

# THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST

small group study guide  
Women Exploring Spirituality

HOW A FORGOTTEN REALITY  
CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING  
WE SEE, HOPE FOR AND BELIEVE



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## **AGREEMENTS FOR GROUP PARTICIPATION:**

- Read the book.
- Respect every member of the group by not commenting or interrupting when sharing.
- Holding confidentiality throughout the course of the group sessions, inside and outside of the sessions.
- Sharing *only* one’s own personal story.
- Hold an open mind and heart. Wondering together may lead to good insight.

**KEY** LISTENING  
**IN** BELIEF  
**THE** REST  
**RE** CHRIST



# WEEK 1

## Chapter 1: What's Christ got to do with it?

**“But God loves things by becoming them. God loves things by uniting with them, not by excluding them.” (page 16)**

After you read this quote from page 16, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“Every life has an influence on every other kind of life.” (page 4)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

On page 18, Richard Rohr writes, **“We ended up spreading our national cultures under the rubric of Jesus, instead of a universally liberating message under the name of Christ.”**

- Is Jesus and Christ the same? Can Christ be something other than Jesus?
- What does this statement imply about the nature of people?

He continues by saying, **“An incarnational worldview is the profound recognition of the presence of the divine in literally “every thing” and “every one.” It is the key to mental and spiritual health, as well as to a kind of basic contentment and happiness.”**

- In your own life, do you see the divine in “every thing” and “every one?”
- How would this affect your basic contentment and happiness or would it? Explain...

**Last one...**

On page 20, Rohr says, **“The Christ Mystery anoints all physical matter with eternal purpose...first in creation; second in Jesus, ‘so that we could hear him, see him with our eyes, watch him, and touch him with our hands’...and third, in the ongoing beloved community...which is slowly evolving throughout all of human history. We are still in the Flow.”**

- How do you interpret what Rohr calls “the flow?”
- Which of the three revelations of the Christ Mystery has been the easiest way for you to connect with “the flow?” What has influenced that ease?

**NOTES:**

## WEEK 2

### Chapter 2 & 3: What do we have to do with it?

**“As long as we keep God imprisoned in a retributive frame instead of a restorative frame, we really have no substantial good news; it is neither good nor new, but the same old tired story line of history. We pull God down to our level.” (pages 28-29)**

After you read this quote from pages 28-29, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“I have never been separate from God, nor can I be, except in my mind.” (page 45)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

On page 37, Richard Rohr writes, **“You are a child of God, and always will be, even when you don’t believe it. This is why (you can) see Christ...in those who do not like you, and those who are not like you.”**

- As you listen to this statement, what arose for you:
  - On a cognitive level? (thoughts)

- On an emotional level? (feelings)
- On a physiological level? (sensations)
- Are you able to see this manifest in your life? Share an example...

Rohr states on page 48, **“I cannot help but think that future generations will label the first two thousand years of Christianity ‘early Christianity.’ They will, I believe, draw out more and more of the massive implications of this understanding of a Cosmic Christ.”**

- What is your understanding of a Cosmic Christ and how do you feel about it?

### **Last one...**

Rohr continues and says, **“We would have helped history and individuals so much more if we had spent our time revealing how Christ is everywhere instead of proving that Jesus was God.”**

- How can you engage with our community in a way that reveals that Christ is everywhere? (Family, friends, or neighbor; local, national, or global)
- How does the last two statements make you feel about where we might be in the history of Christ’s mission?

## **NOTES:**

## WEEK 3

### Chapter 4: Back to the beginning

**“I have never met a truly compassionate or loving human being who did not have a foundational and even deep trust in the inherent goodness of human nature.” (pages 63)**

After you read this quote from page 63, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“We have spent centuries trying to solve the ‘problem’ that we’re told is at the heart of our humanity. But if you start with a problem, you tend to never get beyond that mind-set.” (page 62)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

On page 64, Rohr writes, **“We are more attracted to the problem than the solution, you might say. ...The only way, then, to increase authentic spirituality is to deliberately practice actually enjoying a positive response and a grateful heart. And the benefits are very real. By following through on conscious choices, we can rewire our responses**

toward love, trust, and patience. Neuroscience calls this *'neuroplasticity.'*"

- Is this reality true for you in your life? Share an example...
- How would this practice change how you live your life?

Richard Rohr writes on page 65, "In Catholic theology we called these three essential attitudes (faith, hope and love) the 'theological virtues.' ...In this understanding, faith, hope, and love are far more defining of the human person than the 'moral virtues,' the various good behaviors we learn as we grow older. This is why I cannot abandon an Orthodox or Catholic worldview. For all of their poor formulations, they still offer humanity a foundationally *positive anthropology.*"

- Which set of virtues, "theological or moral," has a bigger role in the way you live and view the world? Share an example...
- In what ways do you wish to bring faith, hope, and love into situations in your life right now, either internally or in community? (Again, this could be family, friends, or neighbors; local, national, or global community)

## NOTES:

# WEEK 4

## Chapter 5 & 6: The sacredness of love

**“Remember, the only thing that separates you from God is the *thought* that you are separated from God.” (pages 80)**

After you read this quote from page 80, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“Similarly, as I look at the things and people I have tried to love in my life, I would have to say, ‘They made me do it!’ It was the inherent goodness, inner beauty, vulnerability, deep honesty, or generosity of spirit from the other side that drew me out of myself and toward them. In a very real sense, I did not initiate love toward them. Rather, it was taken from me! It was pulled out of me – by them.” (page 77)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Rohr writes on pages 85-89, **“Many educated and sophisticated people are not willing to submit to indirect, subversive, and intuitive knowing, which is probably why they rely far too much on external law and ritual behavior to achieve their spiritual purpose. ...I personally was so trained**

**not to trust those voices that I think I often did not hear the voice of God to me, or what Abraham Lincoln called the 'better angels of our nature.'"**

- Is this true for you? If so, in what way(s)? If not, what effect did these experiences have on you?

Richard Rohr writes on page 83, **"How does anyone achieve such a holding together of opposites – things like inner acceptance and outer resistance, intense suffering and perfect freedom, my little self and an infinite God, sensuality and intense spirituality, the need to blame somebody and the freedom to blame nobody?...Christ [is] a universally available 'voice' that calls all things to *become whole and true to themselves*. God's two main tools in this direction, from every appearance, seem to be great love and great suffering – and often great love that *invariably leads* to great suffering."**

- Reflect on a time in your life when you experienced great love or great suffering. What happened? Who was involved? What emotions did you feel at the time?
- Did this experience lead you to become more "whole and true" to yourself? If so, in what way(s)? If not, what effect did this experience have on you?
- How does this experience continue to influence you today?

## **NOTES:**

# WEEK 5

Chapter 7, 8 & 9: Where are we going?

***“There is no such thing as a nonpolitical Christianity. To refuse to critique the system of the status quo is to fully support it.” (pages 94)***

After you read this quote from page 94, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

***“There must be a way to be both *here* and in the *depth of here*. Jesus is the *here*, Christ is the *depth of here*.” (page 118)***

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Rohr mentions on page 104, ***“The Apostles’ Creed does not once mention love, service, hope, the ‘least of the brothers and sisters,’ or even forgiveness – anything, actually, that is remotely *actionable*. It’s a vision and philosophy statement with no mission statement, as it were. Twice we are reminded that God is almighty, yet nowhere do we hear mention that God is also *all suffering* or *all vulnerable*.”***

- In what ways has your experience of Christian spirituality been more a “philosophy statement with no mission statement”?
- To what degree have you experienced God as being all suffering or all vulnerable, as well as almighty?

Richard Rohr continues on page 107 saying, **“Humanity now needs a Jesus who is historical, relevant for real life, physical and concrete, like we are. A Jesus whose life can save you even more than his death. A Jesus we can practically imitate, and who sets the bar for what it means to be fully human. And a Christ who is big enough to hold all creation together in one harmonious unity.”**

- Share any thoughts or hopes that arise in response to this statement.

**Last one...**

On page 111, Rohr writes, **“Remember, the archetypal encounter between doubting Thomas and the Risen Jesus (John 20:19-28) is not really a story about believing in the fact of the resurrection, but a story about *believing that someone could be wounded and also resurrected at the same time!* ‘Put your finger here,’ Jesus says to Thomas (20:27). And, like Thomas, we are indeed wounded and resurrected at the same time, all of us. In fact, this might be the primary pastoral message of the whole Gospel.”**

- Reflect and share on your own experiences of being “wounded and resurrected at the same time.”

**NOTES:**

# WEEK 6

## Chapter 10 & 11: This is my body

***“We always had the feminine incarnation, in fact it was the first incarnation, and even better, it moved toward including all of us! *Mary is all of us both receiving and handing on the gift.*” (page 124)***

After you read this quote from page 124, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

***“In Mary, humanity has said *our* eternal yes to God. A yes that cannot be undone. A corporate yes that overrides our many noes.” (page 128)***

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Rohr writes on page 137, **“The Great Circle of Inclusion (the Trinity) is a centrifugal force that will finally pull everything back into itself – exactly as many physicists predict will happen to the universe the moment it finally stops expanding. They call it the ‘Big Crunch,’ and some even say it will take a nanosecond to happen. (Could this be a real description of the ‘Second Coming of Christ’? Or the ‘Final Judgement’?)”**

- What is your understanding of the “Big Crunch” and how will this affect you in this very moment?

Richard Rohr continues through page 138 and writes, **“We are not just humans having a God experience. The Eucharist tells us that, in some mysterious way, we are God having a human experience! ...Who we are in God is who we all are.”**

- Everyone in the group go around and read this statement out loud and one at a time. As you do this, listen closely each time it’s read and see if you hear something different you didn’t hear before. Share your thoughts...
- How does this statement change the way you experience God during communion? Or does it...explain.

**Last one...**

On page 134 Rohr writes, **“The bread and the wine together are stand-ins for the very elements of the universe, which also enjoy and communicate the incarnate presence. Why did we resist this message so much?”**

- In what ways have you assumed that God is merely Spirit?
- Why do we resist this message so much?

**NOTES:**

# WEEK 7

## Chapter 12 & 13: Death and what it all means

**“Love cannot be bought by some ‘necessary sacrifice’; if it could, it would not and could not work its transformative effects. Try loving your spouse or children that way and see where it gets you.” (page 144)**

After you read this quote from page 144, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“John Duns Scotus (1266-1308), refused to see the Incarnation, and its final denouement on the cross, as a mere reaction to sin. Instead [he and the Franciscans] claimed that the cross was a *freely chosen revelation of Total Love on God’s part.*” (page 143)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Rohr writes on page 161, **“The only way out of deep sadness is to go *with it* and *through it...* When I try to heroically do it alone, I slip into distractions, denials, and pretending – and *I do not learn suffering’s softening lessons.*”**

- What comes up for you when you hear the words “deep sadness”?
- What distractions, denials, or pretending do you use to avoid going “with it and though it”?
- Is there someone in your life who could support you in approaching sadness differently?

Rohr also writes on page 167, **“Once I know that all suffering is both *our suffering and God’s suffering*, I can better endure and trust the desolations and disappointments that come my way... If I can recognize that all suffering and crucifixion (divine, planetary, human, animal) is ‘one body’ and will one day be transmuted into the ‘one body’ of cosmic resurrection (Philippians 3:21), I can at least live without going crazy or being permanently depressed.”**

- Does this statement give you a sense of relief? Why or why not...

**Last one...**

On page 151, Rohr writes, **“He did not come to change God’s mind about us. It did not need changing. Jesus came to change our minds about God – and about ourselves – and about where goodness and evil really lie.”**

- Pause and let this statement settle for a bit. Then share what your thoughts are with each other.

**NOTES:**

# WEEK 8

## Chapter 14: Christ is Risen!

***“Resurrection’ is another word for change, but particularly positive change - which we tend to see only in the long run. In the short run, it often just looks like death. The Preface to the Catholic funeral liturgy says, ‘Life is not ended, it is merely changed.’” (page 171)***

After you read this quote from page 171, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“The fragile ego always wants to set a boundary, a price, an entrance requirement of some sort. Many Christians sadly prefer...a worldview of scarcity instead of the Gospel of divine abundance, and this constant resistance to Infinite Love is revealed in the biblical text itself.” (page 173)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Richard Rohr writes on page 184-185, **“As long as you operate inside any scarcity model, there will never be enough God or grace to go around. Jesus came to undo our notions of scarcity and tip us over into a**

**worldview of absolute abundance – or what he would call the ‘Kingdom of God.’”**

- Reflect on your own worldview. Do you predominantly view your life from the perspective of scarcity or from the perspective of abundance? Share an example...

Rohr also writes on pages 179-180, **“If death is not possible for the Christ, then it is not possible for anything that ‘shares in the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4). God is by definition eternal, and God is Love (1 John 4:16), which is also eternal (1 Corinthians 13:13), and this same Love has been planted in our hearts (Romans 5:5, 8:9) by the Spirit dwelling within us. *Such fully implanted Love cannot help but evolve and prove victorious, and our word for that final victory is ‘resurrection.’”***

- What resonates with you and why?
- What impact does reflecting on an idea such as this have on your state of being?

**NOTES:**

# WEEK 9

## Chapter 15: Witness

**“We usually have to let go of Jesus on one level before we can accept and believe in ‘Jesus the Christ.’ If your Jesus remains too small, too sentimental (e.g., ‘Jesus, my personal friend’), or too bound by time and culture, you do not get very far at all.” (page 194)**

After you read this quote from page 194, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“[Paul] would have agreed with Jesus, I think, that humans are punished *by* their sins more than *for* their sins.” (page 196)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

On page 194, Rohr writes, **“Mary Magdalene serves as a witness to personal love and intimacy, which for most people is the best and easiest start on the path toward universal love. Then in the garden at Easter, she experienced a sudden shift of recognition toward the universal presence of Christ.”**

**“[Paul] starts with the Universal Christ, which then leads him to a deep devotion to the crucified and resurrected Jesus. God can use either path as long as we stay on that path for the whole journey.”**

- Which path do you personally resonate with the most: that of Mary Magdalene (for knowing Jesus to knowing the Universal Christ) or that of Paul (from knowing the Universal Christ to knowing Jesus)?
- What life events and experiences have influenced this for you?

Rohr also writes on page 197, ***“But remember, the greater light you are, the greater shadow you cast. And Paul is a huge light.”***

- As you discover more about yourself, your consciousness, and our spirituality, what kind of a shadow are you casting on your community (family, friends, and neighbors; national and global community)?
- What do you think others would say your shadow is?

## **NOTES:**

# WEEK 10

## Chapter 16: Contemplative Minds

**“What many have begun to see is that you need to have a nondualistic, non-angry, and nonargumentative mind to process the really big issues with any depth or honesty, and most of us have not been effectively taught how to do that in practice. We were largely taught what to believe instead of how to believe.” (page 207)**

After you read this quote from page 207, you are either thinking, “I get it” or “what is he talking about?” Let’s talk about it...

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

Here’s another one...

**“Every world religion – at the mature levels – discovers some forms of practice to free us from our addictive mind, which we take as normal.” (page 209)**

- What is the first thought that enters your mind?
- What impact does this have on you, in this very moment?

On page 210, Richard Rohr writes, **“When Western civilization set out on its many paths of winning, accomplishment, and conquest, the contemplative mind seemed uninteresting or even counterproductive to our heroic purposes. The contemplative mind got in the way of our left-brain**

philosophy of progress, science, and development, which were very good and necessary in their own way – *but not for soul knowledge.*”

- Can you sense a tension between Western civilization’s sense of “progress” and contemplative “presence”? How might that tension be resolved?

Richard Rohr also writes on page 217, *“Suffering is seen as the practical and real place for letting go of illusion, false desire, superiority, and separateness. Suffering is also pointed out as the price we pay for not letting go, which might be an even better way to teach about suffering.”*

- Take a moment to sit with this statement and sense some of your own suffering. Share with the group how you might be hanging on to “illusion, false desire, superiority, or separateness.”
- What is the value of community in all that we have been reading and studying?

## NOTES:

# WEEK 11

## Chapter 17: The importance of Practice

Invite three volunteers to read this poem out loud. Each time the poem is read, what questions come up for you...

### LOVE AFTER LOVE

The time will come when, with elation, you will greet yourself arriving at your own door, in your own mirror, and each will smile at the other's welcome, and say, sit here. Eat.

You will love again the stranger who was yourself. Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all your life, whom you ignored for another, who knows you by heart.

Take down the love letters from the bookshelf, the photographs, the desperate notes, peel your own image from the mirror.

Sit. Feast on your life.

-Derek Walcott

- What is evoked from deep within you?
- What line or lines strike you the most?
- Describe the "stranger who has loved you...who knows you by heart". (even with just a word or two – the first words that come to you)

## LET'S REFLECT ON THE LAST 10 WEEKS...

- How do you see the world differently?
- How has the last ten weeks effected the way you hope for things to come?
- **ReThink Christ** – is your view of Christ different? What do you believe and is it different from when we started this study?
- What has been the best part of this book study?
- What has been an area we could improve on?
- How has this study affected you personally?



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