

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Days of Awe and Wonder

How to Be a Christian in the
21st Century

by
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CHAPTER 1 LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

1. “What Jesus was, historically speaking, was a Spirit-filled person in the charismatic stream of Judaism,” writes Marcus Borg (p. 2). Is this how you think of Jesus? Why or why not?
2. For Borg, all that Jesus said and did “flowed out of his own intimate experience of the ‘world of Spirit’ ” (p. 2).

What does Borg mean by this “world of Spirit”? How is that world different from our own modern worldview?

CHAPTER 2 FAITH: A JOURNEY OF TRUST

1. Borg notes four meanings of the word “faith”: faith as believing, faith as trust, faith as faithfulness, and faith as a way of seeing (pp. 22–25). Which of these is closest to your own understanding of faith? What did you learn about faith in this chapter?
2. What elements from Abraham’s story can help us understand faith more deeply?

CHAPTER 3 MY CONVERSION TO MYSTICISM

1. When you hear the word “mysticism,” what words, phrases, and images come to mind? How do these compare to Borg’s description of mysticism throughout this chapter?
2. Prior to learning about mystical experiences, Borg notes, “It had never occurred to me that what we call ‘God’ could be experienced” (p. 33). Do you believe that God can be experienced? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 4 JESUS, OUR MODEL FOR BEING SPIRIT-FILLED

1. Would you consider yourself to be “Spirit-filled”? Why or why not? What does this look like?
2. On pages 46–47, Borg responds to the question, “What was Jesus like?” Did you learn anything new about Jesus from this response? If so, what was it?

CHAPTER 5 RECLAIMING MYSTICISM

1. How does Borg describe “*mysterium tremendum*” (p. 69)? What is your own definition of the mystical?
2. “The sense of mission that [Jesus] received as a Spirit person led him to undertake the role of prophet” (p. 70). What is the relationship between Jesus’s two roles of “Spirit” person and prophet? How do they inform each other?
3. In writing about Jesus the sage, Borg notes, “In [Jesus’s] teaching, he regularly identified four centers as most typically dominant in people’s lives: family, status, possessions, and piety” (p. 79). Why do these four things, in particular, keep us from knowing God more fully? Which of these poses the biggest challenge to your own faith?

CHAPTER 6 AWE, WONDER, AND JESUS

1. “As a culture, we do not take it for granted that there are ‘miraculous powers’ at work in the world, and we are suspicious of events that seem to require an explanation that transcends what we take to be the ‘natural’ laws of cause and effect. . . . Miracles violate the modern sense of what is possible” (p. 89). What are the limits to such a worldview—specifically, with regard to our spirituality?
2. “According to the Gospels, [Jesus] commissioned his twelve disciples to be charismatic healers. . . . His two most important first-century followers, Peter and Paul, were also charismatic holy men. . . . St. Francis of Assisi, often considered the most ‘Christlike’ of subsequent Christians, was a mystic, visionary, and healer” (p. 110). If Borg is correct, why have so few contemporary Christians continued in this “charismatic” stream?
3. What role do miracles, mysticism, wonder, and awe play in your experience and practice of faith?

CHAPTER 7 IS JESUS GOD?

1. “Was Jesus God? No” (p. 113). What do you make of Borg’s claim here? Do you agree or not? Discuss.

2. Borg describes two different understandings of the Gospels: the Gospels as the product of “divine information” on one hand and the Gospels as the product of “a historical process” on the other (p. 116). Which of these two understandings is closest to your own? What might you learn about the Gospels from the other understanding?

CHAPTER 8

TAKING JESUS SERIOUSLY: MYSTIC, WISDOM TEACHER, SOCIAL PROPHET

1. Borg claims that the historical Jesus played the following three roles simultaneously during his time on earth: Jewish mystic, wisdom teacher, and social prophet (pp. 122–123). Which of these roles do you think of when you think of Jesus?
2. “Spirituality I define as becoming conscious of and intentional about our relationship to God” (p. 124). Would you define spirituality in the same way? If not, give your definition.

CHAPTER 9

STAND WITH JESUS

1. According to Borg, a life that takes Jesus seriously “is a *life deeply centered in God*” (p. 131). To what extent is your life “*deeply centered in God*”? How could it be more so?

2. “Compassion is utterly central to the teaching of Jesus,” (p. 135). How does Borg define “compassion” in this chapter? How does Jesus embody that definition in his life and teachings? How are you embodying compassion?

CHAPTER 10 RENEWING OUR IMAGE OF JESUS

1. According to Borg, how does our image of Jesus need to be renewed? Do you agree?
2. What is the “popular image” of Jesus that Borg describes (pp. 140–142), and how did it come to be?

CHAPTER 11 HEALING OUR IMAGE OF GOD

1. Borg notes “two primary images or metaphors for God’s character”: God as lawgiver and judge and God as lover (pp. 150–159). Which of these two images or metaphors is closest to your own? Where did you learn to view God in that way?
2. Borg includes George Herbert’s poem “Love Bade Me Welcome” in this chapter (pp. 158–159). What strikes you from this poem? What might it teach you about God? What might it teach you about yourself?

CHAPTER 12 LIVING GOD'S PASSION

1. Compare and contrast the social world of the Bible with our current social world. What parallels do you see? What differences?
2. Borg claims that one of Jesus's two main passions was the "kingdom of God" (p. 169). How does Borg define this important concept?

CHAPTER 13 FACING TODAY'S CHALLENGES: AN INTERVIEW

1. Borg offers a critique of the New Atheists in this chapter (pp. 178–181). What is the basis of his critique? Do you agree with him?
2. "Many Christians . . . affirm that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, the infallible Word of God, and therefore factually and literally true in everything it says" (p. 183). Do you view the Bible in this way? Discuss.

CHAPTER 14 THE HEART AND SOUL OF CHRISTIANITY

1. Borg sees five things as "most central to Christianity" (pp. 192–202). Were any of these things new to you? Did you agree with the centrality Borg assigns them? Why or why not?

2. For Borg, to be “Christian means to be resocialized into a different vision and different way of being [than modern Western and/or American culture]. Christian community is a vehicle or agent of that resocialization” (p. 200). To what extent do you think of Christianity as helping people move into a “different vision and different way of being”? Do you think that resocialization is necessary?

CHAPTER 15

ENCOUNTERING THE WISDOM OF OTHER FAITHS

1. What is one thing that you learned about pluralism in general or the religious pluralism of the United States in particular?
2. Borg offers three reasons why “I can no longer affirm that Christianity is the only way of salvation” (p. 218). What do you make of his three reasons? What do you make of his overall argument?

CHAPTER 16

LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF GOD

1. “The Hebrew phrase that names [God’s] voice is *bat kol*. . . . Translated into English, *bat kol* literally means ‘the daughter of a sound.’ What kind of metaphor is this? The voice of God, the divine voice, is the daughter of a sound” (p. 228). Have you ever heard the voice of God? If so, how would you describe it?

2. Borg includes a story from one of Parker Palmer's books in this chapter (pp. 232–234). What strikes you from this story? What might it teach you about how you have grown *away* from God as you have grown older? How might you grow *toward* God from this point on?

FINAL QUESTION

1. The subtitle of this book is “How to Be a Christian in the 21st Century.” How did the book help you along that journey? Name one example of how it has changed your mind about or challenged your understanding of being a Christian.