

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

# Better Together

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HOW WOMEN *and* MEN  
CAN HEAL *the* DIVIDE AND  
WORK TOGETHER  
TO TRANSFORM *the* FUTURE



Danielle  
Strickland

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THOMAS NELSON

*Better Together Study Guide*

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Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Nelson Books. Nelson Books is a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.

Published in association with The Bindery Agency, [www.The.Bindery.Agency.com](http://www.The.Bindery.Agency.com).

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ISBN 978-0-310-11076-7 (softcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-11077-4 (ebook)

First Printing January 2020 / Printed in the United States of America



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## Introduction

### How This Study Guide Works

Welcome to the *Better Together Study Guide*, a six-week group experience intended to amplify your growth as you watch the video teachings and read my book *Better Together*. This study guide contains six guided Group Gatherings and six weeks' worth of guided Personal Time of reflection and prayer. My hope is that this experience will help you to digest and embrace the truths you find in *Better Together* by helping you to engage with God and others. Before you dive in, let's take a closer look at what this guide has to offer.

#### **GROUP GATHERINGS**

During your guided Group Gatherings you and others will be exploring and discussing what it means to be *Better Together*. Each gathering is designed to be 70–90 minutes and is divided into three main sections: Warm Up, Watch Video, Unpack Together.

#### **WARM UP (5-10 MINUTES)**

This is an opportunity for each of you to check in with God and your group before diving into your video session. Though it is the shortest of the three sections, it can have a huge impact on the openness of your group.

#### **WATCH VIDEO (20-22 MINUTES)**

Every Group Gathering is set up with a video that explores a specific aspect of being *Better Together*. During the video, you are encouraged

to take notes as to what stands out to you and what questions you still have. Each video is roughly 20 minutes and is followed by an opportunity to quickly jot down what resonated with you most and what was most challenging.

## UNPACK TOGETHER (35-45 MINUTES)

Most of your Group Gathering will be spent unpacking each session's concept together. Each gathering you will (1) *Discuss Together* the video you just watched and the topic it brought up, (2) *Explore Together* a passage of Scripture and what it means for you today, (3) *Experience Together* a group activity that will help you to engage with that session's topic, and (4) *Pray Together* to close out your meeting.

## PERSONAL TIME

In between each gathering there are three days' worth of personal time provided for you to reflect and pray on what you have been learning and experiencing so far. These times with God are not intended to be stress-inducing or burdensome. Rather, they are offered as opportunities for you to process with God what is going on in your heart and mind. You are encouraged to engage in all, some, or any of the activities you find there, while keeping in mind that the more you engage with God in this process, the more your heart will be opened to the transformation that he wants to bring within you.

Okay! You should be all ready to jump in! My prayer is that your eyes, mind, and heart would be opened to what God has for you and your group and that the seeds that are planted here will lead to the shared thriving of women and men for the sake of a better future for us all. Thanks for joining me.

Danielle



## Session 1: Through Kingdom Lenses

### Group Gathering

#### **WARM UP** (5–10 minutes)

##### INVITE GOD IN

Take a few minutes to talk with God silently about the lenses through which you see the world. Ask God where he wants you to pay attention to your worldview.

*If it is helpful, use the space below to write, draw, or express yourself to God.*

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##### DISCUSS TOGETHER

How do differences normally divide us in our culture? On a daily basis, where and in what ways do you see or experience differences driving us?

**WATCH VIDEO (22 minutes)**

*Watch the video for Group Gathering 1. Feel free to take notes in the space provided.*

**VIDEO NOTES**

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**John 9:1–12**

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**Finding Fault vs. Taking Responsibility**

“We choose to find fault with current situations when we want to escape responsibility to change them.”

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Jesus Uses Natural Means

“Jesus uses every natural means necessary. What I mean by this is that Jesus does well. We don’t see it coming.”

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Jesus Uses Supernatural Power

“Jesus infuses natural things with supernatural power.”

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Jesus Gives People Choices

“Jesus gives people choices.”

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**Galatians 3:26–29**

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**Power Is A Corrupting Influence If . . .**

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**TAKE A MOMENT**

Take two minutes to jot down what stood out to you the most about what Danielle said. What resonated with you and what was challenging?

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**UNPACK TOGETHER (35–45 minutes)**

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**DISCUSS TOGETHER**

1. Danielle said that an honest assessment of the lenses we wear is the starting place of shifting our perspective. What makes identifying the flaws of the lenses we wear so important? How can someone safely identify their flawed perspective in a way that is helpful and not shameful?

2. What are some natural means that can be implemented around us to shift the lenses through which we see the world? What would it look like to invite Jesus' supernatural power into those means? How can Christlike empowerment also play a role?

### Shifting Martha's Lenses:

#### Select a volunteer to read aloud to the group:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

**(Luke 10:38–42)**

### EXPLORE TOGETHER

*Group leader: select a volunteer to read the following passage and commentary aloud. Discuss the questions below.*

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

**(Galatians 3:26–29)**

**Gentile was a term describing any person of non-Jewish descent. In the New Testament non-Jewish persons are also referred to as Greek, given the heavy Greco-Roman influence throughout the Ancient Near East.**

### **What It Meant Then:**

As Paul writes this passionate yet heart-broken letter to the churches of Galatia, some major worldview shifts were under way for early Christians. Jesus' life-giving and radically inclusive message was spreading quickly across the known world, and not just among the Jewish community. The Holy Spirit was drawing both Jew and Gentile alike to receive new life in Christ. Though beautiful in so

many ways, the coming together of various cultures, backgrounds, and worldviews led to a lot of conflict among early Christians.

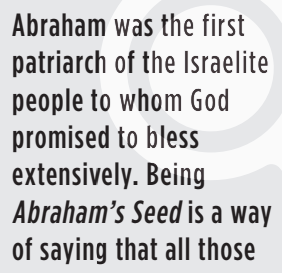
In the church in Galatia, a small group of Jewish Christians were pressuring Gentile believers to adhere to Jewish religious and cultural practices, claiming that salvation is perfected through them. These practices and beliefs were deeply ingrained into the Jewish way of life. This group even encouraged other Jewish Christians not to associate with Gentile believers who refused to bend to their pressure. Paul, a Jewish Christian himself, took huge exception to this, pointing out that all believers' salvation and growth happen through the power of Christ alone (Galatians 3:1–3). He claimed that the Jewish customs were no longer necessary and that there was no hope for salvation through Jewish religious law (Galatians 3:10–14).

In the passage on page 11, Paul challenges the worldview of both Jews and Gentiles, putting to rest the notion that there should be divisions among believers based on differences. Society of that time was stratified based on race, status, and gender. Those with the right qualifications would be elevated to certain levels of cultural and societal privilege while others were discriminated against. By using three consecutive pairs of opposites (Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female), Paul rejects three major dividing lines in first-century culture.

He even goes as far as saying that all who belong to Christ are *Abraham's seed*, a privilege previously bestowed on the Jewish people exclusively. In this Paul was admonishing followers of Jesus to see the world and others through the new kingdom lenses of inclusion, love, and equality.

### What It Means Now:

Paul outlines the cultural worldview that Jesus was calling his followers to embrace. Much like in the first century, our culture has a subtle yet powerful impact on the way we see the world and those around us. Recognizing and setting aside the lenses we wear is no small task, yet it is a necessary one if we are ever to see the shared thriving of humanity that Jesus desires. Christ has established new cultural viewpoints and norms for his followers to adhere to—ones where we are all children of God in Christ and on an equal footing regardless of our differences. Paul writes that we are *all one in Christ Jesus*, and it will take us all working together in order to shift these entrenched perspectives.



Abraham was the first patriarch of the Israelite people to whom God promised to bless extensively. Being *Abraham's Seed* is a way of saying that all those in Christ (including Gentiles) would receive the same rights and privileges that God promised to Abraham's descendants. This would have been a radical claim in Paul's time and likely met with fierce opposition.

## Looking Ahead

1. What do you think made it so difficult for Jewish Christians to shift their worldview and see others through Jesus' lenses? What made changing lenses so important for the early church?
2. What similarities and differences do you notice between a first-century approach to diversity and our culture's approach today? How have you seen the church embrace kingdom lenses? How have you seen the church embrace the lenses of our world?
3. Where in your own life have you noticed difficulty putting on Jesus' kingdom lenses of equality and love? What would it look like to start to better embrace that worldview with the support of Jesus and those around you?

## EXPERIENCE TOGETHER

### Instructions:

- Have one person read the guided prayer on pages 16–17 out loud to the group.
- As they read, take time to think about and pray about a situation in your life where you are struggling to see someone or something through Jesus' kingdom lenses.
- If needed, take notes as you go in the open space provided on the next page. After you are finished with the guided prayer, give everyone a few extra minutes to jot down any final thoughts from the prayer time.

- When everyone is ready, discuss your experience as a group. How does Jesus want to be present in that situation with you? How does he want to shift your perspective?
- Have the group encourage each member as they share.

**As the reader, make sure you are also engaging in prayer for yourself as you read.**

### PRAY TOGETHER

Have someone close your time in prayer by inviting God into the rest of this week. Ask Jesus to shift your worldview to better align with his.

## GUIDED PRAYER



*Before you begin, take a few minutes to yourself to think about a situation where you have struggled to love, respect, or include someone. It can be something you are currently experiencing or a situation from your past. Once everyone is ready, have one person read the following aloud as your group engages in this guided prayer. Reader, use the paragraph breaks to pause for at least 30 seconds. After you are done with the guided prayer, give everyone a few extra minutes to jot down any final thoughts from the prayer time.*

Imagine you are in a place that is especially peaceful for you. It can be a place in nature, a special place in your home, or somewhere else entirely.

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Now imagine Jesus is there with you. He smiles, bringing you even more peace. How is he engaging with you?

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Knowing that you are fully loved and accepted, tell him about the situation where you are struggling to love, respect, or include someone.

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Open up to Jesus about the situation, letting him know your thoughts and feelings about the situation and person. How does Jesus empathize with your thoughts and feelings?

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## Session 1: Through Kingdom Lenses

Now Jesus points out something to you that you notice for the first time. You are wearing a pair of dirty glasses. Glasses through which you are seeing this situation. Jesus gives the glasses a name. What is the name Jesus gives your glasses?

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He asks you to notice how the glasses are shaping the way you see this situation. He offers to clean your glasses in a way only he can. Will you let him? Imagine handing him your glasses.

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After cleaning your glasses, he offers them back to you. As he hands them to you, he gives them a new name and perspective through which to see the situation. What new name does he give to them? . . . Notice how they change your perspective on the situation.

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As you both get ready to leave together, thank Jesus for this gift he has given you.

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# Personal Study

*The following pages are for your personal study in between sessions. Engage in any or all of these three times of prayer and reflection in order to enhance your experience.*

## DAY • 1

“We can change [our lenses] by embracing the truth, imagining the possibilities, and confronting the barriers. We need to trade our patriarchal glasses for some clearer lenses.” **Danielle Strickland,**  
*Better Together, Chapter 7*



### READ

The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. **(1 Samuel 16:7b)**



### CONSIDER

Where in my life do I *look at things the way people* do? List the areas here:

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What would it look like to start seeing things the way the Lord does?

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### STEP OUT

Take the next 24 hours to really notice the way you are viewing others around you through the lens of external factors and stereotypes. As it comes up, invite God to transform your lens.



### PRAY

Make a list of all the ways you are tempted to judge people based on external factors. Ask God how he wants you to see those around you through his eyes.

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### LOOKING FOR MORE?

Read Chapter 5 of *Better Together* by Danielle Strickland and write down what stands out to you most.

DAY • 2

“If we are going to adjust our lives to fit the new social constructs of power we have got to do the work of identifying our own. How will we ever change something we are not recognizing or acknowledging? So what kind of power/privilege do we have?” **Danielle Strickland, *Better Together*, Chapter 10**



READ

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (**Romans 12:2**)



CONSIDER

In what ways am I conforming to the pattern of this world when it comes to the relationships of women and men? Define the ways here and then take time to write the obvious or potential consequences of conforming.

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Where do I need Jesus to transform and renew my mind? What specifically are you asking Jesus to transform, to renew? Be clear and declare your need. Honest vulnerability of need tills the soul’s soil for growth.

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## STEP OUT

Intentionally talk to three people outside your group this week about what you are learning in this group and how it is impacting you. Set a reminder on your phone if necessary.



## PRAY

Spend some time deeply considering with God what areas of your worldview need transformation and alignment with Jesus'. Ask God how you might cooperate with the transformation he wants to do in you.

[illegible]

## LOOKING FOR MORE?

Read all of Romans 12. What do you learn about the new culture Jesus wants to build for the church and ultimately the world?

DAY • 3

“When things get personal, they get closer and our perspective shifts. Far from talking about the ‘theory’ of empowerment, the conversation moves towards a felt need to change for the sake of our daughters and sons. It’s an important shift.” **Danielle Strickland, *Better Together*, Chapter 7**



READ

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)

*Discerning spirits* is a way of staying in tune with the Holy Spirit, understanding when a prophet or teaching comes from God and when one does not.



CONSIDER

How am I allowing beliefs or understandings not from God to guide my life (particularly in the area of inequality)? Describe here.

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Describe would it look like to tune myself with the Holy Spirit and his worldview.

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### STEP OUT

Ask a trusted friend if you can talk together about the lenses of inequality you both want to release. Discuss ways Jesus might see differently and pray for one another.



### PRAY

Spend some time asking and listening to God about what lie/s you are believing in the area of gender equality. After rejecting each lie in Jesus' name, ask him what truth he wants to replace the lie with.

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### LOOKING FOR MORE?

Read Chapter 6 of *Better Together* by Danielle Strickland and write down what stands out to you most.

[illegible]





## Better Together by Danielle Strickland

We are currently at a strategic cultural intersection with relationships between women and men eroding. And it seems no one knows what to do. While it is good for women to expose their pain, what often happens is that they immediately blame the person at the other end of it, which sets up a never-ending cycle of accusations, denial, avoidance, and ultimately devastation for everyone involved.

*Better Together* is a beacon of hope in a challenging storm. It's where thoughts can be rechanneled and hope rekindled as author Danielle Strickland offers steps toward a real and workable solution.

Danielle says, "I refuse to believe that all men are bad. I also refuse to believe that all women are victims. I don't want to be just hopeful, I want to be strategically hopeful. I want to work toward a better world with a shared view of the future that looks like equality, freedom, and flourishing."

**LEARN MORE**