

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Importance of Being Foolish

by

Brennan Manning

1. Early in the book, Brennan Manning emphasizes the power of manual labor. What is the nature of the power produced by manual labor, and in what way does it elevate the human soul?
2. Manning asserts that the contemporary church both tolerates and perpetuates lies. Do you agree? If so, what do you think are some lies the church tolerates and perpetuates?
3. What does Manning mean when he says “self-deception is the enemy of wholeness” (p. 5)? In what ways might people of faith be deceiving themselves? How might a church deceive itself? How does self-deception fragment a person’s inner wholeness, and is this bad?

4. Believers must live in truth, even if it means through “painful, merciless interaction” (p. 11). Aren’t Christians supposed to show mercy? Do you think inflicting pain can be an act of grace? How so? If not, why?
5. Manning quotes the late Jean Daniélou: “Truth consists in the mind’s giving to things the importance they have in reality” (p. 13). What does this mean?
6. Do you agree with Manning’s statement that money rules the world? Is this evident in the church as a whole? What about in your life and your particular church? If so, how?
7. When reflecting upon Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, Manning asserts that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who perceive in themselves the “misery of the sinner” (p. 33). What might this misery look like for someone who knowingly has done wrong? What about someone who knowingly hasn’t done right? Is the misery equal in both instances? Should it be?
8. Do you agree with the statement, “We are inordinately preoccupied with security, pleasure, and power” (p. 79)? Who is the “we” in this statement? How does this preoccupation show itself, and how does it hinder the person’s transparency?
9. Do you see any correlations between the story of the Medicine Man and Willie (pp. 85–91) and the relationship that Jesus desires with individuals? What is the real medicine that effected change in this story?

10. Manning likens the repentance of a sinner to the experience of a confessed alcoholic at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting (p. 102). How do AA's principles allow members to demonstrate authentic repentance? Do you see a connection between these principles and Jesus's call for sinners to repent?
11. Manning says compassion is when "you send out the signal, 'Yes, I know. I've been there too'" (p. 111). Is it possible for a person to exhibit authentic compassion for another if he or she hasn't "been there" yet truly cares?
12. Manning speculates that the failure of an inestimable number of marriages, jobs, and personal relationships, as well as much "concomitant suffering," might have been avoided if the individual had been able to "submit [his or her] decision-making process to the Lordship of Jesus Christ." What does it look like to submit the process to Christ's Lordship? This also begs the question: Is it possible that an individual who did submit the process to Christ's Lordship could still end up in a wrong marriage, job, personal relationship, or other cause of suffering? If so, how is this reconciled to living the gospel life?
13. How might we apply "personal boundaries" (p. 140) in trying to live the life Christ calls us to?
14. Manning highlights Francis of Assisi as a seminal example of one who completely abandoned the things of this world and instead devoted himself to a wild embrace of

the purposes of God. What was Francis's vision of God that enabled him to live this way (pp. 142–43)? Does this example suggest that all believers are called to live the way Francis of Assisi lived? What does his example mean for how you personally experience faith?

15. To live in “foolishness” (as the title suggests), Manning asserts that “we must renounce all that we possess, not just most of it. We must give up our old way of life, not merely correct some slight aberrations in it” (p. 182). How do you respond to this notion? Is it attainable? Is it appropriate? Is this what following Jesus demands? If not, what does the book's title mean in reality? If so, what are you waiting for? What changes can you make to live with more “foolishness” for Jesus's sake?