

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *The Wisdom of Tenderness*

by

Brennan Manning

1. Brennan Manning describes the spirituality of the Western world as possessing “the flat flavor of old ice cream” (p. 1). Do you agree with this assessment? What would prompt such an indictment?
2. Manning refers to rampant “unfreedom” in religious circles (p. 2). What does this unfreedom look like, if anything, in contemporary evangelicalism?
3. Manning warns against confusing the institutional church with the “church as mystery” (p. 10). Why? Isn’t the institutional church the earthly manifestation of the church as mystery?
4. Do you agree that silence and solitude are prerequisites to wisdom (p. 15)? How so?

5. Manning speaks about God's "love" and God's "like" (p. 17). What is the distinction?
6. In what way is God's unconditional love "furious" (p. 21)? How can fury be tender?
7. Manning writes, "The wisdom of tenderness allows us to love our whole life story and know that we've been graced and made beautiful by the providence of our past history" (pp. 32–33). What about people whose histories may have been abusive, damaging, or horrific? How might they live out this notion?
8. Borrowing Manning's metaphor on page 35, as you dangle between a hungry tiger and jagged rocks, what tender strawberries has God sent for you to reach for?
9. How do you account for the mysterious grace that comes over a person after prolonged repetition of the seven-syllable prayer, "Abba, I belong to you" (pp. 46–47)?
10. To live in the wisdom of tenderness, Manning says, is to love, honor, serve, and revere "the least of the brethren" (p. 57). Who, in your world, would be considered "the least"?
11. Manning asserts that "traitors, swindlers, and adulterers enter the Kingdom before the religiously respectable" (p. 60). Do you agree with this statement? How does it make you feel?

12. “God himself does not condemn, but forgives” (p. 63). How, then, does God reckon with heinous wrongdoing committed by those whom he loves tenderly?
13. “Yet isn’t it second nature to judge? Perhaps so” (p. 69). What do you make of Manning’s statement? Is it a fair one?
14. Manning quotes Richard Hays: “One reason the world finds the New Testament of peacemaking and love of enemies incredible is that the church is so massively faithless” (p. 89). What “church” is Hays referring to? Do you agree with him? Has this been your experience of the church?
15. Manning describes the encouragement given to him by his sponsor at AA, who told him to “forget about what I had lost and focus on what I had left” (p. 104). Think about what you have lost and how this loss has affected you. Then think about what you have left and how this can guide you forward.
16. On page 109, Manning describes the simple gesture of kissing the hands of a drunk in the street. What does this gesture suggest about the heart of the giver? What impact might it have upon the recipient?
17. Manning concludes the book by stating, “The prayer of quiet regard, liberation from inordinate self-consciousness, and attention to the attentiveness of Jesus reveal the unfathomable depths of our poverty”

(p. 153). Take apart this statement and think about its respective parts.

- a. How would you pray a prayer of quiet regard?
- b. What does inordinate self-consciousness look like in your life? In what ways might it hinder you?
- c. Finally, how might you give more attention to the attentiveness of Jesus? How has he demonstrated his attentiveness to you today?