

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Honest to God Prayer: Spirituality as Awareness, Empowerment, Relinquishment and Paradox

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Orientation and Prologue

- How have you experienced the four movements of prayer (as awareness, empowerment, relinquishment and paradox)? Which of these tends to get shortchanged?
- Are you familiar with the Native American four directions or with the Ignatian (Jesuit) tradition of the four themes (“weeks”) of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*? What is your response to the parallels the author suggests?
- At what points in your life have you experienced waking up to reality, embracing dreams, letting go of attachments or integrating seeming opposites?

Prayer as Awareness (Theme One)

- “The direction for awakening in primal and biblical traditions is East, and its time is dawn.” What practices help you awaken your awareness?
- “To restore the healthy child in yourself is to live with soul, awake with all the senses to life’s pain and play.” How do you think our Western society either encourages or discourages the healthy child in us?
- Scan over the nine Multiple Intelligences (pp.18–19). Which ones describe ways of prayer and spirituality that seem natural for you? Which ones would stretch you in your spiritual life?
- “By meditating with the ‘what is’ of our experiences, we begin to see traces of grace rising from the grit of our own or others’ defeats and discouragements.” When have you noticed some trace of grace in the grit? Pause to reflect. Then share.
- Glance over the prayer poem “Who Is the You I Pray To?” in chapter 2. What phrase or metaphor speaks to you? disturbs you? delights you?
- Read aloud the dialogue between master and disciples at the end of chapter 2. Can you recall some momentary glimpse of spiritual awareness that happened for you on the road? Pause to reflect. Then listen to a few such stories.
- If moments of awareness happen far more often on the road than in a temple or during personal prayer, why pray or meditate?
- What do you think about the idea that listening to the body can be an opening to spiritual awareness?

Prayer as Empowerment (Theme Two)

- “Honest to God empowerment means noticing, offering and listening to your gifts in order to claim your own potential for transforming the world.” How does this message sound like or unlike what you’ve heard from your family, from instructors, from the culture around you?
- How do you respond to Kierkegaard’s parallel of prayer to breathing?
- How is imagination as a spiritual or human quality valued in our society, in your experience?
- What would it mean to speak with your own voice?
- How does the ancient metaphor of the tree of life speak to you of the need for balance between contemplation and action? How do you attend to this balance?
- How do you respond to the idea of creative questions as a spiritual practice for empowerment? How could you cultivate this practice in your relationships?
- Which parts of your life mission do you see as expressed in intimacy (cultivating meaningful relationships) and generativity (doing fruitful work in the world)?

Prayer as Relinquishment (Theme Three)

- We tend to think it is only in the afternoon of life that we experience losses. But think again. What sort of losses have you seen children experience? What sort of losses did you experience as a child?
- How can the diminishment of our life become for us a source of good? How have you seen this in your own life?
- When have you experienced a time of emptiness or liminal space as a fertile time for gestation or renewal? Or for organizations or institutions?
- Find the Beatles’ song “Let It Be” and play it for yourself or for your group (following practice 18). Share your reflections.

Prayer as Paradox (Theme Four)

- How do the two words *eclectic* and *integrative* describe spirituality differently?
- In what ways can you cultivate an integrative life that is true to the core of your own being rather than merely adding on new experiences?
- What are some of the seeming opposites that you seek to integrate into creative paradox in your life?
- When have you experienced a *felix culpa*—a good mistake—in your life?
- How can you cultivate the *tao* of simplicity and complexity—simplicity?

- Note the seven suggested practices for integrating both/and spiritual living. To which ones do you feel drawn to pay more attention? Which ones make the most sense to you? Which ones seem most countercultural?
- What insight of intention will you take away from reading *Honest to God Prayer*?