

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Promise:

God's Purpose and Plan for When Life Hurts

by

Father Jonathan Morris

PART ONE GOD ON TRIAL

This reader's guide was designed for individuals and small groups to engage with the material as they move through each chapter. As you read, take time and reflect on the questions listed here, and use them to spark further discussion.

CHAPTER 1:
DO YOU EVEN CARE, GOD?

1. Does the evil I see or the suffering I experience move me toward God or away from God?
2. Have I lost trust in God? If so, what were the causes?

CHAPTER 2:
REASONABLE FAITH?

1. Do I think faith is reasonable? Am I able to explain this belief to others?
2. Is learning more about God and my faith a priority in my life?

CHAPTER 3:
SOMEONE LIKE GOD

1. How do I conceive God? How would I characterize my relationship with God?
2. Does my perception of God change in difficult moments?

CHAPTER 4:
IN GOD WE TRUST?

1. Do I really trust in God? If not, why not?
2. Do I have a personal, intimate, and loving relationship with God, as with a close friend?

CHAPTER 5: REVEALED IN SUFFERING

1. What does Christ's suffering mean to me? Does it move me? Does it make me want to love him in return?
2. How can I apply the message of Christ's suffering to my own life?

CHAPTER 6: IN COURT

1. How can I transform my suffering into a springboard for personal growth?
2. What does God's Promise say to me in my present situation?

PART TWO EMOTIONAL SUFFERING

CHAPTER 7: HOW DO YOU HURT?

1. Do I know how and why I hurt?
2. Can I see connections between emotional, spiritual, and physical hurt in my own life?

CHAPTER 8: HEART DAMAGE

1. What do holiness and God's grace have to do with finding meaning and joy in the midst of my suffering?
2. Have I detected any emotional or spiritual damage in my life? Am I willing to confront it?

CHAPTER 9: THE FATHER OF LIES

1. What lies have I accepted that have left emotional and spiritual damage?
2. What am I going to do to begin replacing lies with truth?

CHAPTER 10: SOURCING THE SUFFERING

1. Do I want God to enter my soul and heal me in an integral way? Will I open myself up to him in prayer?
2. Am I giving God and his grace their proper role in my spiritual life, or am I trying to do it all on my own?

PART THREE

PRINCIPLES FOR FREEDOM: LIVING

CHAPTER 11: MAKING A FUNDAMENTAL OPTION FOR HOLINESS

1. Have I made a fundamental option for holiness? Would anyone know it?
2. What is my idea of success? Is it the same as God's?

CHAPTER 12: LIVING MY PERSONAL VOCATION

1. Have I asked the question "God, what do you want me to do for you?" Has he responded?
2. Have I accepted suffering as part of God's plan for my life?

CHAPTER 13: UNITING MY SUFFERING TO HIS, FOR OTHERS

1. Do I understand why my suffering has value in the eyes of God?
2. Am I willing to take part in God's Promise and offer up my suffering for the sake of others?

CHAPTER 14: BEING THE HANDS AND FEET OF CHRIST

1. Who needs me to be the hands and feet of Christ for them today?
2. What should be my strategy to be an effective Good Samaritan, given my particular talents and the circumstances of my life?

CHAPTER 15: SKETCHING A PLAN FOR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

After reading through this chapter, consider sketching a personal plan for your spiritual life. Using the outline below, follow each of Father Jonathan's points: identify your major obstacle, set a goal, identify any threats, and finally, make a strategy for how to move forward. Keep your outline close-by for the next few weeks and see if it is able to help you meet your spiritual goals. Remember, this won't be an overnight solution, but a life-changing process."

Outline for Sketching My Plan for the Spiritual Life

Here is a simple outline you can use to sketch a plan for the spiritual life.

MAJOR OBSTACLE ("MY ROOT SIN")

Manifestations of My Root Sin in Daily Life

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

SPIRITUAL GOAL (“MY OPPOSITE VIRTUE”)

Threats to Attaining This Goal

In my relationship with God

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In my relationship with others

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In my interior

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

STRATEGY

In my relationship with God

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In my relationship with others

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In my interior

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

APPENDIX ONE: COURT OF APPEALS

1. How do I understand evil?
2. Does the idea of evil as a “missing good” rather than part of God’s creation help me understand God’s role in suffering?

APPENDIX TWO: EARTHQUAKES AND TSUNAMIS

1. Was physical evil part of God’s original plan? Why does he permit it now?
2. What’s the difference between physical evil and moral evil?

APPENDIX THREE: MORAL EVIL, THE WICKED KIND

1. What is the connection between evil and freedom?
2. Have I ever misused my freedom, becoming the cause of evil for someone else?