

Study Guide

*On Mended Wings:
Transforming Lives and Communities in Nicaragua*

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About this study guide:

This study guide was put together by authors Carol Van Klompenburg and Donna Biddle with aid from Pamela Neumann, who formerly was with the Food for the Hungry Hunger Corps and served as communications coordinator for the Nehemiah Center from 2006 to 2009. Neumann holds a master's degree in Latin American Studies and is now a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin.

Permission to reprint this study guide is granted by the authors. However, the authors would appreciate your sending an email to onmendedwings.2@gmail.com to explain where and how you are using this guide.

On Mended Wings, a 204-page book, retails for \$14.99 and can be ordered from The Write Place website www.thewriteplace.biz or by calling The Write Place at 641-628-8398. More information about the Nehemiah Center can be obtained from its website www.nehemiahcenter.net.

***On Mended Wings* Study Guide Introduction**

On the surface, *On Mended Wings: Transforming Lives and Communities in Nicaragua* provides a fascinating look at dozens of Nicaraguans, told through the stories of these people who share their struggles and hopes.

By its very title, however, author Carol Van Klompenburg conveys that she wants people to read more into this book. She offers readers an up-close and very personal look at transformation. The entire book is a story of transformations, but of transformations considered from many angles:

- It is the story of the Nehemiah Center, an organization that somehow works despite all the difficulties collaboration poses among people from different denominations and among nonprofits with different goals.
- It is the story of a country hit hard by frequent natural disasters and by a history of political upheavals.
- It is the story of missions – how missions can or should be accomplished.
- It is the story of the ongoing transformation of marriages, of churches, of youth, and of communities.
- It is the story of ongoing transformation of North Americans, who come to realize their own poverty.

However, even in their combined entirety, these transformations represent only part of the transformation the author hopes will take place. In the introduction, Van Klompenburg relates that she kept returning to Nicaragua in search of a bigger world. What she found in the end was a changed heart. She hopes the same will happen, in a small way, for the readers of this book.

“When Nicaraguans see that God is God of all, something HAPPENS. Their lives are changed. I have learned much from them, and I feel as if I have just begun,” Van Klompenburg said. “My dream is that readers of *On Mended Wings* will learn from them as well.”

How to Use This Study Guide

Broken into twelve sections to correspond with the preface/introduction and the eleven chapters, this study guide is meant to be discussed over twelve separate sessions. Use this study guide with your Bible study group, Sunday school group, prayer group, or other group. If you are part of a group considering going on a mission, this would make an excellent study aid to help you get your mind into the proper frame.

Because so many of the topics and chapters are interrelated, it probably would be best if everyone in the group has read the entire book before the group begins meeting, then reviews the appropriate chapter in preparation for that week's discussion. This process, although not a requirement, would probably make for better discussion and give everyone a more complete perspective of what is being discussed.

Because the questions require some rumination, it also would be helpful if participants had the chance to think and perhaps even to write down their answers before discussing them with the group.

Ultimately, however, because the topic of transformation is so personal, this study guide will prove its most value only if you spend the alone time necessary to fully consider these issues.

Even if you aren't using this guide with a group, this guide will still be valuable in that it asks you to consider ideas that aren't easy to grasp. To benefit fully, take your time, think the questions through, consider your own life, and envision what your own next step in transformation could be.

Preface/Introduction

Author Carol Van Klompenburg shares why she chose the title: *On Mended Wings*. She also shares her own personal story of how she came to write this book. She talks about her search for a bigger world, and her search for a way to make a difference or an impact in her part of the world. Through that search, she concludes that using her talent to write a book would be her way to find the right niche.

Understand

- Why is there a butterfly on the cover? What does a butterfly mean to the author?
- Why use the term “mended” on the title? What else does the term “on mended wings” convey?

Reflect

- What were the forces that caused you to read this book?
- Have you ever felt the yearning to enlarge your world?
- What has the term “biblical worldview” meant to you? As you read, reflect, and discuss this book in the coming weeks, pay attention to see if your understanding of this term changes.
- What would you title the book if you could?
- Are you in need of transformation? What kind of transformation?

Apply

- The author shares that she found her “Nicaragua niche” when she resolved to write a book. Do you have a niche? Are you searching for your niche? Or, are you seeking to expand your niche?

Chapter 1: Just Another Conference

As a pastor, Tomás Ruiz felt God's call in his life. More than anything, he wanted his church to grow, and in his attempt to help his church grow, he did the only things he knew to do: pray and fast. When he went to a conference – one he felt obligated to attend – he learned about biblical worldview for the first time. His newfound knowledge helped him change his perspective, and over time, he found his church prospering.

A large portion of this chapter concerns the role this pastor's church plays in the community – something that will come up again and again later in this book. As you reflect more on this chapter, consider what it must have been like for Pastor Tomás during this period in his life. Consider how his sense of frustration turned to hope. Consider what the role of the church should be.

Understand

- What were the challenges facing Pastor Tomás and his church?
- How and why did Pastor Tomás and his church change their approach to the community? How did the community respond?

Reflect

- Why did Pastor Tomás apologize to his community? What would your reaction have been if you had been there that day? Would you have believed him?
- What is the relationship/connection between physical and spiritual needs?
- In what ways have you experienced physical needs? Spiritual needs? How did you seek to meet them?

Apply

- How would you describe the walls between churches and communities where you live?
- What are some of the pressing needs in your community? Think of one specific step you and/or your church could take to address that need.

Chapter 2: A Community for Transformation

Those involved in the Nehemiah Center shy away from the term “center” and instead like to describe themselves as a “community.” As you study this chapter, reflect on those terms and consider how you might describe the Nehemiah Center. Consider the forces that were present at that time that led to the formation of the Nehemiah Center and the characteristics possessed by the people involved.

Understand

- How does the Nehemiah Center’s focus on training relate to its overall mission?
- What is a biblical worldview, and how is it different from secular materialism?
- What obstacles to collaboration among Christians exist in Nicaragua? How has the Nehemiah Center sought to overcome these challenges?

Reflect

- How would you describe your own worldview? In what ways do you practice syncretism?
- Why are personal relationships so important for societal transformation?
- In her journal entry on page 21, the author suggests that Central Americans’ perception of biblical worldview is different from that of North Americans’. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- On page 14, Kim Freidah Brown describes the vision to transform Nicaragua as an outrageous goal, and she says that outsiders might even consider it absurd. What do you think she meant by “outrageous”? Do you think transformation is outrageous? When might it be absurd or unrealistic?

Apply

- Think of a situation in which you tried to change another person or their circumstances. Were you successful? What might you do differently next time?
- Think about a time when you tried to work collaboratively on a difficult project. What characteristics must each collaborator possess in order to be successful? How can you cultivate those characteristics?
- What does it mean to “build the kingdom” in our daily lives?

Chapter 3: Bonding in the Wake of Disaster

It often seems to take a significant event – sometimes even a disaster like a death, a job loss, a tornado, or a hurricane – to force people to make a change. While always painful, those changes sometimes can lead to good things. Consider what might have happened if Hurricane Mitch had not hit Nicaragua in 1998.

Understand

- What circumstances brought the founders of the Nehemiah Center together? How did their respective backgrounds and skills influence the approach of the organization?
- What was the purpose of the 1999 conference, and how did it set the stage for the Nehemiah Center’s formation? What is the significance of the name “Nehemiah”?

Reflect

- What characteristics did the North American and Nicaraguan founders of the Nehemiah Center share? How did their commonalities help them overcome the political and religious divisions they faced?
- Where have you seen a transformation in thinking and living (in your own life or someone else’s)? What factors preceded or contributed to that transformation?
- How might better situations be created out of painful circumstances? When going through trying times, it is possible to look ahead to see how God might use those trials to create something good? How much trust is required to do that?

Apply

- In the Bible, Nehemiah was called to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. What walls need to be rebuilt or restored in your community? How might you be called to use your gifts or talents as part of that process?

Chapter 4: Walking in the Triangle of Death

In this chapter, Van Klompenburg writes about a truly impoverished community, so much so that she relates in her journal entry that she needed to create in her own mind a new definition of poverty: extreme poverty. She acknowledges that during a tour of the community, she felt despair, yet missionary Maria Saeli saw hope.

Understand

- What does it mean that Nehemiah Center seeks “end-to-end transformation”?
- What elements are involved in the process of “continual conversion”? Where do you see these elements in the stories of Mike and Maria, David and Wendy, and the farmers of Mombachito?

Reflect

- When you encounter poverty, what emotions do you feel? (Despair? Hope? Frustration? Anger?) How do you respond?
- What is your perspective on Archbishop Romero’s statement that “the kingdom always lies beyond us.” Is it comforting or challenging? Why?
- What is your definition of poverty?

Apply

- What crossroads have you experienced in your life, and what impact did your decisions at those moments make on your future?
- Consider your current lifestyle. What is one change or sacrifice you could make to become more of an agent of transformation in your community?

Chapter 5: Piercing Hearts

Missions is a large focus of this chapter – short-term missions, long-term missions, and the impacts they can make on people, in this case, both from North America and in Nicaragua. The author indicates that missions aren't always necessarily positive for everyone involved. As you reflect on this chapter, think about the requirements for a good missions program. Have you ever been on a mission trip? Were you transformed? Was that transformation long-lasting?

An integral part of mission trip is coming to a better understanding of poverty. There are so many degrees of poverty in the world today. In the parable in Matthew chapter 25, Jesus says that when we help poor people, we are helping him. As you read and reflect on this chapter, think about what it means to be poor.

Understand

- What are some of the pitfalls of short-term mission trips?
- How does the Nehemiah Center's approach differ from the typical approach to short-term teams?
- What is the difference between "poverty alleviation" and "reconciliation of the whole person"?

Reflect

- "Poverty is something we all have" (p. 73). What does that statement mean? Have you ever considered yourself to be poor in some way? Why or why not?
- How should we go about helping the poor?
- What is the value of developing long-term relationships between North Americans and South Americans?

Apply

- Focus too long on relief, and you create dependency. Focus too much on economic sustainability, and you may forget God's call to compassion" (p. 75). Which side of this spectrum is more difficult for you? Why?
- Have you seen the "fix-it" mentality in your own life (either applied to yourself or others)? How has it affected you or your relationships?
- How do your possessions affect your sense of dependence on God?

Chapter 6: Fish Pancakes

This chapter begins to get at the heart of the training offered by the Nehemiah Center. In this chapter, the author tells us about marriage training and the training to grow healthy churches. Nehemiah Center founder Joel Huyser has said he considers these the stepping stones to further transformation, that is, these are two key areas that must first be in order before additional growth can occur.

Told through the very personal story of Lourdes Rivas, this chapter explains in clear terms what an unhealthy marriage looks like and the alternative as well: what a healthy marriage can look like.

Understand

- What are the main issues plaguing marriages in Nicaragua?
- What is the difference between teaching biblical worldview through theological concepts versus through real life problems?
- How does the healthy churches training program strengthen Nicaraguan churches?

Reflect

- What is most striking to you about the transformation in Lourdes and Alejandro, and Daniel and Gloria's marriages and ministries?
- How do these couples' stories illustrate the intersections between physical and spiritual needs, and the importance of restoring whole persons? What has been the impact of their transformation in the lives of others?

Apply

- How do you recognize God's voice in your life?
- What attitudes or practices make you more receptive to hearing from God?

Chapter 7: Not Our Land

In this chapter, the author writes about Daniel Aragón and Darling Hüeck who donated the land they bought for their own home so that their neighborhood could have a school. In chapter 2 (page 21), Van Klompenburg tells in a journal entry about a pastor who spoke about his experience when God told him he wanted him to donate 100 percent of his profits from his farm sale, and also 100 percent of himself.

That kind of commitment is seen by quite a few people in this book. Is this commitment unique? Unique to Nicaragua?

Understand

- How did Daniel and Darling's background and experiences prepare them to start Mount Hermon school? What attitudes or character traits do you see in them?
- What issues does Nicaragua face in the area of education?
- How has the network of Christian schools contributed to the improvement of education in Nicaragua?

Reflect

- What makes a Christian school Christian?
- In what ways has God redeemed a past struggle in your life for a future purpose?
- Has your life been altered significantly by one of your educational experiences?

Apply

- What challenges do local schools face where you live?
- What is your commitment to education?
- How might you encourage education for yourself and others?

Chapter 8: From Dirt Eaters to Artisans

El Ojoche residents were known as “iguana-eaters,” the lowest of the low. Yet, while other communities weren’t ready for the Community Health Evangelism (CHE) training, this community was. Yes, they struggled, but the people in this community came together and made positive changes.

Understand

- What is the CHE program and how does it promote sustainable development?
- What physical and spiritual changes has El Ojoche experienced? What has brought about these changes?
- How did the leaders of El Ojoche respond to the leptospirosis crisis? What was the role of international organizations?

Reflect

- How do you avoid creating dependency in a relief situation? Does the case of El Ojoche offer any lessons?
- What sacrifices have you made for a cause or mission you believed in?

Apply

- What are some concrete ways to foster unity in a diverse community or church?
- In what ways would you like God to touch or change you?

Chapter 9: Joining God in the Lowest Places

In this chapter about the youth programs, one of the youth trainers, Hultner Estrada, asks us (page 131) to consider Hagar, the handmaiden of Abraham's wife, Sarah, who bears a child by Abraham. Before you discuss this chapter, read the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar again from the 16th and 21st chapters of Genesis. This time, put yourself into the role of Hagar and conscientiously think about her reaction and what yours might have been.

Understand

- How have Carl, Hultner, and Roberto's personal journeys prepared them to work with youth in Nicaragua? How would you describe their collaboration?
- What are the components and characteristics of the youth ministry known as the Strategy of Transformation? How has its approach to leadership training and outreach affected people in the church and wider community?

Reflect

- What does it mean to "read the Scriptures through the eyes of those who live in those lowest places"? How might that change the interpretation and application?
- Do you identify more with Hagar or Abraham? Why?

Apply

- Consider your own family history and situation. Have you ever wished your family could be perfect? Where do you need God's grace in your family?
- Where do you see God on the streets? How can you be an instrument of grace in the lowest places?

Chapter 10: Tugged in Different Directions

Van Klompenburg and Nehemiah Center co-founder Joel Huyser felt it was important to include in this book information about the struggles and failures of the Nehemiah Center. When reading a book of this nature, sometimes it is easy to gloss over the very real, very difficult, and very long struggles of the people involved. We rejoice that Lourdes Rivas is now a successful trainer and counselor, but the time period when someone would pull aside the curtain in the church and see her dressing is a very real part of her story. Hallelujah that Daniel Aragón champions Christian education, but it is important to remember he was addicted to drugs for years.

By the very nature of the word, transformation implies that something or someone was in a state that wasn't right. By including these stories of real struggles, the author hopes to make the story more relatable to each of us. Each of us struggle, each of us fail, but each of us has the opportunity to keep trying, to keep working on our personal transformations.

Understand

- What is the purpose of the Nehemiah Center's arts camps? How have these camps impacted the children who have participated? What are their limitations?
- How do the arts camps and media center reflect the Nehemiah Center's emphasis on service, learning, and collaboration?
- How did the expectations of North Americans and Nicaraguans for the business program differ? What other factors contributed to the business program's lack of long-term success?
- What are some of the lessons the Nehemiah Center is applying in its plans to expand its work to Esteli? What is their long-term goal for the relationship between North American and Nicaraguan churches?

Reflect

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a decentralized organizational structure? How has the decentralized organizational structure helped the Nehemiah Center's ministry and work over the last decade?
- What is the role of nonprofit organizations? How should the money from these organizations be funneled? Who should have the responsibility for determining where this money should be directed?

Apply

- What are some of the organizational challenges you have experienced in ministry or service work? How did you overcome them?
- When one of your projects fail, how can you pick up the pieces? How might you better consider opposing viewpoints?

Chapter 11: Seeding Somotillo

The author starts chapter 1 with the story of a defeated pastor. Closed-in, isolated, inaccessible, lonely are some of the words you might use to describe his way of life before his transformation. In this final chapter, the author writes about a pastor who has expanded his vision, broadened his life and that of his community.

One missionary described this pastor as essentially “creating a Nehemiah Center in his own zone,” (page 157). This is the kind of transformation that the Nehemiah Center hopes for, that Nicaraguans take it upon themselves to create, leading the change they want for their own country.

Understand

- What does Pastor Diomedes mean when he says “the church is the leader of the city”? How did he develop this vision and how is this vision reflected in the idea of PESCAR?
- What are the felt needs in Somotillo and how has Prince of Peace church been involved in meeting those needs?

Reflect

- What is the role of prayer in your life?
- How has God stretched your faith? When do you find it hard to believe?
- Again, consider the term, biblical worldview. Compare and contrast the worldview of Pastor Ruiz in chapter 1 and Pastor Diomedes in chapter 11.

Apply

- What is your biblical worldview? How has it changed in recent weeks? What does it require of you?
- What seemingly impossible dream might God be calling you to believe in and work toward?