

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Jesus: A Story of Enlightenment

by

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1. What is your initial response to a fictional account of Jesus's life? Do your own beliefs support or detract from this imagining of Jesus's path to enlightenment?
2. One of the main themes of *Jesus: A Story of Enlightenment* is the exploration of the gap that exists between the everyday Christian and an enlightened Jesus—Jesus wants everyone to reach a higher state of being, just as he did. Is enlightenment something you consciously seek for yourself or see others in your life actively striving for? To what lengths would you go to attain an enlightened state? What other priorities conflict with your search for enlightenment?

3. Chopra uses the format of a novel to present many thought-provoking questions about spirituality. How do you think a fictional biography can be a useful supplement to your understanding of God and the Bible?
4. In Chapter 10, Jesus recounts a moment of revelation from his childhood. As a young boy, he aimlessly explored the area surrounding his village. One day, lost in the hills, he stopped to rest and found himself watching a small sparrow darting to and fro. He continues, “Suddenly, my eyes were opened. How many generations of sparrows have lived this way? Many more than the generations of men. They had no plan where they were going. But God’s hand has guided them these thousands of years. If he can find seed enough for sparrows, what more does he want to do for you?” How does the idea of letting go and letting God’s plan lead the course of your life make you feel? What sort of emotions appear? Why does surrendering control frighten so many people? In what ways can you practice letting go in your own life?
5. Jesus says to Judas, “All you have to fear from me is that I come in peace.” How are *fear* and *peace* defined in this statement? Why would Judas fear peace? Is Jesus’s arrival at this moment a threat to Judas?
6. Jesus also says to Judas: “I was your first disciple.” What is your reaction to this inversion of the generally accepted image of Jesus as a leader of disciples? If Jesus is a disciple of Judas, what does that make Judas? How does Chopra’s inversion redefine your existing understanding of Judas and his role in Jesus’s life?

7. On page 159 Chopra writes, “Mary wanted to accept that Jesus followed God’s will, but that was the problem, not the solution. A man moved by God alone was like a leaf blown before the wind, or a bird zigzagging from perch to perch. No plan, no direction could be seen.” Is Mary right in her reluctance to follow Jesus? Is Chopra’s assessment of “a man moved by God alone” correct? Explain why you either agree or disagree.
8. “Maybe the Messiah has come, but he’s here to save Romans too” (p. 174). How does this statement remain revolutionary today? Do non-Christians receive God’s mercy? Why or why not?
9. Which character do you relate to most? Mary, Jesus, or Judas? Or perhaps you have characteristics from each character. What elements of each main character’s personality make up your own? Which characteristics from Mary, Jesus, and Judas do you not have, but wish you did?
10. At the end of the story, Jesus redeems Judas, revealing that Judas had merely played his necessary part. Do you agree that Judas’s actions were necessary? Can Judas’s betrayal be seen as a necessary step leading up to the Salvation of Man?
11. Chopra presents Christianity as a path to enlightenment, much as Buddhism is. Does this switch in traditional vocabulary make a difference in your understanding of Christianity? How is this idea different from the idea of Christianity as a path to salvation? Can these two beliefs be reconciled? Do you find yourself drawn to one over the other?

12. Chopra places Jesus with Mary Magdalene and Judas Iscariot, two of Christianity's more controversial figures. What lessons can be taken away from Jesus's choice of companions during his formative years, pre-enlightenment? Do you agree with the author that God is in all things and people?
13. Is it helpful to read about Jesus depicted in a realistic, complex manner, or do you prefer the flawless Son of God? What implications for Christianity does each representation bring?
14. On page 256 Chopra queries, "Turning inward seems familiar—every spiritual tradition demands it—but what do we do when we get there?" Paraphrase the five steps of Chopra's Process of Enlightenment. Which of these steps do you anticipate will be difficult or easy to follow? Do any of the steps surprise you? Why? How do these steps inspire you to make changes in your everyday life?
15. Chopra argues, "Renunciation of the world, in the sense of giving up on it, has nothing to do with this path, nor does piety and ostentatiously living a religious life in order to seem better than those who don't" (p. 262). How does this go against your expectations? Do you notice people who seem to be living the religious life for the wrong reasons? In what ways do you find yourself using religion as a source for validation?
16. What three questions does Chopra encourage you to apply to your behavior in every situation? How does this process of questioning your own actions help

bring focus and clarity to your path? Why do you think holding yourself accountable is important?

17. Truly great writing consists of vivid prose as well as intriguing concepts. What are your favorite ideas and passages and why did they affect you? Did you read anything that particularly changed the way you think?