

## **Reading Group Guide**

### *My Hands Came Away Red*

Background Note: While the characters in this story are fictional, they experienced a real-world conflict. Events very similar to those depicted in this story have occurred in the Maluku Islands of Indonesia within the last fifteen years.

#### **Discussion questions**

1. To what extent do the characters of this book remind you of yourself or someone you know?
2. What scene(s) did you find had the most emotional impact? Why?
3. Did any part of the story make you uncomfortable or angry? If so, why?
4. What themes and/or questions stood out to you as you read this book? How did different characters in the story interact with these themes?
5. How do the various characters react to the massacre in Mani's village and the events that followed? Did you learn anything about the experience of trauma through their stories? Which character did you identify with most?
6. Marooned in the jungle, what was Cori thinking and feeling as she read Psalm 55 (pages 117-119)? Have you experienced events in your life that could have prompted similar questions and feelings? How did you react in those times? How do you address such questions in your own life, now?
7. How did Cori react after returning home? Why might she have reacted like that? Were you surprised by any of her reactions? How were they similar or different to experiences you or others have had after returning from spending time overseas?
8. How have the various characters changed by the end of the novel? What changes were "positive/negative"? Why?
9. Has reading this book prompted you to reconsider some of your views or investigate further some of the issues raised (e.g. faith-based or sectarian conflicts, post-traumatic stress)?
10. The title of this novel was taken from a line on page 95. Do you think "my hands came away red" is a good title for the book? Why or why not? What are some of the images and meanings the title evokes?
11. Where did you see laughter, joy, and hope in this story? Where did the characters find them? When things seem darkest in your own life where do you tend to find those things?

### **Additional questions...**

1. If you could ask one character one question, what would it be?
2. Most of the characters tell us something about their motivations for going on this mission trip. What were their various motivations and expectations? How can motivations and expectations influence how we cope with life experiences?
3. Would you consider undertaking a short term mission trip or encourage someone (a friend or maybe your child) to do so?
4. What can you do to better understand people who have a different faith or worldview?
5. How can we help avoid future breakdowns in the peaceful co-existence of and mutual respect between religious groups?
6. Throughout the novel, the characters frequently make up their own stories about a boy named Jip and his pet monkey, Kiki. What did Jip and Kiki come to mean to the characters in the story? What role(s) did they play as a literary device?
7. If you had been the team's counselor in Jakarta what might you have said to them? What questions would you have asked? What are some things that can help people cope after highly traumatic events?



