

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Jesus, The Greatest Therapist Who Ever Lived

by

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INTRODUCTION

1. In the introduction, Mark W. Baker describes the relationship between psychology and religion as being conflicted for many people (p. xiv). Before you read Baker's book, what were your thoughts on religion? What were your thoughts on psychology? Do you see a conflict between them?

UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE THINK

1. According to Baker, we try to base our decisions on logic and reasoning (p. 3). Can you think of a time when you based a decision on a belief or feeling rather than on objective facts? How did that situation resolve?
2. Baker argues that to Jesus, wisdom is not only amassing facts but, more importantly, applying knowledge in our relationships (p. 10). Have you ever encountered a situation in a relationship where you felt you had a lot of knowledge about something but later decided you failed to use wisdom? What would you do differently now?
3. Jesus spoke in parables because he knew that “the deepest truths register in your heart more than in your head” (p. 31). He also recognized that a person can understand things only from his or her own perspective, which is why spirituality requires humility. How might recognizing that we can understand absolute truth only from our perspective make us more humble?

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE: ARE THEY GOOD OR BAD?

1. Do you tend to think of people as primarily good or primarily bad? Did Baker’s discussion of people change your view?

UNDERSTANDING GROWTH

1. Think of a time when you used justification to avoid facing a problem. How was that situation resolved?
2. “Living in the grips of unconscious organizing principles causes us to live in the past,” Baker writes. “It is only by examining the unconscious beliefs shaped by our past that we can be free to develop the new beliefs we need in our present” (p. 68). What do you think Baker means by this statement? Do you agree? Can you think of a time when your unconscious influenced your actions? What would you do differently now?
3. Baker states that to grow, people must be aware of organizing principles that affect their thought process and work to expand their beliefs (p. 77). How might you expand your beliefs in an effort to grow? Can you identify an unconscious organizing principle of your own? What new unconscious beliefs would you like to develop?

UNDERSTANDING SIN AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

1. Baker states that salvation and psychological health both hinge on recognizing our need for relationship (p. 81). What is your response to this statement? How does being in relationships with others affect both your spiritual and your psychological health?
2. “Both spiritually and psychologically, you must have a change of mind in order to grow” (p. 88). Baker states

that the Bible's definition of repentance is recognizing and then changing your behavior, and the same is true for a person in therapy. How does this line up with, or perhaps differ from, your understandings of spiritual repentance and the goal of psychological therapy? Can you think of a time when repentance caused growth in your life?

UNDERSTANDING RELIGION

1. "Mercy always considers the other person; sacrifice can sometimes be just for ourselves" (p. 107). How is this view of sacrifice similar to or different from that held by our society? If Baker's view of sacrifice is different, with which view of sacrifice do you agree? What do you think Jesus meant by "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"?
2. What is your response to Freud's view of religion (p. 112)? What do you think about Baker's analysis of Freud's view?

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

1. Baker asserts that addiction is a modern form of idolatry (p. 132). Do you agree or disagree, and why? If you agree, give an example of how this might be true.
2. "Jesus taught that it is only through dependency upon God and others that we are able to know who we are" (p. 153). Do you think people can be independent of God and others and still know themselves? How might

relationship with God and others help people understand themselves more accurately?

KNOWING YOUR FEELINGS

1. Being childlike is different from being childish (p. 166). Can you think of a behavior of yours that might be considered childish? How might you be more childlike in such moments?
2. “Jesus knew that suffering could make us either better or bitter” (p. 176). Baker goes on to say that we become bitter when we have no one with whom to share our pain. Have you experienced painful events in your life that have made you bitter, or painful events that have made you better? During these events, did having a support system (or not having one) influence whether you became better or bitter? How might people choose to allow suffering to make them better instead of bitter?

KNOWING YOUR UNCONSCIOUS

1. Have you ever realized that you were unconsciously following a habit? Was this realization helpful? If the habit was harmful, were you able to discover why you were engaging in it and how to modify your behavior? Explain.

KNOWING WHOLENESS

1. Think of a time when you had to forgive someone who had hurt you. How can the act of forgiving another change you for the better? What is the difference between forgiving someone and excusing or simply tolerating them?

KNOWING YOUR PERSONAL POWER

1. “Personal power is a spiritual union with something outside of oneself that makes each person more than he or she could be individually. Personal power is something that grows as you give it away because it doesn’t come from within individuals—it is something that is created between them” (p. 241). How can being vulnerable with other people grant us personal power? Can you recall a time when being vulnerable gave you personal power?

KNOWING YOUR CENTERED SELF

1. “From Jesus’s perspective, righteousness is maintaining right relationships and sin is anything we do that separates us from God and others” (p. 264). What is your response to this statement? What is your definition of sin? What is your definition of righteousness? How might maintaining right relationships with God and others make you more righteous?

2. Has this book changed your thoughts on either psychology or religion, or on how the two interact? What do you think now about the conflict between psychology and religion?