

Intercultural Encounters

Reflection Guide



INTERCULTURAL
ENCOUNTERS



Credits

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Welcome to Guatemala!

Stepping into another culture can be a life-changing spiritual practice, if done with intentionality and purpose. We are so grateful that you have chosen to travel with the guidance and accompaniment of CEDEPCA, the Protestant Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America.

The Intercultural Encounters program of CEDEPCA facilitates rich experiences of encounter between people of North America and people of Guatemala. Each day of a CEDEPCA-facilitated trip to Guatemala is full of stories, sights, sounds, smells, flavors, feelings...and big questions. We hope that using this daily reflection guide will help you make sense of your encounters and experiences in light of scripture.

The reflections included here may be used as journaling prompts or as group sharing exercises. With so much activity each day, we know that setting aside time to reflect can be a challenge – but your intentionality will pay off!

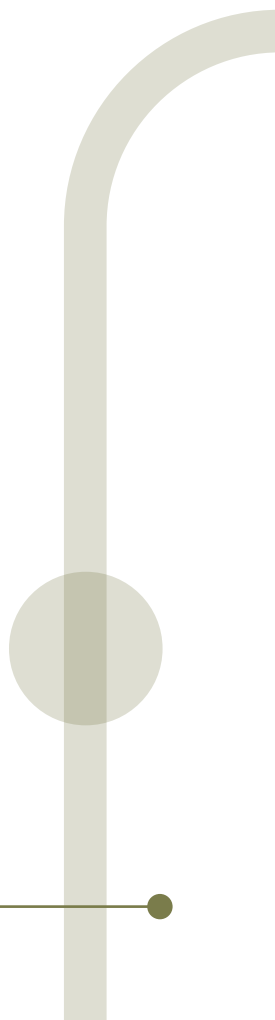
Group leaders may consider the following ideas to encourage deeper engagement:

- 1) Invite group members to use the reflections as journaling prompts first before sharing with the larger group. Some people are more comfortable sharing if they have first had a chance to think about and respond in writing.
- 2) If fatigue at the end of the day is an issue, invite participants to journal their responses in the evening to be discussed over breakfast the following day.

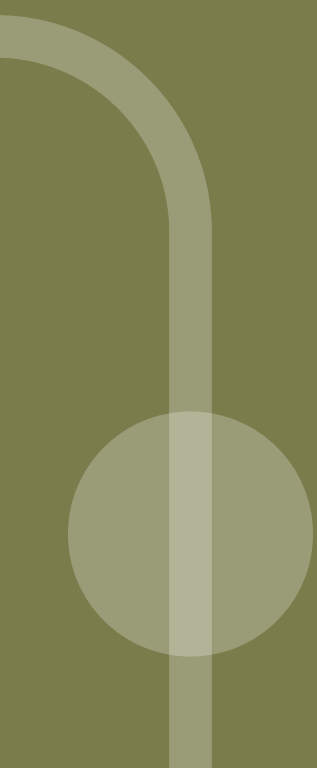


- 3) Especially if the group is large, invite participants to share their responses in groups of two or three.
- 4) If time is short, invite participants to share responses with their seatmate during longer bus rides or walks.

Our prayer for you is that you travel with intention while you are here in Guatemala, aware of the Spirit's constant presence, so that returning, you may enter anew into the transformations that God is bringing about in the world.



Reflections



1

The Gift of Heightened Awareness

Psalm 139:1-12

1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me,"

12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

God is with you and with your group on this journey!

- Underline the parts of this passage from Psalm 139 that speak to you here and now.
- Take stock of your physical and emotional state. On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you feel?

On this trip, expect your awareness to be heightened as you see new things and listen to people's stories. As you journey, there will always be something to think about and question.

- What first impressions did you have as you looked out the airplane window, walked through the airport, and drove through Guatemala City?
- Guatemala is a place of contrasts. What contrasts have you already noticed?
- When are other times in life when your awareness has been in a heightened state? In times like these, does processing and reflecting come easy or hard for you?
- Why do you think God might have called you into this experience?

(When you share as a group, choose one thing that you have written.)

2

The Daily Examen

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

- Matthew 13:16 -17

The Ignatian Examen

The Ignatian practice of examen is a way of reflecting prayerfully about your day. It is a call to recognize that which is holy in each moment.

- 1) Place yourself in God’s presence.** Take a few deep breaths. Give thanks for God’s great love for you and for the world. If God feels absent to you, acknowledge and explore this feeling of absence.
- 2) Pray for the grace** to understand how God is acting in your life.
- 3) Review your day with gratitude.** Recall specific moments and your feelings at the time. If it helps you to remember, write down the main experiences of the day and think briefly about each one.
- 4) Pay attention.** As you review the experiences and learnings from the day, what stays with you? What emotions did you have at that time? (Anger, confusion, hopefulness, sadness, relief, anxiety?) Were you drawing closer to God, or further away? Stay in that moment and pray from it.
- 5) Look toward tomorrow.** Are you being called forward to do something differently tomorrow? Are you being called to take action when you return home? Pray about this call.

3

Foundations for Healthy Intercultural Relationships

In their book, Freeing Congregational Mission, co-authors Hunter Farrell and Bala Khylllep talk about the foundational principles for joining God in mission in intercultural settings: Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-Development.¹

- *Companionship* is marked by mutual accompaniment, shared vulnerability, and recognizing that God sends people from the margins to transform systems.

How are you seeing or experiencing companionship on this trip – with fellow group members and with the Guatemalan people you meet? What organizations or individuals model companionship? Do you sense any imbalances?

- *Cultural Humility* requires that we recognize differences between cultures and not assume our way of thinking and living is either superior or inferior to other ways of thinking and living.

What cultural differences have you noticed on this trip? What cultural values or insights have you observed in Guatemala that have been refreshing or enlightening to you?

- *Co-Development* is, according to Farrell and Khylllep, “a mutual process whereby two communities accompany each other toward a more abundant life economically, socially, and spiritually by providing tools and removing barriers to their companions’ growth.”

Reflect on the saying seen in a school in Uganda, “What you do for us without us is not for us.” How is this saying at play in the way U.S. organizations have interacted with communities in Guatemala?

¹Farrell, B. Hunter and Khylllep, S. Balajiedlang, *Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-Development*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (2021).

4

Reading the Bible with New Eyes

Read Luke 6:20-26:

20 Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 “Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

22 “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24 “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

25 “Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

- What do you notice in this passage?
- Hold in your mind the image of a person you have encountered in Guatemala who has gone through great struggle. How would you read this passage differently, and what parts would stand out to you?
- How could this passage be mis-used?
- What present hope (rather than hope in the afterlife) does this passage give to people who are struggling now?

5

Reckoning with Privilege

Read Amos 8:4-8:

4 Hear this, you who trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,

5 saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain,

and the Sabbath,

so that we may offer wheat for sale?

We will make the ephah smaller and the shekel heavier

and practice deceit with false balances,

6 buying the poor for silver

and the needy for a pair of sandals

and selling the sweepings of the wheat."

7 The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:

Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

8 Shall not the land tremble on this account,

and everyone mourn who lives in it,

and all of it rise like the Nile,

and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?

- At the beginning of the trip, you reflected on the great contrasts apparent in Guatemala. What other contrasts have become aware of? What contrasts most trouble you?
- In what ways have you become aware of your own privilege on this trip?
- Write about how you are wrestling with injustice as you see a land and people who have suffered?
- How is God calling forth transformation?

6

Encounters on the Road

Read Luke 24: 13-35, a passage about an encounter “on the road.”

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” 19 He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.” 25 Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

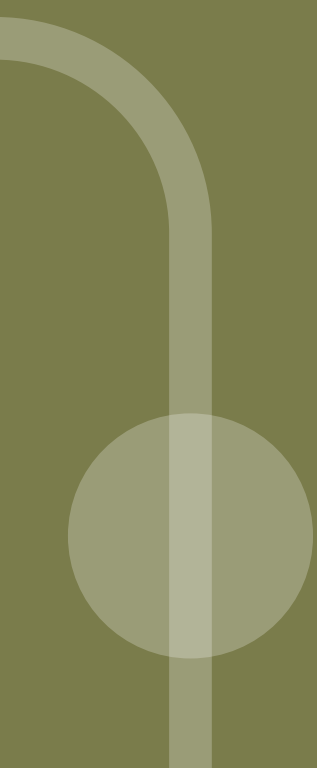
28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.”

So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflect on the following questions:

- God, where did I see you today among the group as we rode on the bus and chatted together, in the day's comings and goings?
- God, where did I encounter you in today's meals?
- God, how did I encounter you in the neighbors I met today?
- God, here are some of the things I am still trying to understand:

Topical Bible Studies



Depending on the topic or issue your group is focusing on during the trip, consider selecting one or more of these Bible Studies to help you process your experience from a theological perspective.

Women's Issues

Read Exodus 1:8-22.

8 Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.9 He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians subjected the Israelites to hard servitude 14 and made their lives bitter with hard servitude in mortar and bricks and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?" 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." 20 So God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

- What tools of oppression were used by those in power during this setting in Exodus? What similarities do you notice between this setting and the current context in Guatemala?
- How did Shiphrah and Puah, the two Hebrew midwives, respond to the violent, oppressive context they were living in?
- How is their courageous action similar to the courageous actions you have seen taken by certain women in Guatemala?



Migration

Read Matthew 2:13-23.

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.¹⁷ Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazarene.”

- What have you learned about the “push factors” in Guatemala and other Central American countries that lead people to make the difficult decision to migrate?
- What were the “push factors” in this story from Matthew that led Mary and Joseph to migrate? What thoughts and feelings do you imagine they had as they were on the road and living in a foreign land?
- What other stories of migration do you remember from the Bible? What do they have in common?
- What are some of the conflicting stories you have heard about migration in the news or on social media? How do those stories intersect with what you have seen in Guatemala and what you read in scripture?
- What is God’s word to you as you consider the issue of migration here in Guatemala?



Environment/Creation

(A guided prayer based on the Ignatian Examen practice)

Read Psalm 104: 24-35.

24 O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures.

25 There is the sea, great and wide; creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.

26 There go the ships and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

27 These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

28 when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die

and return to their dust.

30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works—

32 who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

34 May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.

35 Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more.

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Praise the Lord!

1) Thank God for the beauty and wonder of creation that you see in Guatemala. Imagine God's Spirit dwelling amidst creation, God's voice uttering: "It is good." Rejoice in the goodness of creation.

2) Ask God's Spirit to reveal to you both the agony and the opportunity inherent here. Pray for God's grace strengthen you as you contemplate the pain and suffering endured by God's created world, including God's people. What of God's dream has been damaged? Lost? Forgotten? Ask for the grace to see clearly a new path forward.

3) In the presence of God's Spirit, review your experiences and observations in Guatemala. Review your own actions in relation with the earth in your home context. With honesty, recall your own choices.

4) What feelings arise in you as you reflect? Turmoil, anxiety, fear, freedom, awe, joy, happiness, lightness, anticipation, creativity, humor, grief? Do these feelings lead you toward God and God's creation, or away from God?

5) Recognize that your call to ecological conversion is a lifelong endeavor. Ask God for the grace to continue in this work, striving to live more deeply into God's dream for the world.



Education

Read Romans 12:1-8.

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

- What practices is Paul lifting up in this section of his letter to the Romans?
- How have you personally seen or experienced education contributing to the transformation of individuals and communities?
- Why is equitable education so important for societies?
- What have you observed and learned regarding education in Guatemala? What gives you hope?



Theology

Here in Guatemala, many churches interpret scripture through the lens of Christians religious fundamentalism. Encouraging a literal reading of scripture, they may promote hierarchical and patriarchal thinking as well as a belief in the “prosperity gospel.”

At CEDEPCA, we promote a contextual reading of scripture, considering both historical and current context together in the light of Christ when analyzing particular passages from the Bible. Considering context can make all the difference between a reading that leads to oppression and a reading that leads to liberation and transformation.

Consider two passages about women:

John 20:11-18

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

And 1 Timothy 2:8-15

8 I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument, 9 also that the women should dress themselves in moderate clothing with reverence and self-control, not with their hair braided or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, 10 but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. 11 Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve, 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

- What can you know or infer about the context of each passage?
- What do you see as the main point in each passage?
- Where do you encounter the good news of Jesus Christ in each passage?
- What does each passage say about women speaking? How do the passages “speak to each other?”
- Considering the context of women in Guatemala, how do you read these passages differently?
- What interpretive principles help you make sense of what you do not understand?

Consider two passages about “prosperity.”

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

1 “If you will only obey the Lord your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; 2 all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God:

3 “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.

4 “Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your livestock, both the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock.

5 “Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

6 “Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

7 “The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. 8 The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you undertake; he will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. 9 The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. 10 All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. 11 The Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your ground in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you. 12 The Lord will open for you his rich storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all your undertakings. You will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow. 13 The Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be only at the top and not at the bottom—if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today by diligently observing them, 14 and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I am commanding you today, either to the right or to the left, following other gods to serve them.

Consider two passages about “prosperity.”

And Luke 12:13-21.

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” 16 Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

- What can you know or infer about the context of each passage?
- What do you see as the main point in each passage?
- Where do you encounter the good news of Jesus Christ in each passage?
- What does each passage say about prosperity? How do the passages “speak to each other?”
- Considering the context of poverty and prosperity in Guatemala and/or in the United States, how do you read these passages differently?
- What interpretive principles help you make sense of what you do not understand?

How could this one “theology” from a particular part of scripture be used to diminish the message of God’s mission in Christ?

If you or your group would like to do a study using the materials that CEDEPCA uses in its Biblical-Theological program or Women’s ministry, you may request a sample study!

