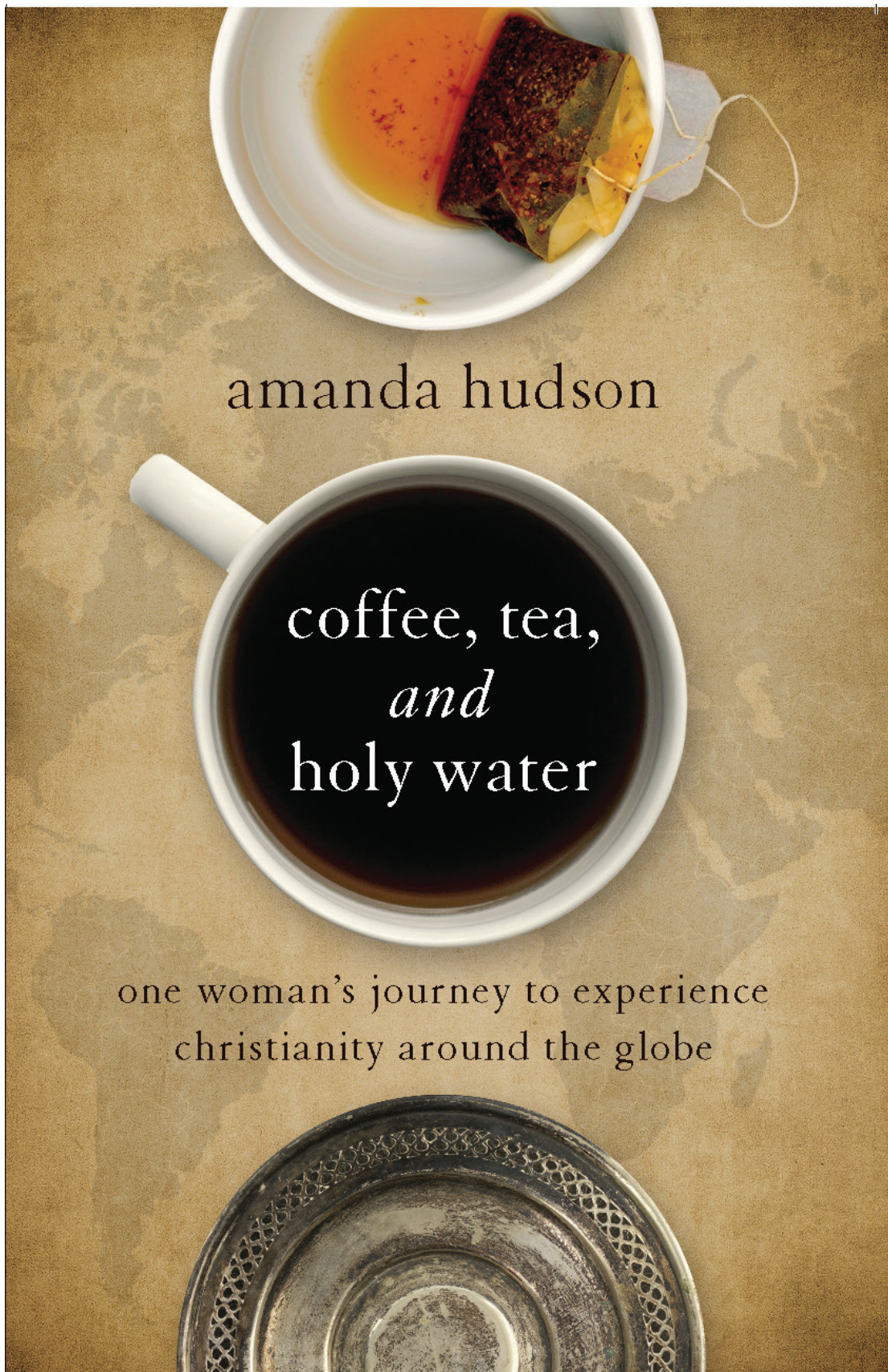


COFFEE, TEA, AND HOLY WATER / Online Study Guide



amanda hudson

coffee, tea,
and
holy water

one woman's journey to experience
christianity around the globe

Coffee, Tea, and Holy Water

Small Group Study Guide

What does it look like to travel outside your spiritual comfort zone? Especially when that comfort zone involves crossing international boundaries?

Coffee, Tea, and Holy Water takes the reader on an entertaining journey to five countries—Brazil, Wales, Tanzania, China, and Honduras—to share thoughts about Christianity around the world.

From the wildlife of Ngorongoro Crater, the Eighth Wonder of the World, to the banana trees of Honduras, join author Amanda Hudson in a cross-cultural trek that will appeal to everyone interested in religion beyond their own backyard.

W E E K 1 :
Brazil

In a nutshell, that's what propelled me to make this trip—a visit to five countries to see exactly what I, a born-again American believer, have in common with brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

How does the influence of spiritism affect the faithful in Brazil?

What is the number one question Britain would like to ask God?

What does Christianity look like in house-churches in Communist China?

How do people address God in prayer in Honduras? . . .

And what exactly do Maasai women do after a discussion about God in their boma?

1. In the Beyond the Red Sea section, the author writes, “I began to wonder: If being a Christian was such an integral part of my culture, what does normal Christianity look like in other countries? Not in the most extreme places on earth, but among everyday lives in other regions?”

What questions have you had about the church in other countries?

2. The author makes the statement, “If Christianity is like coffee, the American choices are as vast as the selection in a five-star coffee shop.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. The author briefly describes her childhood memories of

church. Do you have specific childhood memories of church? Were they similar? Why or why not?

4. Would you say you live in a “culture of Christianity”? Explain.

Bonus: If you had to compare your current church to coffee, what drink would it be?

5. The author also describes her experience under Rio’s Corcovado statue of the Christ:

“With the statue behind me, I close my eyes and set my heart free—free to blow around in the wind, tickle the face of Christ, and dive toward the water in a rollicking swoop. Now that I am finally here, I wonder, What should I do? Say a prayer? Make a wish?

“I look at the statue again, eyeing it carefully, as if it really were Jesus and I could ask him questions.

“‘Lord, there are so many things I don’t understand. Why are you so hard to find?’

“‘Why do you seem to speak to some people and not others?’

“‘How much of my life is your will?’

“I wait for something profound to happen, but I don’t suppose God works that way.

“My heart returns to me just as it left: in silence. It’s as if the statue is trying to tell me, ‘Spiritual experiences are not up here. They’re down there.’

“And the statue, of course, is right.”

Have you ever had an experience or revelation similar to this? Explain.

6. What three questions would you most like to ask Jesus?

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7. In the Becoming a Gospel section, the author gives her testimony about being “sincerely, yet almost ‘accidentally,’ saved” . . . no sensationalism. Did your own conversion come with any sort of special feelings or sensationalism? Discuss.

Estevan gives his testimony and says he doesn’t advocate asking God for signs. What are your thoughts and why?

8. What do you think are three idols the average American faces? What are the two biggest idols you personally face? Are they the same? Why or why not?

Group discussion: Do you believe in the spirit world?

Journal question: What is your reaction to Estevan’s testimony?

W E E K 2 :
Wales

Flying over the Atlantic Ocean the next day, I turn my attention to the next country on my journey—the U.K., or more specifically, Wales. As the plane approaches the runway, I can see a classic British trademark: houses squeezed together in long strips called “flats.” Row upon row, hundreds upon hundreds. Just before touching down, we skim over a rolling green pasture with grazing sheep, so close it seems like we will land among them.

1. The popular British Alpha class featured in Land of the Cymru provides a safe place for skeptics to ask questions. What particular skeptics’ questions do you have about the faith? Have each group member share at least one question.

2. The author writes:

“As I review my notes, I find myself annoyed because we got off the lesson. Then it occurs to me . . . maybe that *was* the lesson. What I mean is, the conversation tonight was a microcosm of what is going on all across the country. While people might like to attribute their doubts to more intellectual motives, most people’s objections to God aren’t actually coming from answers to the Alpha questions—they’re coming from a reaction to the church, which many see as a lifeless institution. Try to lead a discussion through the basics of the Christian faith . . . and you may as well be herding cats.”

Do you think this statement is true in your own city? Why or why not?

3. The author shares a quote from C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*: "A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all." Name at least three examples of "moderated religion" and share with the group.
4. In *Viva*, the author writes, "When Christians are not linked together, every new regional problem such as food shortage, disease, or resource scarcity has to be dealt with as if for the first time." Do you see any examples of this in your own city or state? Discuss.
5. Karen says, "I always thought of God as . . . an uncle. . . . I finally came to realize he was my Father." What was your childhood perception of God? How has that changed over the years?

How do you think America views God?

6. In *The Prosperity Gospel and the Problem of Pain*, the author

writes, “I am beginning to think that this ‘problem of pain’ is what ultimately turns people away from God—not the intellectual argument for a supreme being,” as many suppose. Do you think this statement is true? Why or why not?

Journal question: What is your definition of “the prosperity gospel”?

7. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the demon Screwtape writes, “It’s funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: In reality, our best work is done by keeping things out.” Discuss this statement.
8. *The Screwtape Letters* discusses the heavenly war for human souls from the “Enemy’s” perspective. What “strategies” do you see at work on your peers?

Journal question: What are three strategies of the enemy you see at work in your own life?

9. In *Feed the Birds*, the author says, “Perhaps, in a world of theories and theology, we are missing the obvious—maybe all

Christ wants us to do is ‘feed the birds.’”

Journal question: What does “feeding the birds” mean to you?

W E E K 3 :
Tanzania

I depart London's Heathrow Airport the next day. But it isn't until I look out the window of the plane and see nothing but sand that I realize: I am really going to be in Africa in a few hours' time. My next stop is Tanzania, in the heart of east Africa.

1. The author writes, "After a few days with the Smelsers, I find I am learning several things about Tanzania very quickly. First, the most simple luxuries take a lot of work—clean clothes, hot water for showers—even brushing one's teeth requires using a glass of sterilized water. Whether the toilet will flush or the Internet will work is anyone's guess. Clothes cannot be left on the line overnight, as parasites will get into them. Dishes and vegetables must be rinsed in bleach water to kill bacteria."

What types of "efficiency" do we take for granted in the U.S.? Have the group break these into six categories: *Housing/Utilities/Transportation/Communications/Social/Healthcare*. List ten examples of each.

2. The author compares doing humanitarian work in Africa to the metaphor of trying to "empty the ocean with an eyedropper." Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. Have you ever had an “eyedropper” moment? If so, share with the group.

4. Personally, do you believe in the *paternalist* or *indigenous* theory of Western outreach? Why or why not? Realizing this is a complex issue, discuss with the group.

Bonus: Have you ever noticed these principles at work in an example close to you? If so, share.

5. What is your favorite life-quote or proverb?

6. In Ngorongoro Crater and Noah’s Ark, the author uses the analogy of the animal kingdom to describe the fruits of the Spirit. Using this analogy, what animal would you be?

7. What questions or concerns have you encountered when giving to money Africa? Realizing this is a complex issue, discuss with the group.

W E E K 4 :
China

I could not write about exploring Christianity around the world without mentioning the blossoming of Christianity in China. . . . Nicknamed “The Middle Country,” China is the world’s most populous nation, with more than 1.3 billion people. It is also the world’s most atheistic country, controlled by the grip of its Communist government.

1. What are the main differences between the Chinese Three Self Church and the American church? What are the similarities?

Journal question: Given the choice between Three Self or Chinese house church, which do you think you would prefer and why?

2. What three Chinese cultural differences would influence you the most and why?
3. The author writes, “Is it expectations, then, that determine a person’s contentment level? Maybe.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Discuss with the group.
4. What other factors do you think determine a person’s contentment level?
5. The author tells the story of her childhood friend Ginger and

their “life notebooks.” Did you ever do anything similar as a child? Share with the group.

6. The author writes, “While the culture is atheistic, the Chinese way of living—with its emphasis on sharing, avoiding gluttony, responsibility for family, and being content with what one has (in general, putting others’ needs above oneself)—seems inherently more ‘Christian’ than the American lifestyle of *me, me, me.*”

Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

7. List five qualities of American independence we take for granted.

W E E K 5 :
Honduras

The vistas beyond Tegucigalpa's congestion are startlingly beautiful. Meanwhile, stacked houses—mostly beige, with spots of peach and teal, roped off with sticks and barbed wire—cover the hillside in what looks like the favelas of Rio, with banana and mango trees all around.

1. Have you ever been on a group mission trip? If so, where? Share with the group.
2. “When the Spirit leaves the room, all you’ve got left is religion.” What do you think this particular quotation means?

Journal question: Write a couple of pages concerning your own thoughts about this statement.

3. The author tells the story of her trip out West as a teenager and the stash of SunDrop. Have you ever bought the off-brand of an item and been sorry? Share your story with the group.
4. In what areas of life do you think it’s OK to accept imitations?
5. In what specific areas would you accept no imitations?

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6. The author says, “Somewhere along the dusty roads of Tegucigalpa, I decide I will stop living inside the box.”

Journal question: “The box” is different for everyone. What does this statement mean to you?

WEEK 6 :
Appendix

If God called you to cross borders, would you do it?

I don't just mean geographically. We all have our own borders, whether they're denominational, national, or even self-imposed fear.

I think sometimes God beckons us to cross borders, not because he wants us to live there but because he wants to broaden our sights. I can't tell you what borders you should cross or when you should cross them. Only that Christianity isn't a box with rigid sides . . . it is a moving, flowing thing.

1. Having reviewed the five countries in *Coffee, Tea, and Holy Water*, which country would you most like to visit and why?
2. What spiritual themes could you tell the author considered in the book, and which theme resonates the most with you?
3. What church in the book did you feel was most similar to your church? The most different?
4. What three things about mission work interest you the most?
5. What, to you, would be the hardest thing to consider about missions?
6. What would be the easiest?