

THE LAND IS NOT EMPTY

FOLLOWING JESUS IN DISMANTLING
THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

SARAH AUGUSTINE

Study Guide

By Grant Swanson



Harrisonburg, Virginia

Contributor's Preface and Introduction

1. When did you first hear about the Doctrine of Discovery? What were your initial thoughts or reactions?
2. How would you define the Doctrine of Discovery in your own words?
3. In the contributor's preface, Sheri Hostetler describes the three concepts she learned from conversations with Sarah Augustine. What are they? How do they intersect?
4. How does Augustine show that the Doctrine of Discovery is a present and ongoing reality for Indigenous communities on a global scale?
5. Many Christians, including Augustine, are often reluctant to get involved in justice movements because they do not believe themselves to be "qualified." How have you experienced this feeling of being "unqualified"? How does Augustine reorient us away from this feeling?
6. *Creation:* On page 16, the preface writer challenges readers, especially those who are white settlers, to "really listen" while reading this book. Create a plan of tangible steps, reading strategies, or mindfulness practices that you can commit to before reading to help you "really listen." Display your plan on a note card, on your phone, or via another form of reminder while you read.
7. *Action:* Augustine details her personal context and how it influences her writing to be forthright about her expertise and humble about her challenges. Take some time to prayerfully think through your personal context (social, cultural, economic, political, and other identity factors). How might your context aid or challenge the way you engage with this text?

The Doctrine of Discovery and Me

1. What are three differences between being “a walking person” and “a road-centric person” (p. 24)? Which are you? What are the benefits of being a walking person?
2. Whether conscious or unconscious, how did Christian missionaries aid and abet the Suriname government in resource exploration and extraction from Indigenous lands?
3. How would you define *terra nullius* in your own words? How do you understand it as a “cornerstone of the Doctrine of Discovery” (p. 27)?
4. How was the Doctrine of Discovery written into U.S. law? What are two examples of the Doctrine of Discovery used in modern legal cases? Did you learn this information during your K–12 education? If not, why do you think this history was left out?
5. How did the European “paradigm of domination” define Indigenous People on a global scale? How did Christianity provide the framework and justification for this definition? How has this “paradigm of domination” manifested in the past, present, and ongoing history of the United States and Suriname?
6. How do you understand Augustine’s experiences of “commissioning” and “divine call” on pages 34–35? When have you experienced a moment or moments of “divine call” or “commissioning” into ministry and justice work?
7. How do borderlines/political boundaries serve nations/states and not land or Indigenous communities?
8. Juxtapose the discussion of “real Indians” on page 31 with Augustine’s self-description of being a “Bad Indian” on pages 37–38. What do you notice? What is Augustine inviting us to consider about defining Indigeneity?
9. *Creation:* While Christianity played a key role in establishing, institutionalizing, and proliferating the Doctrine of Discovery, how might Christianity also dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery and create something different? Augustine mentions Jesus’ ministerial proclamation in Luke 4:18-19 as a call to deconstruct the Doctrine of Discovery and stand with those most harmed by it. Start to create a list of Scripture passages that call you, and others, to this ministry work of justice and peace. Leave space on this list, because you will continue to update it as you read this text.
10. *Action:* For many readers, this may be the first time that you are learning about the 1823 *Johnson v. M’Intosh* Supreme Court case that wrote the Doctrine of Discovery into U.S. law. And for folks who already knew about it, you probably learned this information later in life and not as a part of your K–12 education. What actions could we take to help teach others about this history of the Doctrine of Discovery? A few ideas:
 - a. Letter writing to school boards or elected officials
 - b. Book club or conversation groups with local community members
 - c. Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery small group with your church or another faith-based small group (a study guide resource is available at <https://dofdmendo.org/study-guide/>)

Laying Down Our Nets . . . or How We Came to Live on a Reservation

1. Given Augustine's humble example, how has adherence to an "ideal" prevented you from fully seeing another person *or* prevented you from challenging the status quo?
2. Why do you think it is so important for outsiders, like Augustine and her husband Dan Peplow in Suriname, to take the lead from locals in justice work instead of trying to make decisions for locals?
3. How would you describe the "crossing the Rubicon" or "Matthew 4:20" moment in Augustine's and Peplow's lives? Have you ever experienced such a moment? If yes, what was that experience like? If no, what are other ways that you seek human rights and justice for others?
4. How do the roles of the Christian church, the U.S. government, and institutions of education intersect in Augustine's historical account of attacks on Yakama land and culture?
5. How would you describe the legal battles the Yakama people have fought, and continue to fight, over sovereignty and land rights?
6. How does Augustine's discussion of garbage and recycling challenge you to think differently about poverty, systemic oppression, privilege, and land ownership?
7. What is the settler mindset toward the natural world? What is the alternative that Augustine describes? Where do you see examples of humans joining in the creation of life? Where do you see examples of humans dooming ourselves to death?
8. What role do you think the church could play in reorienting humanity toward the continuous role of life instead of the logic of death?
9. *Creation:* Augustine beautifully paints a word picture of the Yakama land on which she lives. She uses precise language in describing geographic features, plants, and animals. This shows that she knows the land as her neighbor. Take some time to paint a picture of words describing the location where you live. Spend time researching, walking, and getting to know the geographic features, plants, and animals that live around you. Be as specific as possible in naming the land that is your neighbor.
10. *Action:* Augustine is also able to describe the people history—past, present, and ongoing—of the land where she dwells. She has spent much time getting to know the histories of the Yakama people and building relationships with them today. All land in the United States was formerly the land on which a specific tribe or people dwelt. Spend some time researching who traditionally called the land on which you dwell "home." Get to know the history of these people (or peoples) and find out if and where they have sovereign land today. Is it nearby? Is it far away? Go to the tribal or nation website and see whether there are any opportunities to learn, connect, support, build relationships, seek reparations, and so on with this community.

Is Everyone at the Table Who Needs to Be Here?

1. At the top of the chapter, Augustine is at odds with a “prominent Mennonite theologian” (p. 58) over what constitutes peacemaking. Where do you see differences and commonalities between their definitions?
2. What do Augustine’s interactions with the institutional church in this chapter say about the general state of the church, Western institutionalized religion, and the priorities of theologians?
3. Augustine describes “if not you, then who?” moments (p. 61). For what issues or passions has God given you “if not you, then who?” moments?
4. On page 62, read through the seven actions in Augustine’s statement for the World Council of Churches (WCC) Executive Committee. What sticks out to you? What surprised you? What seems manageable? What would require greater community buy-in and collaboration?
5. What would “active inclusion” of marginalized voices in your own life and communities look like? What are some strategies, conversations, relationships, and steps you could take toward more intentional active inclusion?
6. How does Augustine intersect her conversations with the WCC and the scriptural story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28?
7. While the statement in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and denouncing the Doctrine of Discovery was eventually adopted by the WCC in Busan, it was not fully implemented because of several barriers. What were two of those barriers? What are two reasons Augustine gives for why these barriers exist?
8. How would you respond to the secular activist’s statement at the end of chapter 3? What parts of her statement are true, false, or in need of redemption? Where do you see the church living into the devastation of this statement? Where do you see glimpses of the church defying this statement?
9. *Creation:* Augustine makes a distinction between the body of Christ and the institutionalized/Western church at the end of chapter 3. Take a moment to close your eyes and imagine what the body of Christ might look like beyond the rigidity and pitfalls of the institutionalized/Western church. What do you see? What characteristics do you imagine? Who is there? Draw, paint, or digitally craft your body of Christ image. Get creative: include images, words, colors, sounds, and so on. May this image guide you in your justice work.
10. *Action:* In a journal, a notes app, or another preferred medium of note-taking, write down the seven actions in Augustine’s WCC Executive Committee statement on page 62. Take at least a week to pray over these seven actions and see how God might be leading you to envision these actions within your own life, within your church, or within your wider community context. Get creative! After you have developed a contextual list, start having conversations with others about implementing these actions.

The Doctrine of Discovery and Me, Again

1. Do you relate to the feeling of shame or detachment from ancestry that is described in this chapter? Why or why not?
2. Where do you see the outcomes of the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery in Augustine's vulnerable testimony?
3. How many different eras of U.S. Indian policy does Augustine detail in the section "A legacy of intentional trauma" (pp. 76–83)? How would you summarize the goals of each era?
4. If the goal of the Termination era "was to terminate the legal existence of tribal governments permanently" (p. 80), why did the U.S. government create a pathway (albeit an impossible one) for tribal nations to develop a nation-to-nation relationship? How does the status quo use legalese to justify marginalization and oppression?
5. What were the goals and outcomes of boarding schools?
6. How does Augustine challenge us to think about time as cyclical rather than linear through the personal, communal, and collective stories of trauma and shame shared in this chapter?
7. How have Christianity and Scripture been used to justify the supremacy of European migrants over Indigenous Peoples? How does Augustine provide an alternative interpretation of Jacob and Esau to resist this narrative of supremacy?
8. Chief Justice Marshall's opinion on European supremacy from the 1823 Supreme Court case *Johnson v. M'Intosh* remains the rule of law in the United States. What is required of us as individuals, as communities, and as the church to truly dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery?
9. *Creation:* Create a visual timeline of the different eras of U.S. Indian policy. With termination being reversed in 1988, extend the timeline to today. Reflect on this timeline, the larger picture of oppressive Indian policy, how the timeline correlates to the lived realities of trauma for Indigenous Peoples today, Augustine's challenge for us to think of time as cyclical rather than linear, and how we are being invited into justice work. Spend time journaling, thinking, and praying over these questions.
10. *Action:* Just as Augustine provided an alternative interpretation of a Scripture passage to resist the narrative of European supremacy, find a Scripture passage (or passages) that points to a more inclusive world *or* rejects the concepts of supremacy, domination, or oppression. Spend time reading and praying over the Bible as you embark on this intentional journey of interpretation and reclamation. Add this Scripture to the list you started from chapter 1.

We Don't Need Help, We Need Relatives

1. Cree Elder Stan McKay challenges Christians to question “the exceptionality of humanness” and expand our understandings to the truth in “all of creation” (p. 94). How do you understand this challenge? How does this challenge affirm or contradict (or both) your theology?
2. How does Augustine’s reinterpretation work of Matthew 28 model what we are called to as Christians and the church in dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery?
3. What is the Requerimiento? Explain, in your own words, Augustine’s three central concepts from the Requerimiento that remain a part of Christian mission today.
4. Name at least three negative outcomes and mindsets enacted by missionaries upon Indigenous lands and communities.
5. What are the papal bulls *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Inter Caetera* (1493)? How did they provide justification for the Doctrine of Discovery? What are modern manifestations of church-endorsed colonization?
6. What does the Baptist mission organization’s impact on the Wayana people of Suriname demonstrate about Western Christianity and its relationship with land, culture, traditions, and spirituality different from its own?
7. By building relationships with peoples who have different spiritual or cultural beliefs from us, how might we be invited to expand and grow our own worldview and faith? And how can we ensure we are not falling into the problematic pitfalls of appropriation?
8. At the end of the chapter, how is Augustine reimagining and redefining Christian terms with an Indigenous lens: mission, salvation, evangelism, redemption, and so on?
9. *Creation*: Several papal bulls, legal or governmental documents, and Scriptures are discussed in this chapter, as well as others. Find a piece of paper or other medium of notetaking, create a two-circle Venn-diagram, and label one “Church,” one “State/Government,” and the center intersection “Both.” As you come across different church documents, Scriptures, legal or governmental documents, and other sources that undergird the Doctrine of Discovery, write their names here they belong: “Church,” “State/Government,” or “Both.”
10. *Action*: At the start of the chapter, Augustine discusses the impact of Cree Elder Stan McKay’s advice “to seek healing in the sacred waters” of her homeland (p. 95). Spend time thinking about the physical lands and waters of your homeland or homelands. How did those physical features help form, shape, and grow you? Who are the caretakers of those physical features today? Or are they polluted and abused? What ways could you advocate for the well-being of those features? How might you (both) find healing in this advocacy work?

Reimagining Our Theology

1. What are the contradictions that Augustine points out within Deuteronomy 5–7, as well as between Deuteronomy and Luke 4?
2. Explain the “chosen people–promised land” mindset (p. 121) from Deuteronomy, as well as its historical and present manifestations, in your own words.
3. What does it mean to embrace your own “old testament” (p. 123)?
4. With Jesus’ mandate in Luke 4 as our guide, how does Augustine demonstrate that the Doctrine of Discovery, manifest destiny, and American exceptionalism are all structural evil? What Old Testament texts does she use to back up this claim?
5. What does Augustine say American Christians sacrifice “on the altar of our security” (p. 127)? And what do American Christians sacrifice it for?
6. What is a “transversal worldview,” and how could it be transformational for the body of Christ?
7. How do you understand the sins of the Western Church toward Indigenous spirituality and culture?
8. Christians are commanded to “choose the systems of Life over the systems of death” (p. 133). What are examples of “systems of Life”? What are examples of “systems of death”? List these examples on a piece of paper, notes app, or other form of note-taking. Reflect on your day-to-day routines. Pinpoint an opportunity to seek “systems of Life” where you may not have seen that opportunity before. Implement one opportunity to change this week.
9. *Creation:* As Christians, especially those who experience oppression, we are encouraged to bring life-giving stories and histories, personal and communal, alongside the gospel message of Jesus Christ in Scripture, to create our own “old testament,” or sacred texts. What stories, histories, or texts would you include in your own accompanying “testament”? Start gathering these stories, histories, or texts and write them down on the Scripture list you started in chapter 1.
10. *Action:* Augustine challenges us to communally rethink our theology toward systems of life and reject systems of death. Think of someone in your life who would be open to discussing what you are learning in this text. Commit to finding a time to invite this person into a conversation to process together.

Follow the Money

1. To what idols are global Indigenous Peoples continually sacrificed? Why?
2. How does discussing manifestations of the Doctrine of Discovery in the past tense and as unintentional serve the status quo of colonization?
3. How has international aid for economic development from wealthy countries to poorer countries become a primary mode of the Doctrine of Discovery, particularly in the twenty-first century?
4. Who are all the different constituent groups in the SLMP case study? Who are the “winners” and who are the “losers”? How is this a manifestation of the Doctrine of Discovery?
5. How is land and resource extraction connected with the overall health of human bodies and communities?
6. How does focusing on individual behavior modifications for suffering communities benefit the powers and principalities behind the Doctrine of Discovery? What types of modifications would protect those who are suffering?
7. How does the legality of exploitation, violation of rights, intentional harm, and murder of Indigenous Peoples shape your understanding of the global church’s urgent responsibility to demand change?
8. How does Western Christianity’s focus on individual sin make Western Christians complicit in the structural sins of capitalism, globalism, and other manifestations of the Doctrine of Discovery today?
9. *Creation:* Find the list of Scriptures and stories you created starting from chapter 1. Expand this list with the more focused goal of demanding change for the blatant human rights and life violations committed against Indigenous Peoples around the globe. Start with the Scriptures and stories Augustine mentions in this chapter.
10. *Action:* As Augustine shows us through the example of Everence financial services, we can make our voices heard through where and how we invest. Take time to research where you, your church or community home, and your place of work are investing money. Consider how you may be able to lobby your current investments, invest in more humanitarian organizations, or disinvest altogether.

Solidarity and Repair

1. What role does interpretation and reinterpretation of Scripture play in our call as Christians to solidarity and repair work?
2. How does Augustine distinguish Bev Barnum's solidarity from performative "symbolic" solidarity? How does Augustine distinguish her early work in Suriname as symbolic solidarity versus her later work as true solidarity? While it is important work, why is symbolic solidarity not true solidarity?
3. How do you understand the comparison of resource extraction and slavery as "systems of death"? How does this help you understand "systems of death"?
4. Augustine frames solidarity as giving up "the power to oppress, whether actively or passively" (p. 178). How does this challenge, affirm, or expand your understanding and commitment to solidarity work?
5. What are tangible examples that Augustine gives of churches leveraging wealth to support communities oppressed by economic development and extraction? What are some examples that your community might consider?
6. How does Augustine define *peacemaking*? Is this the same as, different from, or parallel to true solidarity?
7. How do you grapple with these seemingly opposed concepts in your own life: (a) working from the inside of oppressive institutions to effect change, (b) protecting self-interest, (c) holding dual allegiances, and (d) having structurally inherited privilege? And how does Augustine's centering Scripture, Philippians 2:1-4, help center your own reflections?
8. How does Augustine envision reparations and restorative justice? What are the tangible examples she gives? What might reparations and restorative justice look like for you and your communities?
9. *Creation*: Augustine creatively engages with Scripture by reframing Isaiah 58:2-12 in her own words and context. Look back over your ongoing list of Scriptures and pick out a Scripture that particularly speaks to your mission and call to justice work. Reframe and rewrite that Scripture in your own words. Get creative and use a medium of writing that works for you: a poem, a journal entry, a list, a manifesto, or so on.
10. *Action*: Augustine juxtaposes Isaiah 3:13-15 with common excuses for not seeking solidarity with the oppressed. Write down or think about these common excuses. What are some responses that you might prepare to have in your toolbox when you encounter these excuses either from others or from your own internal monologue? How could you spark further conversation or challenge deeper reflection? Feel free to get creative, drawing on Scripture, stories, or data that is authentic to you. Write down these responses or make note of them for future use.

My Cosmology

1. How do you understand the difference between Indigenous cosmologies and the cosmology of dominant culture/Western society?
2. What insights does Augustine discover about God's divine nature reading Scripture from an Indigenous worldview/cosmology? What insights are new, challenging, or clarifying?
3. How have Western society and the Western church actively worked to oppose, condemn, and demonize Indigenous cosmologies and worldviews? What might Western society perceive as threatening from Indigenous cosmologies and worldviews?
4. What are your initial reactions to the story with Van, Augustine's conclusion about "right relationship," and the implications on how you understand your relationship with power?
5. Unpack the ways in which Augustine shows that private property severs us from relationship with the land and with one another through the example of Celilo Falls. How might this connect with the title of the book, *The Land Is Not Empty*?
6. What does it mean to "think ecologically" from an Indigenous cosmology? How is this different from thinking ecologically from a Western cosmology?
7. What are the primary self-perpetuated barriers preventing Western churches from being aware of their complicity in injustice and being involved in justice work with oppressed communities?
8. How does Augustine suggest that the Western church reimagine reparations, repentance, right relationship, and redemption? What role does relationship play?
9. *Creation:* Augustine powerfully interprets Scripture through an Indigenous worldview/cosmology to better understand God's divine nature. Expand your list of Scriptures and stories to include Scriptures and stories that speak to an Indigenous worldview or cosmology. Start with the stories and Scriptures that Augustine shares. Then, using the insights Augustine points out about God's divine nature as a guide, seek out additional stories and Scriptures. Add them to your list.
10. *Action:* Western society does not question private property or interrogate its existence. Augustine challenges us to do precisely that. Find your preferred medium of reflecting or note-taking and document your relationship with private property. How do you understand private property? Have you ever questioned the necessity of private property; have you ever imagined a different way of being in relationship with the land than through private ownership? How might you be led to reorient your understanding of land away from private property ownership toward mutual relationship, advocacy, and solidarity? What might this look like in lived practice? After a time of reflection, find a conversation partner to discuss what you learned and how you might imagine a different relationship with the land together.

People of Faith, Rise Up!

1. Why is it important for us to reframe the Western worldview question “What can I do?” to “What can we do?” How does Scripture help us reframe from an individual worldview to a structural worldview?
2. How do Augustine and chapter coauthor Sheri Hostetler define structural sin? Why are all manifestations of the Doctrine of Discovery considered structural sin?
3. How does a cyclical understanding of time help us to move from “I” to “we” and from “individual sin/redemption” to “structural sin/redemption”?
4. What is the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition? What work does it do and what resources does it provide?
5. How do the authors define “church institutions” (p. 216)? What ideas for direct peacemaking do they challenge church institutions to explore and implement? What examples do they provide?
6. What are the three structural changes that the authors suggest implementing at a denominational and institutional level? What would it take for your communities to consider and implement these structural changes?
7. Why do the authors conclude this text with the story of Nehemiah 5? How does Nehemiah 5 relate to dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery and the restorative justice work of this book?
8. While the logic of life will always have the power defeat the logic of death, what does the logic of life require from us? How does this circle back to the “agenda of creation” discussed by Hostetler and Augustine on pages 16–17?
9. *Creation:* Augustine and Hostetler remind us that Scripture undergirds our call into the work of dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery and restorative justice because “God is a God of justice” (p. 229). Christians are called into this work because we have committed ourselves to God’s desire for the flourishing of all people and creation. As you finish reading, take the time to finalize your list of Scriptures and stories pulled from this text and from your own experiences. Carry your list with you as an ongoing conversation with this book and as a resource to give you the language, justification, and motivation you need to embark on restorative justice work.
10. *Action:* What resources and opportunities for communal justice work do Augustine and Hostetler present to congregations, church institutions, and general groups of people? What resources and opportunities do you want to live into as a part of your communities? Choose at least one action item and make a plan to start a community conversation around implementing that action item.