

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR



If God Is Love

by

Philip Gulley and James Mulholland

CHAPTER 1: WHY BELIEFS MATTER

1. How does Philip Gulley and James Mulholland's belief that God will save everyone make you feel? Happy? Relieved? Confused? Angry?
2. The authors say that "universal salvation is not an event, but a process" (p. 10). Have you ever thought about salvation as a process? How does it change the way you think about God's grace and his ultimate goal for our lives?
3. If you were raised with a specific image of God, what did it look like? Was it a violent image? If so, how has that affected your treatment of those who hold different beliefs?

4. Have you ever been ostracized for your beliefs?

CHAPTER 2: EMBRACING GRACE

1. Has fear been used as a tool in your religious experience? Were you ever persuaded by the conversion tactics described in this chapter? Why do you think these tactics work?
2. Why does a theology based on fear fail to inspire acts of compassion and service?
3. Do you agree that thinking about earning God's blessing, or being rewarded for good works, is destructive? How does it make faithfulness a selfish act?
4. When describing how we learn to accept grace, the authors write, "When God looks on us, God smiles. Pure religion is learning to smile back" (p. 36). It's a beautiful picture of what the life of faith could be. How does our calling on earth change when we think about learning to smile at God? How could we learn to incorporate that into our spiritual practice?

CHAPTER 3: BEING GRACIOUS

1. Does your worldview change when people can no longer be divided into tidy categories of saved, unsaved, and wicked? Where do you see these categories coming into play in your life? How could you learn to eliminate them or refuse to tolerate them from others?

2. Why do we persistently try to escape the command to love? How do you find yourself making excuses?
3. Who is your enemy? Does it change your way of perceiving enemies when the authors remind us that “God loves our enemies as much as God loves us” (p. 71)?
4. How is empathy part of our calling as the people of God? How can you start to cultivate this powerful tool in your life?

CHAPTER 4: LIVING GRACIOUSLY

1. How can you begin to live more graciously at home? With your spouse? With your children?
2. The authors argue that shifting our focus from what we “do” to the kind of person we can “be” is an essential transition for those looking to live graciously (p. 99). Why does our culture value action over attributes? What kind of actions might you take to encourage this mind shift?
3. “Any game or pastime that divides us contributes to the dysfunction of our world” (p. 109). Are there any hobbies you enjoy that might be contributing to the dysfunction of the world?

CHAPTER 5: GRACIOUS RELIGION

1. In this chapter, Gulley and Mulholland encourage religion to become more gentle, humble, open, and com-

passionate. Which quality is most difficult for you to conceive of? What can we do to bring out these attributes in our religious communities?

2. When encountering different beliefs and religions, how can we allow these differences to encourage more exploration rather than ~~threatening~~ our current beliefs?
3. What was your reaction to the story of the three rings (p. 140)? How does that story challenge your current understanding of other religions?

CHAPTER 6: GRACIOUS CHRISTIANITY

1. Do you agree with the authors that, in addition to reforming our theology, we need to remake the Church? How do you see your congregation following the example of Jesus? Where do ~~they~~ fall short? How might you encourage them to mend their ways?
2. Gulley and Mulholland argue that churches need to stop thinking of themselves as social clubs and instead think of themselves as hospitals. Does your church fall into that trap? What might change if churches saw their calling as that of a hospital—to heal the wounded who walk through their doors?
3. Do you believe, like Larry's friend (p. 174), that you must believe everything your pastor believes?

CHAPTER 7: THE POLITICS OF GRACE

1. Do you agree that “to follow Jesus is to be political” (p. 184)? Why or why not?
2. Is it possible to approach politics without an agenda?
3. If gracious politics calls us to see every life as blessed, how does that **impact** your beliefs on capital punishment, abortion, or same-sex marriage? How can gracious religion and gracious politics work together?

CHAPTER 8: MONEY AND GRACE

1. Has wealth become a master in your own life? What can you do to change this?
2. Why does believing in the salvation of every person lead to a new way of thinking about our responsibility as citizens of this world?
3. “The economic system of Jesus can be summarized with one word: Give” (p. 223). Place this word on the dashboard of your car, your computer screen, and the bathroom mirror. How might seeing this commandment every day shift your way of living in the world?
4. While the process of jubilee may seem impossible in our complicated, capitalistic world, how could you embrace the politics of jubilee on a personal level?

CHAPTER 9: GRACIOUS JUSTICE

1. “Justice is creating a world where both victim and perpetrator are healed and transformed, where reconciliation rather than retribution is the goal” (p. 247). In what area of your life could you promote the cause of reconciliation rather than retribution? How does retribution continue the cycle?

CHAPTER 10:A GRACIOUS WORLD

1. If you put yourself in the shoes of ancient Jews who were expecting one kind of messiah and got Jesus instead, what would your reaction have been?
2. What is your reaction to the statement, “The greatest obstacle to a gracious world is nationalism” (p. 285)? Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. How can we come together to create heaven on earth? Is this a realistic goal?