

Questions of Faith Series 1 Study Guide

VHS #2340; DVD #2349

**QUESTIONS OF FAITH
STUDY GUIDE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SUGGESTIONS	4
QUESTIONS AND BIBLE REFERENCES	6
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES	8
OUTLINE AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	
WHO IS GOD?	11
WHAT GOOD IS PRAYER?	12
WHAT'S GOD GOT TO DO WITH EVIL?	14
WHAT'S BEING GOOD GOOD FOR?	15
WHO NEEDS ORGANIZED RELIGION?	16
WHAT MATTERS, ANYWAY?	18

“Throughout life, we find ourselves face to face with basic questions of belief and meaning. Sometimes we outgrow our answers. We may even decide the questions themselves don’t really matter any longer. But humans seem to thirst for meaning, and to find it, every generation must ask these questions anew in the light of their times. This series presents a variety of contemporary thinkers giving their response. We hope that what they say will provoke response in you and help in your struggle with the questions.” -- From the opening narration

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

What The Series Is Like

Each of 14 contemporary American Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish thinkers (a complete list with brief biographical information appears on page 8 of the guide) was asked to respond, on camera, to a series of questions. The responses were then edited to create a montage of reflections on that question.

How This Guide Is Organized

This guide is arranged so that you can copy parts of it for handouts:

A. For Handing Out Before Viewing

On pages 6-7 are the questions to which participants responded and Bible references for each session. These Bible references are suggested by the responses of the participants and are meant to provide starting point for further exploration of these issues. The members of your group might consider reading some of all of the passages before viewing the program, as well as for later study.

On pages 8-10 are brief biographical sketches of the people who appear in this series. Viewers may find that having a bit of information about the participants in advance is helpful.

B. For Handing Out After Viewing

Pages 11-19 contain material to aid in discussion. It is strongly suggested that these pages be distributed only after the group has viewed the program in question so as not to limit viewer reaction. For each program, there is an outline to assist in recalling what was said, and a series of questions for reflection or discussion.

A Suggested Procedure for the Sessions

1. View the tape all the way through.
2. View the tape again, stopping for discussion or reflection when the responses show the question has changed. If there isn't time for a second showing, simply proceed with discussion. Either way, you may want, after the program has been viewed, to hand out the outline and discussion questions for the program you have just viewed.
 - a. The outline is provided to help in recalling what was said by whom.
 - b. The questions to stimulate reflection or discussion are suggestions only. Use them if they're helpful.
3. At the end of each session, you might want to give a brief preview of the next program, suggesting that members of the group prepare by reviewing the specific questions to which participants respond, and by reading the suggested passages in the Bible. This information, for the six programs, appears on pp. 6-7 of this guide, arranged so that it can be copied and handed out in advance.

A Word About Equipment

For a smooth and effective showing, you'll want to consider these steps:

1. Preview each program.
2. Check out the equipment in advance.
3. Adjust the VCR and the TV set for sharp picture and clear sound in advance.
4. Cue up the tape in advance so the opening titles appear when you turn on the machine.
5. Adjust the room light for comfortable viewing.

QUESTIONS AND BIBLE REFERENCES

NOTE: These pages may be copied and distributed in advance to help in preparation for viewing.

In each session, to get at aspects of the title question, several additional questions were posed. These questions are not heard, but the responses generally reveal which question has been asked.

The Bible references are to passages mentioned by the participants; they are meant to provide starting points for further exploration. You might find it useful to review them before viewing the program.

WHO IS GOD? (17 minutes)

What's your image of God?
When do you think of God?
How does it affect you to believe in God?

BIBLE REFERENCES

Genesis 1:1-2:3	John 1:1-14
Exodus 3:1-17, esp. 6b	3:16-17
20:1-17, esp. 4	I Corinthians 1:18-31
33:7-23	Philippians 2:5-11
Isaiah 53	I John 4

WHAT GOOD IS PRAYER? (25 minutes)

What is prayer?
What happens when you pray?
Does prayer change God's mind?

BIBLE REFERENCES

Genesis 32:9-12	Mark 14:32-36
Psalms 23	Luke 18:9-14
150	
Matthew 6:5-15	
7:7-8	
27:46	

WHAT'S GOD GOT TO DO WITH EVIL? (20 minutes)

How can a good God permit evil?
Why doesn't God stop innocent suffering?
Is God all powerful, all loving?
Who's in charge?

BIBLE REFERENCES

Genesis 2:4-3:24
Job
Psalms 10

John 3:19-21
Romans 7:18-25
8:35-3

WHAT'S BEING GOOD GOOD FOR? (17 minutes)

What is a good person?
Does religion have anything to do with being good?
If I'm good, can I expect rewards?
Are there any absolutes for behavior?

BIBLE REFERENCES

Micah 6:8
Mark 10:18
Hebrews 12:2

Matthew 19:16-19
Luke 10:25-37
I John 4

WHO NEEDS ORGANIZED RELIGION? (26 minutes)

What good is organized religion?
How do you deal with religious differences?

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 4:1-13
Luke 23:34, 43

WHAT MATTERS ANYWAY? (21 minutes)

What gives your life meaning?
What does it mean to be fully human?

BIBLE REFERENCES

Genesis 1:27
Ecclesiastes
I John 4

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Will D. Campbell
Farmer, Writer, Preacher-at-large

Besides framing 40 acres in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, Will Campbell writes books and country music, lectures, and ministers to people. Educated at Wake Forest, Tulane, and Yale, he has worked for the Committee of Southern Churchmen.

His books include Race and the Renewal of the Church, Up to Our Steeples in Politics (with James Y. Holloway, Brother to the Dragonfly, The Glad River, God on Earth and Forty Acres and a Goat. He received a number of awards for Brother to a Dragonfly (including the Christopher Award) and The Glad River.

James Carroll
Writer

After his ordination to the Catholic priesthood in 1969, James Carroll served as a Catholic Chaplain at Boston University until 1974, leaving the priesthood in 1975. He was a regular columnist for The National Catholic Reporter from 1973 through 1976, and won the "Best Column Award" of the Catholic Press Association in 1976.

He has been a full-time writer since 1975. He has written five religious books, the latest being The Winter Name of God, published in 1975. He has written two plays and a collection of poetry. His six novels include Madonna Red, Fault Lines, The Price of Peace and Supply of Heroes.

Ignacio Castuera
Senior Pastor, First Methodist Church,
Hollywood

Prior to his present appointment, Dr. Castuera served for five years as Los Angeles District Superintendent in the Pacific Southwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

He has served churches in Mexico, Hawaii and California. Since 1970 he has taught theology as adjunct faculty at the School of Theology at Claremont. He worked at UCLA (1972-75) as a Counseling Psychologist. From 1975 until 1980, he served as Executive Director of the All Nations Foundation.

William Sloane Coffin, Jr.
President, SANE/Freeze

William Sloan Coffin, Jr. was chaplain at Yale for eighteen years during which time he was one of the initial advisors to the Peace Corps.

He served as senior minister of Riverside Church in New York City from 1977 through 1987. On Christmas Eve, 1979, Dr. Coffin was one of three U.S. clergymen invited by the Iranian government to hold Christmas services for the American hostages held in Iran. He began work as President of SANE/Freeze in January, 1988.

His books include The Courage to Love (1982) and Living the Truth in a World of Illusions (1985).

Mary Gordon
Writer

Mary Gordon grew up in Queens, New York, attended Catholic schools for 12 years, studied at Barnard College, and did graduate work at Syracuse University.

She is author of three novels (Final Payments, The Company of Women, and Men and Angels) and a collection of short stories, Temporary Shelter.

T. George Harris
Editor-in-Chief, American Health

T. George Harris became Editor of Psychology Today in 1969, taking it to a circulation of 1,150,000. Harris and his partner, publisher Owen J. Lipstein, started American Health in 1982. It won the most coveted award in magazine journalism – the Columbia University Journalism Award for General Excellence in 1985. Having won the same award at Psychology Today in 1973, Harris is the first editor ever to win it for two different magazines.

Harold Kushner
Rabbi, Temple Israel, Natick, Massachusetts

Harold Kushner has been Rabbi of Temple Israel for 21 years. He has written three books, When Children Ask God, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, and When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough. The latter received the Christopher Medal and When Bad Things Happen to Good People was an international best seller.

James M. Lawson, Jr.
Senior Pastor, Holman United Methodist Church,
Los Angeles

Dr. Lawson studied at Balwin-Wallace College, Oberlin College Graduate School of Theology, Boston University School of Theology, and Vanderbilt Divinity School and served as a missionary in India. He was a founder of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. He was pastor of Centenary United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968, and chairperson of the sanitation strike which was being visited by Martin Luther King, Jr., at the time of Dr. King's assassination. Dr. Lawson is President of the Southern Christian Leadership Council.

Madeleine L'Engle
Writer in Residence
Cathedral of St. John the Divine

Educated at Smith College, the New School and Columbia University, Madeleine L'Engle has taught at the University of Indiana and has been Writer-in-Residence at Ohio State University, the University of Rochester and Wheaton College.

She has published more than 30 books, including A Wrinkle in Time, The Moon by Night, A Wind in the Door, A Swiftly Tilting Planet and Many Waters.

She has received numerous awards in the United States, Austria, England, Canada, and Holland, including the Newberry Medal.

Daniel P. Matthews
Rector, Parish of Trinity Church, New York City

Educated at Rollins College, Dartmouth College, Vanderbilt University Divinity School and Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Mr. Matthews has served as Rector at Trinity since April, 1987. Previously he served Episcopal Churches in Atlanta, Georgia, and in Knoxville, Nashville, Memphis and Monteagle, Tennessee.

Valerie E. Russell
President, City Mission Society of Boston

An urban affairs specialist with special interest in the application of religion to social issues, Ms. Russell has lectured in theology at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, Yale Divinity School and since 1982, has taught urban ministry at the Harvard Divinity School. She is the first woman and the first layperson to head the City Mission Society of Boston. Founded in 1816, CMS is the second oldest voluntary social service agency in the United States.

Susan Schnur
Rabbi

Rabbi Schnur attended Barnard College, Johns Hopkins University, and the Reconstruction Rabbinical College in Philadelphia.

She is visiting Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Colgate University (currently on leave). She is a frequent contributor to The New York Times, in the "Her's" column.

John W. Vannorsdall
President, Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia

Dr. Vannorsdall became President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1986, after ten years as University Chaplain at Yale (where he succeeded William Sloan Coffin, Jr.). He has served as the Lutheran preacher for the Protestant Hour since 1976 and his most recent book is Dimly Burning Wicks, published by Fortress Press.

Peggy Way
Former Professor of Pastoral Counseling,
Vanderbilt University Divinity School

Dr. Way has served on the faculties of a variety of seminaries: The University of Chicago Divinity School, Jesuit School of Theology, and McCormick Theological Seminary, in addition to Vanderbilt.

She has served on the Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches, the executive committee of the Consultation on Church Union, and as a voting member of the Disciples' Council on Christian Unity as a United Church of Christ clergyperson.

WHO IS GOD?

(To be handed out after the group has viewed the program.)

OUTLINE

As a discussion aid, listed below are the persons who speak in this program, in order of appearance, with a few key words to assist in recalling their thoughts.

Campbell	...bothered by people who are so sure...who God is...
Coffin	...we experience God as personal power...
L'Engle	...all galaxies, all creation is God's body...
Vannorsdall	...old man in the sky...need to move beyond male figure, beyond "old"...think old in Jesus ...
Russell	...need to lose the old patriarchal images...
Carroll	...Bible is basis of images...my religion doesn't depend on images...
Harris	...try not to impose a theology of images...
Kushner	...not where is God...but when is God...
Lawson	...to stick to "God language" interferes with communicating...
Schnur	...try to get away from a big God focus...
Gordon	...I know what God sound like rather than what God looks like...
Campbell	..."I am who I am"...God is God is God...
Way	...when I think of God, I think of human community...
L'Engle	...I'd probably have said "God is love" and left it at that...

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Can you list some different images or aspects of God the participants identify? Can you think of other aspects of God?
2. Which image did you find most striking? Most disturbing?
3. What is the primary source to which you go when thinking about the nature of God?
4. What is your predominant image of God? How has your image been expanded or enriched by the ideas in this video?
5. Talk about the helpfulness (or unhelpfulness) for you, of the "image of no image."

WHAT GOOD IS PRAYER?

(To be handed out after the group has viewed this program.)

OUTLINE

As a discussion aid, listed below are the persons who speak in this program, in order of appearance, with a few key words to assist in recalling their thoughts.

Harris	...a form of intense listening...
Coffin	...thinking of the temple...
L'Engle	...our whole interior monologue is prayer...
Campbell	...every thought is a prayer...
Vannorsdall	...rarely expect God to intervene...nail in the driveway...
Carroll	...the regular handing over what's important to us to the care of God...
Russell	...getting in touch with the seeds of power within you...
Kushner	...talking in the presence of God...
Lawson	...trying to let your life be open to God's purpose and love...
Schnur	...always done in community...being rather than doing...
Matthews	...spending time with God...
Castuera magical...	...prayer for others is the most important...prefer to stay away from the
Russell	...pray that I can find the power to do scary things in scary situations when I don't want to do them...
L'Engle	...don't know what I expect...need strength beyond my own...
Gordon	...there's a kind of elitism about prayer...
Castuera	...would have a hard time dealing with a God who would change the laws of nature just on my behalf...
Coffin	...let this cup pass...not my will but thine...is the perfect prayer...
Way	...why have a God if you can't talk God into changing something?...
Kushner	...we confuse God with Santa Claus...favorite prayer is Jacob's before he meets Esau...

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What idea(s) about prayer do you find most striking? Most disturbing? Most comforting? Why?
2. Prayer is talked about in a number of ways: as self-expression, as listening, as ritual, as a way of thinking about every desire or thought, as talking in God's presence, as intercession, as praise, as petition, as acting in love and for justice toward others. How do you respond to these characterizations? Do you think of prayer in still other ways?
3. One participant suggests that one of the reasons for having a God is to ask to have things changed. Do you see this as a shallow comment, or a breath of down-to-earth honesty about the way people are?
4. What is your understanding of the distinction between "incantations" and "prayers"?
5. Contrast Madeleine L'Engle's getting "less specific" in her petition with William Sloan Coffin's insistence that one should be very specific in lifting up one's pain. Do you see a conflict here?

WHAT'S GOD GOT TO DO WITH EVEIL?

(To be handed out after the group has viewed this program.)

OUTLINE

As a discussion aid, listed below are the persons who speak in this program, in order of appearance, with a few key words to assist in recalling their thoughts.

Kushner	...would affirm God's goodness at the expense of his power...
Gordon	...hungry God, devouring suffering...
Coffin	...son's death clearly human error...suffering of the innocent...no good answer for that...
L'Engle	...sometimes incredibly wonderful...terrible things happen and we don't know why...
Kushner	...God knows the difference between good people and bad...nature doesn't...
Schnur	...more useful to ask why humans let these things happen...
Carroll	...somehow, God is the one who stands with you...
L'Engle	...how much can we demand of God without being puppets...
Vannorsdall	...act of love for God to keep hands off...
Carroll	...history is at the mercy of human choices...
Castuera	...a spanking God cannot remove....
Coffin	...doctrine of original sin is one of the most optimistic doctrines...
Campbell	...even if we blow up the world, that's not going to be the last word...

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIONS OR DISCUSSION

1. More than one kind of evil is talked about in this program. What are they? Do you agree they are different?
2. Which observation about evil in the world do you find most striking? Most disturbing? Most comforting? Why?
3. Do you think God could stop innocent suffering if She/He wanted to, but for some reason doesn't? What reason would justify that?
4. How do you respond to the idea of a God who stands with you as a friend in the midst of suffering?
5. Would you be relieved or upset to feel that God is not in control of the world?
6. Though the participants use other than male imagery in this series (and, indeed, explicitly point out the need to move beyond male images) they don't do so in this program. You may want to acknowledge this apparent lapse, and reflect on its implications.

WHAT'S BEING GOOD GOOD FOR?

(To be handed out after the group has viewed this program.)

OUTLINE

As a discussion aid, listed below are the persons who speak in this program, in order of appearance, with a few key words to assist in recalling their thoughts.

Gordon	...radically attentive...
Russell	...can "hear one another in the being"...
Harris	...capacity to transcend oneself...
Carroll	...way of living in an ambiguous world with a loving attitude...
Way	...in a process of being liberated in the services of community...
Castuera	...people who are involved in justice work...
Campbell	...Jesus said, "there is none good but God"...
Kushner	...religion gives us...not theology but biography...
Gordon	...religion can get in the way of leading a moral life...
Schnur	...injunctions of your faith...can help...guide you in good behavior...
Russell	...God calls you to use all your humanity...
Kushner	...the only reward for a good deed is that it makes the next one easier...
Coffin	...no good deed goes unpunished...
Campbell	...hope I would not kill...but I know that I do...
L'Engle	..."God is love" is the only absolute thing I can say...
Coffin	...integrity of love is much more important than the purity of dogma...can build a community out of seekers of truth but not out of possessors of truth...

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Several definitions of a good person are advanced; try recalling them.
2. Which comment about being a good person did you find most striking? Why?
3. At least two participants told jokes in their responses and one characterized good persons as being "often quite funny." Is goodness a laughing matter?
4. Several participants suggested that being a good person involved unselfishness and that it might involve suffering. How do you respond?
5. James Carroll seemed to imply a relationship between goodness and competence. What is your reaction?

WHO NEEDS ORGANIZED RELIGION?

(To be handed out after the group has viewed this program.)

OUTLINE

As a discussion aid, listed below are the persons who speak in this program, in order of appearance, with a few key words to assist in recalling their thoughts.

- Carroll ...organized church is what enables generation to learn the story...
- L'Engle ...it stinks but it's all we've got...
- Kushner ...not fellowship with God but fellowship with other human beings...
- Coffin ...churches ought to be God's love organized on earth...
- Way ...local church is...where people can learn how to stand one another...
- Lawson ...religion is the effort...to organize goodness...
- Russell ...church asks society to face the value issues...
- Campbell ...suspicious of all institutions...
- Harris ...often can see the church as a public health nurse...
- Gordon ...less exclusionary than unorganized forms...
- Carroll ...I don't expect the church to be exempt from being human...
- Vannorsdall ...where else do you hear witness of what God has done in human history?...
- Castuera ...Christians must try to live in a dialogue with other religions...

How Do You Deal With Religious Differences?

- Carroll ...the great religious traditions are all speaking to a valid human experience...
- Kushner ...God is personal...affects each of us according to who we are...
- Way ...if I have a faithful stance, I don't have to be frightened by others...
- Russell ...all religion has to look at itself to see if it is self-seeking...
- Gordon ...would hate for there not to be doctrinal differences...
- Vannorsdall ...oasis in the desert...
- Lawson ...need to become competitive in doing justice...

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Organized religion is characterized in several ways – some positive, some negative. Which characterizations(s) do you find most striking? Why?
2. James Carroll refers to “the great religious traditions,” on which he says we would all agree. What are those traditions? Do you agree with him that they are equally valid?
3. Do you agree with Mary Gordon that organized religion is “less exclusionary” than unorganized religion?
4. How do you respond to George Harris’ comment that organized religion provides one with an inoculation against the real thing?
5. What does James Lawson mean by “religious people need to become competitive in doing justice and in calling the nations of the earth to repentance and peace”? How do you respond?
6. Contrast “religion is the effort to organize goodness” with “organized religion stinks but it’s all we’ve got,” and “the local church is where people learn to stand on another.”
7. Do you find the “oasis in the desert” an appropriate metaphor for organized religion? Does it help you in considering the issue of religious differences?

WHAT MATTERS ANYWAY?

(To be handed out after the group has viewed this program.)

OUTLINE

As a discussion aid, listed below are the persons who speak in this program, in order of appearance, with a few key words to assist in recalling their thoughts.

Harris	...Am I here? Can I love? Doe it matter?...
Matthews	...when I can love and be loved, everything seems to fall into place...
Gordon	...have work and love...
Lawson	...love...the power by which I could deal with racism and violence...
Russell	...love and support creates meaning...
Castuera	...what gives my life meaning is the struggle...
Russell	...without faith in God...days I wouldn't get up in the morning...
Kushner	...if life is meaningless, why does it hurt so much?...
Vannorsdall	...not foreordained that we will always have poverty, war and injustice...
Campbell	...life is a gas...

What Does It Mean To Be Fully Human?

Kushner	...a person who has fulfilled all the divine potential...
Way	...to be fully human...is to know one's limitations...
Castuera	...to express as completely as possible my capacity to care...
Carroll	...to be alive to what's real...to be attentive...
L'Engle	...to love...to be vulnerable...
Coffin	...what we're called on to do in this world is to become vulnerable...
Campbell	...fully human...means fully free...

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Some brief response to "What gives your life meaning?" were: "struggle"; "Work and love"; "interesting"; "love and challenge"; "vulnerability." Can you recall others? What struck a responsive chord in you? Why?

2. What sustains faith for the participants? In what ways did you find the comments helpful? Why?
3. Do you find the question: “If life is meaningless, why does it hurt so much?” helpful in exploring meaning? Why or why not?
4. Several participants seem to agree that to be fully human is to realize the divine potential within us. But others responded “to know one’s limitations”; “to be conscious, alive to what is real, attentive”; “to be free.” Do you find conflicts? What views are most helpful for you?
5. What one comment has most affected your thinking about meaning, faith and being human? In what way?