

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Streams of Living Water

by

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IMITATIO: THE DIVINE PARADIGM

1. Foster discusses how Jesus exemplifies each of the six streams of the Christian tradition: Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical, and Incarnational. Which of these streams best fits the way you understand and think about Jesus? Which feels the most unfamiliar to you? How are these understandings reflected in your own practices?

THE CONTEMPLATIVE TRADITION: DISCOVERING THE PRAYER-FILLED LIFE

1. Why are John's teachings on love such a good example of the Contemplative Tradition? How does prayer teach us about love?
2. Some view practitioners of the Contemplative Tradition as excessively self-focused, but Frank Laubach's intense experiences of contemplative and intercessory prayer led him to found an influential literacy movement. How has prayer moved you to action? Further, God revealed to Laubach that his prayers were "large and noble" when he prayed for others as opposed to "thin and small" when he prayed for himself. Laubach also found that he prayed best when physically next to the person for whom he was praying. How do his experiences praying for others correlate with your own?
3. Foster describes the contemplative life as "the steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us" (p. 49) and "a life of loving attention to God" (p. 58). How have you experienced the contemplative life? Which of Foster's suggested practices do you plan to try?

THE HOLINESS TRADITION: DISCOVERING THE VIRTUOUS LIFE

1. Foster tells us that the message of James's epistle is that purity of action flows from purity of heart. How do the life and teachings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer also reflect

that message? How can we keep our own lives from being works-first?

2. Foster describes a holy life as “a life that works” and holiness as “the ability to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done” (p. 82). What does he mean by this? Does this understanding differ from your ideas of holiness? If so, what, in your opinion, are some of the wrong ideas about holiness that he discusses?
3. What are some of the ways in which you have practiced the Holiness Tradition? What are some new ways in which you would like to practice it?

THE CHARISMATIC TRADITION: DISCOVERING THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LIFE

1. What does the Charismatic Tradition mean to you? How does the Charismatic Tradition differ from the Holiness Tradition? Why is it essential that the two traditions be in balance in our lives?
2. William Seymour declared that any demonstration of the power of the Spirit was just more of God’s love and that if any manifestation did not bring more of God’s love, it was counterfeit. When have you experienced such an outpouring of God’s love?
3. What gifts of the Spirit do you have? How do they fit with the gifts of others in your community of faith? What are some new ways in which you can open yourself to the Charismatic Tradition?

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE TRADITION: DISCOVERING THE COMPASSIONATE LIFE

1. Foster writes that the message of Amos—that God demands social righteousness in addition to worship—was and is often unpopular. Do you think this is true? In your Christian community, is this message still unpopular today? Conversely, have you seen yourself or others overemphasizing social justice to the detriment of the other traditions? Do you agree with Foster that the Social Justice Tradition tends to rigidity and judgmentalism? Explain.
2. Foster describes social justice as the place where love “meets the road” (p. 166). How does this justice, *mishpat* in Hebrew, differ from our usual understanding of “legal” justice?
3. John Woolman backed up his convictions with concrete actions, always done gently and in a spirit of great love. How have you been able to do this in your life? Where have you struggled to match your actions to your beliefs? How may God be calling you to work for justice in the future?

THE EVANGELICAL TRADITION: DISCOVERING THE WORD-CENTERED LIFE

1. Foster defines the Evangelical Tradition as “a life founded upon the living Word of God, the written Word of God, and the proclaimed Word of God”

(p. 233). Billy Graham began exemplifying this life during his time at Florida Bible Institute, where he was able to “soak” himself in Scripture—reading, studying, pondering, preaching, and applying it to his life. When, if ever, have you soaked yourself in Scripture? How did it affect your life?

2. One constant roadblock for Christians seeking to live the Word-Centered Life is disagreement about matters of biblical interpretation. Foster advises that we can help determine what are essentials and what are secondary principles by considering how close each matter is to the Christ event—Jesus’s birth, life, death, and resurrection. What are some matters of biblical interpretation that have caused disagreement in your community of faith? How might Foster’s advice help place them in perspective?
3. When have you been the most successful at living the Evangelical Tradition, the Word-Centered Life? Foster suggests that for most of us, the problem is not about knowing what we need to do, but actually doing it. What are some ways in which you might be able to take action in getting to know both the Bible and the people around you?

THE INCARNATIONAL TRADITION: DISCOVERING THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE

1. Do you know anyone who practices a sacramental way of living like Susanna Wesley modeled? How have you succeeded or struggled at practicing what Jean Pierre

de Caussade called the “sacrament of the present moment,” (p. 263)? How have you been tempted to draw a line between daily life and religious life, between secular and sacred?

2. Foster directs us to invite God into all the areas of our lives—our bodies, minds, relationships, work, and society. Into what area do you feel you most need to invite God? Why?
3. Foster calls us to see our work as our calling, our vocation, and also to try to rediscover the concept of the home as the center of family life where we work, worship, play, and make love. How have you practiced sacramental living in your work and in your home? How can you make your home more of a center for sacramental living?

AFTERWORD

1. Upon reflection, which streams are you most comfortable with? Which are you less familiar with, less adept at practicing? If through the reading of this book you experienced new traditions, what new people have they brought you in contact with? What have you learned?