

A Study Guide for

The Thinking Christian

by Gene W. Marshall

Part One of this book focuses on “What is religion?” and “Why does human existence necessitate the social appearance of religious formations?”

Part Two is about the basic proclamation of the Christian good news and the means of accessing the Christian scriptures.

Part Three includes ethical guidelines for our love of justice in the wide world, the Christian mission of witness and justice, and communal practices for our life together.

For portions of the book that require careful personal grounding, I am recommending a study of 10 or less pages of reading in preparation for a 60-minute group study.

For portions of the book that are more contextual in content, I am recommending a study of up to 20 pages of reading in preparation for a 60-minute group study.

The following reading selections

are to be read before the group session.

Selections for Part One on Profound Consciousness

Session 1: Introduction & Ch 1. Out of Your Mind: What Is Mind? pages: xi-13

Session 2: Ch 2. Seven Swirls of Consciousness: What Is Consciousness? p:14-25

Session 3: Ch 2. Seven Swirls of Consciousness: What Is Consciousness? p:25-30

Session 4: Ch 3. Into Your Four Minds of Truth: What Is Truth? p:31-38

Session 5: Ch 3. Into Your Four Minds of Truth: What Is Truth? p:39-49

Session 6: Ch 4. The Paradoxes of Being Awake: What Is Profound Consciousness? p:50-58

Session 7: Ch 4. The Paradoxes of Being Awake: What Is Profound Consciousness? p:58-64

Session 8: Ch 5. The Roots of Religious Practice: What Is Trust? p:65-74

Session 9: Ch 5. The Roots of Religious Practice: What Is Freedom? p:74-79

Session 10: Ch 5. The Roots of Religious Practice: What Is Care? p:79-84

Selections for Part Two on Christian Theologizing

Session 1: Intro to Part 2 & Ch 6. The Death of Heavenly God-Talk p:85-104

Session 2: Ch 7. A Contentless Monotheism of Devotion p: 105-118

Session 3: Ch 8. The Great Goddess and Other Poetry p:119-129

Session 4: Ch 9. The Meaning of Revelation p:130-138

Session 5: Ch 10. Rereading the Old Testament p:139-150

Session 6: Ch 10. Rereading the Old Testament p:150-163

Session 7: Ch 11. The Doorway of Despair p:164-181

Session 8: Ch 12. Who Created Christianity? p:182-190

Session 9: Ch 12. Who Created Christianity? p:190-198

Session 10: Ch 13. An Interreligious Trinity p:199-216

Selections for Part Three on Christian Practices

Session 1: Intro to Part 3 & Ch 14. The Friendliness of Trees p:217-229

Session 2: Ch 15. His-Story, Her-Story and a New Story p:230-236

Session 3: Ch 16. Post-Civilization Christianity p:237-252

Session 4: Ch 17. The Dead End of Christendom p:253-272

Session 5: Ch 18. Witnessing Love and the Echo of Eternity p:273-287

Session 6: Ch 19. The Mind of Commonality and the Love of Justice p:288-300

Session 7: Ch 19. The Mind of Commonality and the Love of Justice
plus: Ch 20. The Bioregional Parish of Responsibility p:300-317

Session 8: Ch 21. The Mind of Intimacy and the Co-Pastors Circle p:318-325

Session 9: Ch 21. The Mind of Intimacy and the Co-Pastors Circle p:326-337

Session 10: Ch 22. Building a Network of Co-Pastors Circles p:338-354

An Extra Session

Session 11: Ch 23. A New Public Face for Christianity p:355-369

Closing Comments p:370-371

Appendix A: An Art-Form Conversation Method p:373-375

Appendix B: A Communion Meal Ritual p:376-377

This basic study plan

is recommended for each of the 60-minute sessions:

Each person is asked to read the assigned text before the session and come prepared to talk about those topics during the group session.

Opening Go-Round Question:

What captured your *interest* in this reading?

This question needs to be introduced by the leader as a one-or-two sentence personal report on what interested you in reading the text for this session. Exploring why this was interesting or questions and comments about this topic are to be reserved for later in the session.

A “go-round” means asking everyone in a circle arrangement to answer the question one after the other around the circle.

If anyone does not have a ready answer, the leader will pass on, and come back to them.

When a Zoom or Skype meeting is being used, the leader calls on each person as they are ordered on the leaders’s screen.

Prior to the session, the leader of that session selects no more than 4 passages to have read aloud by a selected reader. These passages need to be no longer than one page.

After each reading, the leader asks 2 or 3 volunteers (raise of hands) to answer this questions:

What one or two sentences in this reading were *notable* to you?

this is an objective questions about the actual text.

Then the leader will ask 3 or 4 other volunteers to answer this question:

How do you respond personally to the reading?

this is a personal question about relating to the content.

Then the leader will ask for responses to this question:

What further comments are needed on this topic?

this can include elaborations, questions, anything needing discussion.

Concluding Go-Round Question:

What was *Helpful* to you about this Session?

End the session with some closing comments.

Time Management of this study plan may be challenging for most leaders.

The study plan suggests making 4 one-page selections to have read aloud and then discussed with 2 or 3 responses to each of 3 discussion questions. These 4 one-page selections are chosen because the leader believes that these pages are most in need of further discussion and personal grounding for this group on this session’s text.

The rest of the pages that are not read aloud are then considered to be of a more contextual nature, so they can be briefly summarized by the leader as needed for the

flow of thought. We have all read them so this brief reminder can be assumed to be sufficient.

Concerning time management, It may take 8 to 10 minutes to do the leader's intro and the opening go-round. And you will need to instruct the group to keep the go-round relatively brief and focused on a report of their interest in this text. Long comments and questions can be saved for later. The purpose of the go-round is to get out everyone's voice and some hints about the group's relationship with the text.

Then the time for each of the four readings, their discussion, and your contextual and transitional remarks can take as much as 10 minutes each. So the opening go-round and the four discussions will take up to 50 minutes, leaving 10 minutes for the closing go-round and the leader's concluding remarks.

As leader, you will, of course, be flying by the seat of your pants with nothing working out exactly as planned, but here are some key time-management clues I have found helpful for this kind of a study guide. I write approximate times in pencil in the book at the start and finish of each of my 4 four selected one-page readings.

For example, I might write at the beginning of the first reading **11:10**; then at the end of the discussion time for the first reading write **11:20**—also writing **11:20** at the beginning of the second reading. etc. Such clues written on the pages of the book can assist the leader in keep track of making time for all four discussions in a one-hour class.