house of worship where folks in your community who might be marginalized by race or income worship.*

18. SUBURBAN

Name the places where folks who are poor do move through your community, either to work, to receive services, to worship or for some other reason. Where are the points at which you have connected with those who are poor?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Visit a house of worship where folks in your community who might be marginalized by race or income worship.*

Remember, just choose *one* of these adventure challenges to embrace this week!

WEEK IV: CHAPTERS 19-23

Considering Our Family Situations

If you're single and caregiving, hop down to chapters twenty-one through twenty-three.

Married? Or single and kid-free? Answer questions for either chapter nineteen or chapter twenty.

19. SINGLE

Name some single heroes—both the historic ones and also the ones you know today—who have been builders of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Is there a particular gift that your singleness allows you to share with others? Read Isaiah 43:1. To what degree do you feel embraced and cherished by God? Has the body of Christ reflected that reality in your life?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Consider and take one small kingdom step this week that could not be as easily achieved by someone married or parenting. (Be creative!)*

20. MARRIED

Read Hebrews 10:24. Is there a way in which you and your spouse spur one another on to love and good deeds? How has engaging with a world in need looked in your marriage thus far? Are you the spouse who is more reluctant to move toward a world in need, or are you the one more eager to embrace relationship with those in need? Identify the challenge that God might be putting before you right now.

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Take responsibility for your own movement toward a world in need this week by taking one small step of which your spouse is not aware!*

When others are in your care:

- a. If you care for *particularly* needy ones, answer questions for chapter twenty-one.
- b. If you're parenting those who are more self-sufficient, answer questions for chapter twenty-two.
- c. If you'd like to compare a popular view of family life with a Jesus-view of family life, answer questions for chapter twenty-three.

21. CAREGIVER

On a scale from one to ten, how do you feel you and your charges are doing at engaging a world in need? (*One* means that you're trapped in your dwelling, working on toilet-teaching while someone who runs around all day without undies is peeing on the floor. *Ten* means that your five-year-old has launched a nonprofit that provides clean drinking water to war orphans overseas.) Describe how satisfied and/or frustrated you are with your self-ranking.

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Do nothing. For this day, your "small thing with great love" is giving yourself the gift of grace. (And maybe praying for under-resourced caregivers in situations around the globe.)*

22. PARENT

Read Proverbs 3:1-4. Are there ways in which you've attempted to turn your children's hearts toward God's commands to care for the poor? What is it that moves the heart of your child? (Animals? Babies? Sick kids?) Are there ways in which you've nurtured that compassion? Are there ways in which you've

shared your own passion for a world in need with your child?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Take one small step to allow your child to engage with a world in need. Find one way to cross barriers of comfort and security this week, for the sake of nurturing your child's heart.*

23. FAMILY VALUES

Identify some of the ways that you may have placed family, instead of Jesus and his values, at the center of your priorities.

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *This week, take a small step that helps your family break free from self-centeredness. Embrace a challenge that is uniquely suited to your family. Will you shut down pixelated screens to break an addiction to entertainment? Will you use "family time" to engage with others? Will you redirect one meal's dining-out budget to those who are hungry?*

Remember, just choose *one* of these adventure challenges to embrace this week!

WEEK V: CHAPTERS 24-27

Living Mindfully of Beloved Others

24. MINDFULNESS

Read Proverbs 28:27. Would you say that the eyes of your heart are open or closed to the poor? Chances are that you affect the experience of the poor with most of the purchases you make! Describe how meaningful, or decidedly not meaningful, this reality is to you. Does it influence your decisions? Will your choices change at all?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Go online and watch the Story of Stuff. Then, for starters, notice on food and clothing labels what country your resources originated in. Pray for the people whose hands have provided your stuff.*

25. SPEND LESS

Read Matthew 6:11. We express gratitude for our daily bread when we stop at *enough*. Describe your relationship with enough-ness when it comes to food, clothing, technology and other “stuff.” (If you collect a certain kind of item, for example, will your collection ever have *enough*?)

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *This week, target your food consumption as a place to practice enough. Embrace the spiritual discipline of stopping at enough by eating what your body needs and not what it wants. (This really is a radical experiment for most Americans.) If you struggle with disordered eating, or if you have in the past, skip this challenge or apply it to a nonfood area of your life, such as the money you spend on other shopping habits.*

26. SPEND MORE

Read Proverbs 14:31. Do you see any ways in which your spending choices contribute to the oppression of the poor? How does this idea about loving others by spending more money—to obtain equitably sourced goods—sit with you? Is there a way you’re doing this now? Where might you begin? What feels like the biggest obstacle?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Identify one item that you typically consume and that is produced locally; purchase it this week. (Potential markets include farmers’ markets, grocery stores that stock locally grown produce, neighbors or colleagues who sell eggs from backyard chickens, etc.)*

27. GIVE

Read Matthew 6:1-4 (NIV). Notice whether Jesus says “if you give to the needy” or “when you give to the needy.” Describe what your giving habits look like right now. Does any of your financial giving correspond to relationships

you're developing? How might you begin to develop a relationship that follows the path in which your giving monies flow?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Write a letter to someone who benefits from your financial giving. This might be a sponsored child, an overseas missionary that is sponsored by your church or the director of a local agency in town.*

Remember, just choose *one* of these adventure challenges to embrace this week!

WEEK VI: CHAPTERS 28-31

Embracing the Possibilities

28. IMPACT

In John 8:1-11, after Jesus graciously delivers a woman caught in adultery, the next words we hear from him are, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). What does Jesus say in Matthew 5:14? Can you identify ways that you are being light in the world God loves, especially in relation to the poor? In this chapter, we looked at some pretty unlikely heroes who have influenced the lives of others. How convinced are you that *your* life can influence others like this?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGES:

- a. Local:** *Minister to lives close to home. Whether you work with youth or have a heart for one of your neighbors or have noticed someone at church who seems lonely, take one step toward someone this week with great love.*
- b. Global:** *Prayerfully consider whether sponsoring a child—or sponsoring an additional child—might have your name on it. Visit www.compassion.com to learn more.*

29. INFLUENCE

Read Acts 2:42-47. How is the influence of God's people in

the world *corporate*? Your impact in the kingdom that Jesus is building multiplies as you invite others to join you. When has someone roped you into loving a world in need? When have you invited someone else to join you? Share the outcomes.

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *This week—in person or by phone, text or email—invite one other person to join you in moving toward a world in need. (Ideas: Invite a teenager to join you in the church nursery. Grab a friend and create a special surprise gift basket for a mutual friend who is stressed. Ask a colleague to bake cookies with you to take to a local shelter. Possibilities are endless.)*

30. TRANSFORMATION

Your journey toward a world in need is particular to you! As you've read this book, what feels like one manageable change you could integrate into your life? What other sorts of challenges feel as though they will require the most courage and energy from you?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: *Embrace one practice this week as a spiritual discipline that will free you to be for others.*

THE FINAL CHALLENGE

Mark 2:13-15 says:

Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him.

Imagine that you are sitting at your regular work when Jesus invites you, as he invited Levi, “Come with me.” Close your eyes and imagine where—or to whom—Jesus is leading you right now. Can you discern a first step that Jesus is inviting you to take as you follow him toward the ones his Father loves?

ADVENTURE CHALLENGE: Commit to inviting one person you know just peripherally right now—a housekeeper, a barista, a janitor, a church member—to join you for dinner in your home. Then just wait and see what God might have up his divine sleeve.

Remember, just choose *one* of these adventure challenges to embrace this week!