

A NAVIGATORS MINISTRY RESOURCE



# Finding Home

*Exploring God's Dream*



*in Our Neighborhoods*



**Julie Heiliger & Stephanie Wood**

FOREWORD BY TIM SOERENS





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*in Our Neighborhoods*

**Julie Heiliger & Stephanie Wood**

WITH BOB ADGATE AND ANDY HUNT



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# Foreword

**It was such a delightfully** ridiculous proposition.

A few years back, a few colleagues and I were asked if we would consider framing discussions and walking alongside a few hundred followers of Jesus for a new venture focused on neighborhood presence within an international ministry.

All over the country, nearly everyone we met was curious, teachable, and committed to Christ and his Kingdom. Oh, and most had already raised resources to allow them to listen deeply to their neighbors and connect their neighbors' gifts, *and* they were committed to a life of prayer and presence. We almost couldn't believe it.

Most of the insights and grounded wisdom of this book rose from our shared learning over years of journeying together. We collectively began to trust the conviction that if you are a follower of Jesus and you want to change the world, there is no better place to begin than *right where you are*.

I can think of no greater call than to make disciples who join God in healing and transforming every single

## FINDING HOME

neighborhood on the planet. It's an audacious mission that is met with some serious challenges. So it's only fair that at the beginning you are given a fair warning.

You can't change the world—not really.

If it's God's dream we are truly after, then we need to trust that God is the hero of the story, not us. The transformation we seek is a gift to be received, not a technique to be mastered. If you are anything like me, this will take years of unlearning and relearning, and this book will help immensely.

You also can't go alone—at least, not really.

Although one-on-one relationships are vital, the most powerful form of discipleship is plural. The best showcase of the Good News of Jesus is when everyday people form teams around God's dream for that place. This book is loaded with practical and inspiring ideas to make and sustain life-giving relationships right where you are.

We all long for home, and we all long to tangibly see God's Kingdom in our everyday lives. If you commit to journey through this book, especially with others, I think you'll be astonished with the stories you get to tell in joining a God who says, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5, NASB).

*Tim Soerens*

*author of* Everywhere You Look:  
Discovering the Church Right Where You Are

# Preface

I've spent more than thirty years as part of the worldwide discipling movement known as The Navigators. We are really big on, well, making disciples. We want to make disciples who make more disciples. We desire that disciples of Jesus multiply all over the world.

That's what we do. That's the "what." But how about the "why"? Why do we want disciples of Jesus?

God has a dream. His dream is nothing less than the restoration, the reconciliation, and the renewal of all things. Genesis tells us that the original creation was perfect. Adam and Eve lived in harmony with their place, with one another, and with God himself. A temptation to be like God, a terrible choice, rebellion, sin, and brokenness shattered it all. Yet God's dream remains.

What can be again. We know this deep down in our souls. We know that things can be better, that relationships can be healed, that people can fit together in harmony with God and with each other. This is the hope of the gospel.

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Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, all things will be made whole again. This is the power of God—his Kingdom rule and reign—being unleashed. Where does this happen? Every day all over the world, as God’s people pray that his Kingdom would come and his will would be done *on earth* as it is in heaven.

So why make disciples? Because we live in a fragmented and broken world. A committed community of Christ’s disciples can bring hope and healing when they engage at the local level through the lens of God’s Kingdom. I was recently talking about this with a few friends, committed disciplinarians who had recently transitioned to civilian life from our Navigators Military ministries and wanted help applying what they had learned in that context to this new one. I stressed the importance of faithful presence, of committed community, and of engaging with not only the people but also the place they live.

One of the guys expressed surprise. He said, “Al, I thought you would be banging the drum of discipleship, since almost no one else is doing so.”

I responded that discipleship burns in my heart, but if the presence of the disciples of Jesus does not make a Kingdom impact on the places we live, what’s the point?

*Finding Home: Exploring God’s Dream in Our Neighborhoods* is designed to help you partner with others in the place you live for the flourishing of that place. It is full of stories by real-life practitioners. I’ve been to their neighborhoods, I’ve prayed with them, and I’ve dreamed with them

## PREFACE

about what it would be like for God's will to be done in their places. It's a movement that I hope you will join.

*Al Engler*  
*Disciplemakers for Life mission leader,*  
*The Navigators*



# Introduction

**Welcome home.** We're really glad you're there—in your home, on your street, in your town. It's no accident; in fact, we think it is evidence. You being you, right where you are, is evidence that God is present and the Spirit is on the move, rustling through the streets and the schools and the shops and the hearts of the people in your neighborhood.

The collection of stories, reflections, and studies that you hold in your hand is our invitation to you to reimagine the very ordinary space you inhabit. It's an invitation to explore and experiment with the notion that, perhaps, your front porch and your kitchen table, the neighborhood playground and the corner store are more than what they first appear. We believe that when the Spirit of God ignites the hearts of the people of God with a passion for the places they live, these ordinary things become the formidable resources for gospel renewal. We're talking about the kind of gospel renewal that looks and smells and tastes and sounds and even feels like good news.

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It's our dream that Christians would take their faith beyond the church building and would begin to follow Jesus into the neighborhood. We're certain that people will find he is already there and at work. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10, KJV) is a prayer that calls for our participation, and it can begin right where we live.

May we humbly suggest that you gather a few followers of Jesus who live nearby? Spend the next ten weeks together working through this tool. Let's reimagine together what God might do in and through you if you partnered together in his name on behalf of the place you live. This conversation and journey is an exploration that will take you deeper into your own town. *Finding Home* is a ten-week tool exploring what it means to love our neighbors and our neighborhood. It's not a journey best taken by oneself. So these next weeks you will be reading, studying, and practicing—together with others.

This isn't exactly a Bible study, though we hope you will dig into Scripture. It's more of a Bible study meets supper club meets book club. We call it an invitation. It's an invitation to explore and experiment together with what it might be like to partner with other followers of Jesus on behalf of your place. During our time together, you will:

- study the scriptural basis for your calling to the place you live;
- develop practical tools to love people in your community; and

## INTRODUCTION

- discern whether to intentionally join with others locally to invest in the people and places that you call home.

Part 1 of this tool explores scriptural foundations for **Committed Communities** partnering together on behalf of their places. Committed Communities are what we call small groups of Christ-followers who reside in the same geographic area and are intentionally living life together in a way that edifies one another, cares for the lost and broken world around them, and seeks to know and glorify Jesus. These initial chapters will take us into the Bible.

In part 2, we will spend the remainder of our time experimenting with the practical matters of Committed Community life. These next weeks together are intended to be interactive. They are permission to wonder, explore, dream, and conspire together about what God might do if his people banded together for the sake of the neighborhood.

With much love,  
Your co-conspirators:

*Julie Heiliger and Stephanie Wood*  
*with Bob Adgate and Andy Hunt*



# Glossary of Terms

**As we journey together**, you may find yourself learning terms that are new or unfamiliar. To make our voyage smoother and more enjoyable, it will be helpful for us to have a similar understanding of the concepts presented in *Finding Home*. We offer you this glossary as a quick reference. Terms marked in **bold type** at first mention in each chapter are defined for you here.

**built space**—The man-made elements of a community, such as roads, sidewalks, buildings, gardens, parks, etc.

**calculated moments**—The formal or planned moments that a Committed Community spends together on a regular basis.

**casual moments**—The informal or spontaneous moments that a Committed Community spends together on a regular basis.

## FINDING HOME

**Committed Community**—A small group of Christ-followers who reside in the same geographic area and are intentionally living life together in a way that edifies one another, cares for the lost and broken world around them, and seeks to know and glorify Jesus.

**faithful presence**—Entering into your current circumstance with steadfastness and consistency while remaining responsive to both your limitations and responsibilities for relating to God, to others, and to the created world.

**linking**—The practice of growing meaningful relationships with people and places both inside and outside of your own parish.

**living above place**—The unconscious belief that one's experience of life is not interrelated and connected to the place one lives. This leads to a sense of disconnection, as if one's choices do not affect the environment, the built space, other people, and the land.

**parish**—“A unique word that recalls a geography large enough to live life together (live, work, play, and so forth) and small enough to be known as a character within it.”<sup>1</sup> Interchangeable words in this tool include *neighborhood*, *place*, or *local community*.

**People of Peace**—Inspired by Jesus' sending of the apostles in Matthew 10 and Luke 10, People of Peace are non-Christians who nonetheless are receptive to Christians

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

who enter their community and seek to make meaningful connections. They serve as connectors for Christians to other people and contexts, so that Christians have the opportunity to share and demonstrate the love of Christ.

**third places**—“Public places on neutral ground where people can gather and interact.”<sup>2</sup> Third places level the playing field of social interaction, allowing for individuals and communities to strengthen ties and self-understanding. Coffee houses, pubs, and gyms are examples of third places.

**Up/In/Out**—The three-dimensional lifestyle that Jesus lived while on earth. *Up* alludes to Jesus’ relationship with the Father, *In* to his chosen disciples, and *Out* to the broken world around him.





PART 1

# The Foundations of Committed Community Life





WEEK ONE

# Getting Started

*Exploring Your Context*

*The Christian experience, from start to finish,  
is a journey of faith.*

WATCHMAN NEE, *Journeying Towards the Spiritual*

**“If these walls could only talk”** is an idiom that expresses our common human desire to know the history of a place. Our fascination with history museums belies the reality that artifacts are more than just old things. These physical objects, just like our towns and cities and neighborhoods, hold stories that connect us to the past and to each other.

As I (Stephanie) began to love the town I call home, I discovered there was much I did not know. A relative newcomer, I didn’t know where the old hardware store used to be and that the now-vacant Daughtry building had once been a vibrant department store. More than that, I didn’t know about the indigenous people who had once inhabited the

## FINDING HOME

land. I didn't know that before it was a bedroom community, my town had been full of orchards and chicken farms. I didn't know the racist history and the steps toward reconciliation. But I learned, and I am still learning.

### On Your Own

When we know the stories of our hometowns, they become dearer to us. Our hometowns become ours as we know their past and weave our own lives into the stories of the future.

Knowing the story of the physical space you inhabit can provide important context to guide you in the journey ahead. This week, there is no Bible study; instead, consider spending thirty minutes researching your town's history. Google is an invaluable resource, but a local library or a longtime resident may provide you with colorful stories.

### How to Use *Finding Home*

Before you get started, here are some practical notes about *Finding Home*:

It is important that one person (or up to two) fills the role of facilitator. This person should be the same throughout all ten weeks. The role of the facilitator is to help lead the group discussions as well as the weekly group activities. If your group has not already done this, please select a facilitator. (See appendix A for facilitator notes.)

Before diving into the meat of the material, it is important

## GETTING STARTED

that the group gathers to connect, set expectations, and learn how to use the resource. Don't skip week one!

To prepare for weeks two through five, each individual should complete the reading and Bible study portions before gathering together as a group. The early weeks set a biblical foundation for discussion and practice to come. Sections to be completed individually are marked *On Your Own*, and they are the only prep that needs to be done beforehand. These *On Your Own* sections should take about thirty minutes of preparation before the group meeting.

During the weekly meeting time, groups will interact with questions marked "Group Discussion Questions" as well as complete the group activity listed for that particular week. These sections are marked *Time Together*.

Please note, part 2 has no Bible study. The only preparation to be completed before group time is the reading.

All activities throughout this resource are meant to be done in a group setting; they do not require advance preparation. All group activities should take anywhere from twenty to fifty minutes to complete, depending on the week.