

JESUS BRAND SPIRITUALITY STUDY QUESTIONS

ORIENTATION TO THE LANDSCAPE Chapters One & Two

If you are discussing these questions in a group, you may want to refer to the *Discussion Ground Rules* for guidance. These can be found in the appendix or on www.jesusbrandspirituality.com.

1. What are some of the impressions you have of Christianity in contemporary society that exemplify what the author refers to as “trademark infringement on the Jesus brand” [see p. 6]?
2. Are you (or do you have a loved one who is) reluctant to pursue spirituality on the Jesus path because of negative associations with the religion that bears his name? How do you see those associations affecting you (or your loved one)?
3. How do you feel about viewing spirituality as a pilgrimage focused on taking the next step closer God? What are the advantages (and perhaps disadvantages) of this approach [see pp. 4–7]?
4. Trace some of the influences that have shaped your view of faith, using either the big picture quadrant of world religions [see p. 19] or the quadrant of Christianity [see p. 24].
5. What are some of your observations, thoughts, or experiences of what the author describe as “border blending” [pp. 31–32] or “corner dwelling” [see pp. 32–33].
6. What are some of your observations, thoughts, or experiences of what the author describes as “the tug toward the center” [see pp. 33–36].

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ACTIVE DIMENSION **Chapters Three & Four**

If you are discussing these questions in a group, you may want to refer to the *Discussion Ground Rules* for guidance. These can be found in the appendix or on www.jesusbrandspirituality.com.

1. The author depicts contempt as incompatible with Jesus Brand Spirituality [see pp. 41–44]. What are some experiences you've had on the giving and the receiving side of contempt over matters of spirituality or religion?
2. What do you think of the author's view that a concern for justice is at the heart of Jesus' message? Does this differ from your impression or understanding of the Christian message?
3. Why do you think care for the environment is consistent or inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus?
4. The author describes coming to a point of eagerness to follow Jesus without understanding or accepting doctrinal formulations that many would consider essential for authentic faith [see pp. 61–66.] What do you think of this? Is it possible to be a disciple of Jesus while remaining unsettled about what many consider core issues of faith?
5. The author describes an experience of awakening to a sense of God's nearness as a father [see pp. 68–73]. Have you ever felt a sense of God's nearness, and if so, what was it like?
6. If you or someone you know has experienced help from a twelve-step recovery program and wish to share about it, how did it affect your/their understanding of spirituality?

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CONTEMPLATIVE DIMENSION

Chapters Five & Six

If you are discussing these questions in a group, you may want to refer to the *Discussion Ground Rules* for guidance. These can be found in the appendix or on www.jesusbrandspirituality.com.

1. The author describes several factors that make it difficult for modern people to understand, talk about, and perceive “spiritual experience” [see pp. 89–96]. How have these or other factors influenced you?
2. The author describes a variety of experiences that are not ordinarily thought of as “mystical” [see pp. 96–98]. Have you ever experienced or felt something like that? If so, what was it like?
3. The author discusses changes in the way people understand the nature of reality [see pp. 107–15]. Do you think people in our society are more open to spiritual experience than previous generations? What factors do you think account for this?
4. What do you think of Phyllis Tickle’s analogy of the Internet [see p. 108] as a way to understand how prayer might involve an experience of “going somewhere” as well as doing something?
5. What do you think of the author’s recommendation to begin with the “breadth dimension” of prayer, that is, learning to pray at short intervals through the day [see pp. 116–21]?
6. Have you ever experienced a time of stillness and/or solitude that made you wish for more? What was it like, and how did it affect you?

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BIBLICAL DIMENSION

Chapters Seven & Eight

If you are discussing these questions in a group, you may want to refer to the *Discussion Ground Rules* for guidance. These can be found in the appendix or on www.jesusbrandspirituality.com.

1. The Bible can be an inspiring and intimidating book. What are the things about the Bible, as you understand it, that either inspire or intimidate you, or both?
2. What do you think of the idea that there is a common thread or unifying theme that runs throughout the Bible? What was your response to the author's attempt to tell the story of the Bible in five short acts [see pp. 135–44]? Did you find it helpful (or not) and if so, how?
3. Have you ever personally identified with someone's story in the Bible? What was it, and how did it move you?
4. How do you think Jesus' understanding or treatment of Scripture differed from his contemporaries?
5. The author thinks that we've underestimated the power of story as a means to convey truth. What do you think about this perspective? How have stories helped you engage the truth in ways that other ways of truth-telling haven't?
6. What are your thoughts on the tension between the certainty we crave and the idea that our knowing is always partial, at best? Have you ever found yourself acknowledging less certainty than you once had concerning a matter of faith or spirituality?

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COMMUNAL DIMENSION

Chapters Nine & Ten

If you are discussing these questions in a group, you may want to refer to the *Discussion Ground Rules* for guidance. These can be found in the appendix or on www.jesusbrandspirituality.com.

1. How do you think you've been affected by what the author describes as "the myth of individualism" or what Robert Putnam describes as "the loss of social capital"[see pp. 184–87]?
2. What opportunities do you see in your own life to participate more meaningfully in the communal dimension of spirituality?
3. What one thing about the church (your own, those you know of, or your impression of the church at large) would you change to make it more in keeping with the spirituality of Jesus as you understand it?
4. Do you see any difference between saying, "God is loving" and "God is love"?
5. What differences do you see between a spirituality that seeks understanding and one that seeks mastery? Have you ever felt that your approach to spirituality was more about seeking mastery than understanding? Describe what that was like.