

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

If the Church Were Christian

Rediscovering the Values of Jesus

by
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CHAPTER 1: JESUS WOULD BE A MODEL FOR LIVING RATHER THAN AN OBJECT OF WORSHIP

1. It is not unusual for religions to deify (to make a god of or take as an object of worship) religious leaders, prophets, or founders. Why do you suppose religions do that? What practical purpose does that serve? How might it be unhelpful?

2. How central is the moral perfection of Jesus to your faith? Why is that important or unimportant to you?
3. How would you live differently if Jesus were a model of living, not an object of worship?

CHAPTER 2:

AFFIRMING OUR POTENTIAL WOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN CONDEMNING OUR BROKENNESS

1. Can you remember the first time a religious leader or parent said you were a sinner? Did you believe him or her? What effect has that had on your relationship with God? With others?
2. While I speak of the negative effects of guilt, is there such a thing as “good” guilt?
3. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

CHAPTER 3:

RECONCILIATION WOULD BE VALUED OVER JUDGMENT

1. This chapter begins with a memory of the rite of confession. Do you think such a rite could be helpful in your spiritual journey? Why or why not?
2. Are you estranged from someone you were once close to? What would need to happen for reconciliation to occur?

3. Do you think it might be helpful for the church to have a rite of divorce as described in this chapter? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 4:
GRACIOUS BEHAVIOR WOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT
THAN RIGHT BELIEF

1. If being Christian means believing the right things about Jesus, who decides what those right things are?
2. Would a gracious atheist be welcomed in your church?
3. What is the correlation between playfulness and rigid religion?

CHAPTER 5:
INVITING QUESTIONS WOULD BE VALUED MORE
THAN SUPPLYING ANSWERS

1. If you could ask any question of the church, what would it be? How does it feel to ask that question?
2. Could your search for truth ever lead you away from the church?
3. Describe a church that values questions as much as it values answers.

CHAPTER 6:
ENCOURAGING PERSONAL EXPLORATION WOULD BE
MORE IMPORTANT THAN COMMUNAL REFORM

1. If you belong to a church, are you expected to believe certain things? Are there patterns of behavior you are expected to follow to be accepted? How did these expectations arise? Who decided and enforced them?
2. Have you ever felt shunned? Have you ever shunned?
3. What would a church look like that valued personal exploration over communal uniformity?

CHAPTER 7:
MEETING NEEDS WOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT
THAN MAINTAINING INSTITUTIONS

1. Do you agree with Will Campbell, that “all institutions, every last single one of them, are evil; self-serving, self-preserving, self-loving, and very early in the life of any institution it will exist for its own self”?
2. Can you think of an institution that has remained true to the vision that gave it birth?
3. Does working with others in the church to meet human need restore your love for the Christian community?

CHAPTER 8:
PEACE WOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN POWER

1. Can you explain the difference between authority and authoritarianism? Why does the first often lead to the second?
2. If, as some claim, America is a Christian nation, does that justify Christian participation in war?
3. Do you believe the church is attractive to persons seeking power and control? If so, why is that?

CHAPTER 9:
IT WOULD CARE MORE ABOUT LOVE AND LESS ABOUT SEX

1. Do you believe the church, generally speaking, has a healthy understanding of human sexuality?
2. Has the church's understanding of sexuality caused it to be less gracious to people who don't meet the church's expectations?
3. What do you believe should be the standards for Christian marriage?

CHAPTER 10:
THIS LIFE WOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT
THAN THE AFTERLIFE

1. Is the church's historic emphasis on the afterlife a proper concern for the church?

2. How would the church be different if its primary concern were proper stewardship of this life and world?
3. Can you think of your own “Ben and Dorothea,” persons who seemed to have a deep sense of community and caring?

A CONCLUDING QUESTION

1. I have emphasized ten aspects of the church I believe should change if the church were to take seriously the ethic of Jesus. Can you think of any others?