

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

A Glimpse of Jesus

by

Brennan Manning

1. Brennan Manning believes that self-hatred often stops us from seeing God for who he really is. He describes “religious projection” as ascribing to God distorted remembrances from a difficult youth, thus making him in *our* image (pp. 4–7). Do you agree with this assessment? Can you see instances where you have adopted a distorted image of God by projection?
2. Similarly, Manning asserts that the desire for perfection sabotages one’s image of God. He writes, “The painful consciousness of having sold out for small comforts . . . and small compromises that now seem irreversible is a source of deep distress” (p. 8). Do you agree with the assertion that this kind of acquiescence to a comfortable, rather than radical, life leads to self-loathing, and ought to? Have you ever reproached yourself for selling out for small comforts? Why is this a problem? Or is it?

3. Manning defines Christian freedom as “the joyful acceptance of this unprecedented and scandalous reversal of the world’s values.” He takes it further by saying it means “to live without gloom by a lackey’s agenda” (p. 27). How might these lofty notions of freedom be realistically embraced in today’s world—or, more specifically, in your life?
4. Another way that self-hatred comes about is through moralism and legalism (p. 29). Is this form of self-hatred operative in your life? How does Manning say we can break free from it?
5. Quoting John McKenzie, Manning echoes a strong statement: “If the church had applied to the texts on divorce the same kind of exegesis it had applied to the more numerous texts on non-violence and the acquisition of wealth, divorce in the Christian community would be no more common than war and riches” (p. 59). McKenzie and Manning seem to be suggesting that there is a double standard when it comes to morality and that the church is inconsistent in its interpretation. Do you agree?
6. In a gesture to reclaim those whom the church has wrongfully spurned (because of legalism and judgmentalism), Manning makes a “bold biblical suggestion” that the church should declare a jubilee year, inviting all the disenfranchised Christians to return with a warm welcome (p. 61). Do you believe this would rectify past damages? How? If you considered yourself to

be among the disenfranchised, would you attend such a jubilee?

7. Manning quotes Malcolm Muggeridge: “From the Middle Ages . . . professionals have monotonously neglected art and the imagination as guides to religious truth. I find myself in complete agreement with those who wish to reinstate the mystics, clowns and artists alongside the scholars” (p. 68). What can artists and clowns bring to the religious landscape that professionals cannot?
8. “Prayer is first and foremost an act of love” (p. 83). What do you think about this statement?
9. Fear is the primary obstacle to prayer, Manning writes. Why might that be the case? Have you noticed this in your experience of prayer?
10. Manning affirms M. Scott Peck’s summarization of sin as, ultimately, laziness (p. 89). Do you agree or disagree? In what way?
11. Manning dismisses those who uphold the notion that our work is our prayer (p. 89) as applying faulty logic. Is God limited in the kinds of prayer he attends to?
12. In Iris Murdoch’s novel *The Nice and the Good*, a character is trapped in a cave that is slowly filling with water. In a moment of what Manning refers to as “great lucidity,” the trapped man cries out, “If I ever get out of here, I will be no man’s judge, . . . not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, . . . All power is sin and all law is frailty” (p. 100).

Why would such a thought come to a desperate man facing death? Do you agree that all power is sin? How is this so? What, then, do we make of church leaders and religious politicians?

13. Living consistent with the “gospel vision” involves being able to consistently integrate one’s faith, intellectual pursuits, and feelings. Manning says, “Daily we make choices that are either consistent with or contrary to the gospel vision” (p. 105). Do you agree with these assumptions and that the process of decision making is this black-and-white? What might be an example of a decision you have made that is either contrary to the gospel vision or consistent with it?
14. Manning describes the challenge a fellow Franciscan put to him when he asked, “Do you ever reflect upon the fact that Jesus feels proud of you?” (p. 115). Do you ever reflect upon that fact? In what ways might Jesus feel proud of you?