

Faith Sharing/Discussion Questions Following Jesus

By John Shea

These faith sharing/discussion questions accompany *Following Jesus* by Dr. John Shea. Dr. Shea is a theologian, author, and storyteller of great renown both nationally and internationally. He is the Director of Program Development at the Ministry Leadership Center, which creates ministerial formation programs for Catholic healthcare systems. In this book, he leads readers on a reflective journey through the Bible and other sources to help us understand and follow Jesus more fully.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION—CATHOLIC + SPIRITUALITY + ADULT

- What does being Catholic mean to me? (Page 13)
- What or who are some of the beliefs, stories, practices, and people who help me to understand the mystery of Jesus? How have these things helped to shape my attitudes and behaviors toward my faith? (Page 16)
- What are some of the things that have “awakened” me to faith? (Page 19)
- In thinking about my personal journey of faith, what have been some of the high points? What were some of the low points? What have I learned about God from these experiences? (Page 21)
- How has my attitude about Jesus been shaped by the culture in which I live? How might my attitudes and beliefs about Jesus change if I lived in different circumstances, such as in extreme poverty or wealth, in an urban or rural setting, in a high-tech or low-tech environment, or in a macho culture?

CHAPTER ONE—TRACKING TWO TRAJECTORIES

- What does it mean for me to call Jesus “Lord” and “Savior”? (Page 29)
- According to Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus might say to some of his followers “I don’t know you.” What do I think he means by that? To whom might Jesus make this statement? (Page 31)
- What thoughts do I have about the concepts presented: discipleship “is the way of self-knowledge and changes” and “development is paramount”? (Page 32)
- If the first disciples who knew Jesus in the flesh didn’t get it, “what chance do we have” to understand? How would I answer this question? Why do I feel this way? What kept the first disciples from understanding what Jesus meant? What keeps me from understanding? (Page 34)
- Why do I follow Jesus? What words of eternal life do I seek? (Page 35)
- What help do I need to follow Jesus? (Page 36)

CHAPTER TWO—LODGING THE WORD OF GOD IN THE HEART

- How does my prayer life prepare me for my day’s work? (Page 38)
- What are my thoughts on the quote from the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer illustrating the importance of praying to prepare for the day. (Page 38)
- How does the spiritual dimension shape my life? How do I shape my life around the spiritual dimension? (Page 41)

- What is my understanding of the Good Samaritan parable? How does the parable influence how I live my life? (Page 42)
- How does the message from Jesus to “Love our enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return” reflect the inner condition of grace? How do they define what it means to follow Jesus? In what ways does this challenge my assumptions about following Jesus? (Page 44)
- What does the story of the Good Samaritan tell me of God’s love? How does this parable influence how I show love to others? (Page 44)
- What does the phrase “action is triggered by inner communion with God” mean to me? How do I react to this statement? What prevents me from living out this teaching? (Page 45)
- In the Sufi master story, Jesus is quoted as saying “I could only spend what I had in my purse.” What does this say about prayer? What are examples that illustrate this story in real life? (Page 46)
- What do I believe the author means when he writes “Prayer is preparation for action”? (Page 46)
- Jesus’ prayer life kept him “aware of God as the spiritual center for which his actions flow.” What might this statement mean? What does it say about my own prayer life? (Page 48)
- “Praying in preparation to resist . . . is an intense process of inner resolve, a strenuous increase of attention and commitment.” What does it mean to “prepare to resist”? How do these words challenge me about my prayer life? (Page 48)
- “The beginning of violence is the end of dialogue. Once we start to fight, we no longer have ears to hear each other.” What are my thoughts on these statements? How might this affect how I live?
- What is my response to the idea that prayer strengthens the will, prepares us to deal with difficult situations, and prepares us for a new way of acting? (Page 50)
- What can I learn about Jesus from the passage in 1 Peter 2:22–24?
- What is meant by the God-Self-Neighbor spirituality process? What interest do I have in learning this process? (Pages 51–52)

CHAPTER THREE—ANOTHER WAY OF PRAYING

- What does it mean to make the Lord’s Prayer our own? How does this challenge how I pray and think about this prayer? (Page 54)
- What are the three ways to pray discussed here? Which does the author suggest is the best way to pray? Thinking about my own prayer life, which of these forms of prayer do I practice most often? What steps can I take to move into more meaningful forms of prayer? (Page 56)
- If when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, “we begin in heaven and bring heaven to earth,,” what does this mean to me? How does this change the way I think about this prayer and about prayer in general? (Page 60)
- What does the author mean by the phrase “hack open metaphors”? What other ways might I think of metaphors like heaven and earth? (Page 63)
- How does the authors advice on what to do when we pray challenge my understanding of prayer and how we should pray? (Page 67)

CHAPTER FOUR—RECLAIMING RELIGIOUS PASSION

- What does it mean to be religious? (Page 68)
- What does it mean to “tie ourselves” to what is truly ultimate? What are my thoughts on this idea? (Page 69)
- What is the significance of the phrase “spiritual but not religious”? (Page 71)
- What are some ways that people look for cosmic meaning? (Page 72)
- How do we fail to recognize the presence of God in our lives? (Page 73)
- Consider the phrase “The Mystery remains mysterious even after revelation.” What might this mean? How would I explain it to someone else? (Page 74)
- Why is having a pure heart important? How might a pure heart help me to follow Jesus better? (Page 75)
- What might it mean to wake up to “the Mystery of Spirit”? (Page 76)

CHAPTER FIVE—HACKING METAPHOR

- Think about the phrase “The physical and social dimensions are more available to consciousness than the spiritual.” What are some practical examples of this? What steps can I take to become more in touch with the spiritual? (Page 79)
- What does “sacramental imagination” mean? How would I rate my own sacramental imagination? How active and finely tuned is it? (Page 79)
- How do the stories in this chapter reveal God to me? (Pages 79–81)
- What keeps me from moving from the world of the physical to the world of mystery? How might I overcome these obstacles? (Page 81)
- What are examples from my own life of how people say one thing and something else is understood? (Page 82)
- What are practical examples of not getting “stuck on the external attributes of a metaphor”? (Page 83)

CHAPTER SIX—SELF: IDENTIFYING WITH THE HEART

- Think about the phrase “In Gospel spirituality the heart is connected to the eyes.” What do I think this means? What does it mean for us to be “in the dark”? (Page 87)
- What is meant by the phrases “spiritual knowing” and “knowing from the heart”? (Pages 88–90)
- What are the components that make up my “self”? How would I describe my “self”? What role does God play in my “self”? What changes would I like to make to my “self”? What would it take for me to make these changes? (Pages 90–91)

CHAPTER SEVEN—GOD: RECEIVING AND THANKING

- What does it mean to me to be grateful? How do I show gratitude? Who are some of the people in my life to whom I owe a debt of gratitude? How do I show gratitude for life itself? (Page 94)
- Think about the phrase “generosity of spirit.” How is this similar to or different from how I normally express generosity? (Page 96)
- Review the statement “The father does not give the Spirit out of obligation . . . It is the Father’s pleasure to give us the Kingdom.” What thoughts does this statement inspire in me? How does this statement fit with my understanding of God? (Page 98)
- What might it mean if our “umbilical cord to God is never cut”? What does this imply about God’s relationship with us? (Page 98)
- What does it mean to me to be a child of God? (Page 99)
- In what ways does God serve as a rock for me? (Page 101)

- What are some ways that images and preconceived ideas keep me from hearing God? What in my life keeps me from receiving God's messages? (Page 103)
- What comfortable roles do I have that keep me from hearing God's message clearly? (Page 103)
- What metaphors for God mean the most to me? How do these metaphors keep me from seeing and hearing God more clearly? (Page 104)
- What do I do to prepare to pray? What methods do I use to open myself to God? How effective are these methods? What works best in my prayer life? What needs improvement? (Page 105)
- How do I feel about the idea that God (not me) is responsible for everything? What keeps me from reaching this state of understanding? (Page 109)
- What does the parable "The Lilies of the Field" mean to me? What does it tell me about God and about how a disciple should act? What keeps me from fully accepting this parable? (Pages 110–111)
- The author links the phrase "God being pleased" to the act of "reconciling the world to its Source and all people to each other." What does this passage mean? What does it mean to me?

CHAPTER EIGHT—NEIGHBOR: BREAKING AND GIVING

- What do I think of the idea that we don't change our lives because we have become comfortable living as slaves to sin? How does sin hold me captive, preventing me from opening myself fully to God? (Page 116)
- Do I believe that according to the Lord's Prayer we will be forgiven exactly as we have forgiven others? How do I feel about this statement? Will this thought affect how I live? (Page 117)
- "When Spirit that is received is given away, it is increased." What does this mean? How might giving away something that I have increase what I have? (Page 118)
- Why did Jesus eat with sinners? Why would Jesus eat with me? (Page 120)
- How does the author's use of the phrase "carrying one's cross" differ from how the phrase is usually used? What do I think about this interpretation of the phrase? (Page 121)
- The author compares Jesus—known for forgiveness and reconciliation—to the *diabolus* (the one who divides) and to the *Satanas* (the one who accuses). What do I think about this comparison? How is my life a struggle between division and accusation versus forgiveness and reconciliation? (Page 122)
- Do I believe that Jesus knew his behavior would lead to the cross? To where do my behaviors lead? Where do I want to go? How do I need to change my behavior in order to get there? (Page 124)
- Think about this statement "The yoke is the discipline to learn the ways of the earth with enough discernment and skills to change them for the better." What does this passage challenge me to do? How does it challenge me to act? (Page 126)
- "Being on the 'side of the angels' is a real detriment when we do not know how to be on 'the side of people.'" What does this statement imply? What does respecting people have to do with respecting God? (Page 127)
- What does it mean to "be rooted in heaven and alert to the ways of the world"? What are practical examples of this statement? (Page 127)

- If “repentance is redoing situations until they reflect as best as they can human dignity and reconciliation,” what are practical ways I can do this in my daily life? How important is it to practice this idea of repentance in daily life? (Page 127)
- For what do I need to repent? How have I failed to love God and neighbor freely and fully? (Page 128)

CHAPTER NINE—WAGERING ON RESURRECTION

- What does the phrase “rising from the dead” mean? What does it mean to me? (Page 134)
- Think about the Sermon on the Mount. How might living the Beatitudes help me to understand and love Jesus more dearly? (Page 135)
- What does the phrase “Resurrection is not resuscitation” mean? How does it affect my understanding of rising from the dead? (Page 136)
- How does my prayer time prepare me to live? How do I want it to prepare me? What changes do I need to make to my prayer life to change how I live? (Page 138)
- What do I think about the following passage: “wagering on resurrection is not betting on an after life” but is, instead, betting that Jesus “is always with us”? How does it change/affect the way I think and act as a follower of Jesus? (Page 138)