

Questions of Faith Series 3 Study Guide

VHS #2500; DVD #2509

**QUESTIONS OF FAITH SERIES 3
STUDY GUIDE**

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Certain basic questions of belief and meaning come to us over and over in our lives. Sometimes we think we've got them answered. Other times we think we've gone beyond them. But the world and the circumstances of our lives change. And so, as in every generation, we struggle to find new meaning that fits what we now know. In this series a variety of contemporary thinkers reflect on such issues. We hope that what they say will provoke responses in you and will help in your struggle with the questions.

-- From the opening narration

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

What the Series Is Like

Each of 22 contemporary Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish thinkers (a complete list with brief biographical information appears on pages 8-10 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 the programs are listed, with the questions to which participants responded.

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 11-22 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 who said what.

A Suggested Procedure for the Sessions

1. View the tape all the way through. Discuss.
2. Or view the tape twice, stopping the second time for discussion or reflection when the responses show the subject has shifted. Many groups that have used the Questions of Faith series say they found taking time for a second viewing to be very helpful. Some groups even spent their next session on a second viewing and further discussion.
3. Either way, you may want, after the program has been viewed, to hand out the outline for the program you have just viewed.
 - a. The outline is provided to help keep straight who said which things.
 - b. The questions to stimulate reflection or discussion are suggestions only. Use them if they're helpful. People discovered while using the first Questions of Faith series that they didn't need a half-dozen questions to stimulate discussion. They also discovered that a very helpful way to begin is simply to ask members to share what struck them most.

A Word About Preparation and Equipment

For a smooth and effective showing, these steps are recommended:

1. Preview each program.
2. Adjust the VCR and the TV set for sharp picture and clear sound in advance.

3. Cue up the tape in advance so the opening titles appear when you turn on the machine.
4. Adjust the room light for comfortable viewing.
5. Rearrange seating for discussion if necessary and if possible, after viewing. A circle or oval so members can make eye contact is ideal.

THE PROGRAMS

NOTE: This page and page 7 may be copied and distributed in advance to help in preparation for viewing.

To get at aspects of the title question, additional questions were asked. The responses generally reveal which question has been asked. The questions will give you a quick preview of the content of each session.

The Bible references will help in locating the passages referred to by participants. You may want to read these passages before viewing the program.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY FAITH? (21 min.)

What does faith mean to you? What's the difference between faith and belief? Why does having faith matter?

Bible Reference: Hebrews 11:1-39

WHY WORSHIP? (22 min.)

What is worship? When does worship happen for you? Does worship ever happen outside the church? What is the value of worship?

Bible Reference: Exodus 3:1-5. (You may choose to read Psalms 100 or other Psalms of praise; they are implied by participants though not directly cited).

WHAT'S RELIGION GOT TO DO WITH SEX? (27 min.)

What is the Judeo-Christian perspective on sexuality? What can the church/synagogue offer to those in nontraditional relationships? What does religion have to say about homosexual issues?

Bible References: Genesis 1:27-31;
1 Corinthians 7:2-5;
Romans 1:26ff;
Ezekiel 16:49

WHAT ARE THE MORAL DILEMMAS? (24 min.)

What is the most problematic moral issue for you? If you had to identify the most pressing moral problem faced by the culture, what would you say?

Bible References: Philippians 3:12-14;
Genesis 2:15-3:24;
Matthew 22:37-40;
Matthew 5:43-48

REMEMBER SIN AND SALVATION? (22 min.)

Whatever happened to sin? What is sin for you? What does salvation mean? What do you need to be saved from? How does salvation happen?

Bible References: John 8:3-11
 Corinthians 5:19

WHAT ABOUT GRACE AND MIRACLES? (24 min.)

What is grace? How do you experience grace? Does God intervene in creation today? What is a miracle and have you ever experienced one?

Bible References: Matthew 5:43-48;
 Mark 6:30-44;
 John 3:7-8

Suggestions to Aid Discussion

1. View actively (for example, look for conflicting views or note questions that occur to you while viewing).
2. During discussion, the leader need not be alarmed if there are pauses in the discussion. Wait 30 seconds before prodding?
3. Look for ways to include less talkative group members, but remember that members should be allowed to participate at the level that is comfortable for them.
4. A useful activity might be to list on newsprint all the definitions of worship (or grace or salvation, etc.) that occur to group members after viewing. List in members' words and reserve comments until the listing is finished.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Frederick Buechner, Writer (Presbyterian)

The author of 24 books including, Godric and more recently, Whistling in the Dark, Mr. Buechner has drawn upon the experience of his own search for meaning to create a body of work which points to the presence of God in everyday life.

Calvin Butts, Pastor

He is pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, the oldest of African-American Baptist congregations in New York City. To Calvin Butts, religion, politics, and culture are as one, and he regularly uses his pulpit for political and social activism.

Will Campbell, Writer/Farmer/Preacher (Baptist)

Rumored to be the inspiration behind the cartoon character, the Rev. Will B. Dunn, he is known for his work in the civil rights movement. Today he's a best-selling writer and "preacher-at-large."

Anthony Campolo, Sociologist/Pastor/Writer

Professor of Sociology at Eastern College and associate pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Dr. Campolo is known for his vibrant humor and willingness to tackle controversial issues within the church. He is the author of over 10 books, including Twenty Hot Potatoes and Christians are Afraid to Touch.

Hyung Kyung Chung, Theologian (Presbyterian)

Cited as a rising star in feminist theology, Chung brings an Asian perspective to Christian thought. She is Professor of Theology at Ewha Woman's University in Seoul, Korea.

F. Forrester Church, Pastor

The pastor of All Souls Unitarian Church, in New York City, Dr. Church is recognized as a leading thinker on the contemporary scene. He is the author of over a dozen books, including The Seven Deadly Virtues and God and Other Famous Liberals.

Joan Chittister, St. Scholastica Priory

Sr. Chittister is known for her work in interpreting the value of monastic life. Her book, Wisdom Distilled from the Daily, presents the Rule of St. Benedict as a model for modern Christian living. She is Executive Director of the Alliance for International Monasticism.

William Sloan Coffin, Activist (United Church of Christ)

The President of SANE/Freeze, an advocacy group working for nuclear disarmament. Dr. Coffin was most recently the Senior Pastor of Riverside Church in New York City. He is recognized world-wide as a pioneer in advocating for the rights of the oppressed.

Sam Keen, Writer/Mythologist

Author of To A Dancing God, Dr. Keen is a former professor of philosophy and religion, and editor of Psychology Today. He leads workshops around the country that encourage people to discover their own myths and symbols in the stories of their lives.

Leontine Kelly, Bishop (Retired)

The first African American woman Bishop in The United Methodist Church (and probably in any denomination) is known for wanting the church not just to proclaim the gospel, but to live it out. Now retired as Bishop, she is Visiting Professor of Evangelism and Witness at Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA.

Harold Kushner, Rabbi/Writer

The author of the best-selling book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People. Kushner's own wrestling with the nature of good and evil, due to the loss of a son, brought comfort to others and established him as a "pastor-at-large".

Madeleine L'Engle, Writer (Episcopal)

Madeleine L'Engle is the author of over 25 books, many of them for children, including the prize winning, A Wrinkle in Time. Her latest book, Marriage: A Two Part Invention, is an account of her relationship with her husband, actor Hugh Franklin, and his subsequent illness and death.

Daniel Paul Matthews (Episcopal)

The Rector of Trinity Church on Wall Street, Dr. Matthews combined his experiences in radio and television with a commitment to proclaiming the gospel to help found VISN in 1987, bringing together for the first time in communications history, an interfaith cable consortium of 22 religious groups.

Keith Miller, Writer/Speaker

The best-selling author of over 14 books, including the classic, The Taste of New Wine, Mr. Miller draws upon his own faith journey to explore the tensions and connections between faith and practical living. His recent writings examine the popular 12-step addiction program to reveal how it incorporates classical Christian principles.

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Professor/Writer

Raised and educated within a strict Christian fundamentalist community, Dr. Mollenkott entered into a new understanding of Christian freedom through her encounter with feminist literature. As a professor of literature and as author, Mollenkott celebrates that freedom by uncovering new insights about God's nature from the Biblical text.

Parker J. Palmer, Writer/Teacher (Society of Friends)

A Berkeley Ph.D. and former sociology professor, Dr. Palmer left the academic life to live and work at Pendel Hill, the Quaker Community near Philadelphia. Now he gives workshops, lectures, and retreats, inspiring college professors, among others, with talk of truth and love.

Robert Raines, Professor/Writer (United Methodist)

Robert Raines is the Director of Kirkridge, a retreat center in the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania. From the quiet post in the hills, Dr. Raines has authored popular books of Christian meditation including the best-selling classic, A Faithing Oak.

John Spong, Bishop

Bishop of Newark, he is known in the Anglican community for his leadership in working for the recognition and empowerment of the homosexual community within the church. Two of his recent books, Living in Sin and Out of the Whirlwind, challenge the church to look beyond tradition and doctrine in sexuality, evangelism, interfaith dialogue and many other areas.

Ann Ulanov, Psychotherapist/Writer/Teacher (Roman Catholic)

Professor of Psychiatry and Religion at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and a faculty member of the Jung Institute, Dr. Ulanov is the author of over 10 books, including Picturing God and the now classic text, The Feminine in Christian Theology.

Jim Wallis, Editor

Jim Wallis is one of the founders of the Sojourners Community in Washington, D.C. A long-time advocate of the poor, Jim and his community take a “hands-on” approach to oppression by living among them. He is also the editor of Sojourners, a magazine for Christian social action.

Renita J. Weems, Professor

Renita J. Weems teaches Old-Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and is an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She is the author of Just a Sister Away, a well-received book of stories about women’s relationships in the Bible.

Walter Wink, Professor (United Methodist)

Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary, Walter Wink is best known for developing a Socratic approach to teaching the Bible. His book, Transforming Bible Study, has become a classic in how to teach the Bible by allowing people to discover truth and meaning for themselves.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY FAITH?

(To be handed out after the group had 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.

Wallis	Faith is a choice. The difference between a cynic and a saint is faith.
Chung	Faith is love of life for me. This is faith. ...affirming life in spite of death and despair
Raines	They went out knowing where they were to go. That's to me living by faith ... Faith is living by what you most deeply believe in.
Weems	Living against the odds. I don't have faith. I try to live faithfully.
Keen	Faith's a bad word. I prefer the term trust as opposed to the term belief.. because I know more about deepening my sense of trust and dealing with my mistrust.
Matthews	My faith comes out of my trust in the deepest orientation of the reality I understand.
Coffin	People who say they don't believe in God...are responding to God's love.
Campolo	A lot of people that believe in God don't have any faith.
Ulanov	...something that happens to you. You don't cause it and you have to take it; you have to be ready to take it....you have not altogether held in your hands...
Palmer	If faith is the willingness to walk the human journey...inwardly and in company with others, to walk through the fears and yet not be those fears, then I think faith means everything.
Wink	If you know God out of an experience in you life, that's something more than just believing that it's so. You know it's so.
Campbell	Faith is active. Faith does lead to discipleship. Faith is not being absolutely sure of something.
Chittister	...just literally had to scratch myself down to the heart.
Ulanov	They're pushed into their guts...to know what they believe and what they don't believe and it's all right to say, "I don't know."
Campolo	Praxis...if you don't have faith that the world is going to be a better place – then involve yourself in activities that will make it a better place.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. Why does having faith matter to you?

WHY WORSHIP?

(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 words to assist in recalling their thoughts.

Ulanov	It's wonder, wonder that that presence is there and wants you.
Church	...to lift the wheels off of the road for a minute...and reflect upon ultimate meanings.
Chittister	...to wrestle with the questions that I can't handle privately, and to be carried by the faith community while I'm doing it.
Keen	Religion is supposed to tickle your memory. It's not a thing in itself, it's supposed to point beyond itself.
Campbell	My concept of God is not of a being we can tune in at a certain hour.
Coffin	...a reminder of what life is all about...it's very, very powerful if you open yourself to what's going on.
Weems	...collective effort on the part of the people to find a common language to express whatever it is we are going through.
Ulanov	It's not just me and God, and probably in that order, it's God and us...it's really something to be all together in the presence of God.
Palmer	The whole time would pass in silence and yet you would feel a depth of contact with God that was maybe more than the spoken word could ever convey.
Weems	There is a covenant that whatever happens, it will happen because we all make it happen together.
Campolo	Worship is making love to God.
Keen	I'm going to try to learn what it means to pray with your eyes open.
Kelly	Whenever you acknowledge the gifts of God then the response in gratitude is an act of worship.
Church	...just losing oneself in that connection and finding oneself...you just melt with a sense of relief and satisfaction.
Miller	...It's like kissing your wife goodbye...I live more like I would want to live.
Coffin	When I lost my son, I said, "There's not going to be a single sticky bud that I don't see this year."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. What is worship for you?
3. What is the value of worship?

WHAT'S RELIGION GOT TO DO WITH SEX?

(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.

- Kelly: I think we are like ostriches in the church. We have got our heads in the sand...need to let people know there is nothing in life that cannot be talked about.
- Kushner ...Jewish theology...much readier to affirm the good things in life.
- Campolo You people need a decent sex life, not an indecent sex life.
- Mollenkott Well the Christian perspective if it were biblical, sexuality is a good gift of God.
- Miller If you read those early stories, then it was for fellowship...We try to make sex do the job of intimacy.
- Chittister Augustine was a great contributor to the destruction of a healthy attitude toward sexuality, in my opinion.
- Church We tend to be frightened by the power.
- Campbell The institutional church has never come to grips with heterosexuality.
- Spong I've suggested that marriage is not the only relationship in which sex can be called holy.
- Raines The church has within it...always the possibility of its own transformation.
- Chittister Can we expect celibacy from a group of people not called to celibacy?
- Mollenkott The emphasis ought to be on...whether you care about the whole life of the human being with whom you unite yourself.
- Butts Every person is a child of God; so the homosexual is my brother or sister, but I don't affirm the lifestyle.
- Kushner I come out of a biblical, scriptural tradition which sees homosexual behavior as wrong. On the other hand I find myself instinctively responding with compassion.
- Coffin We're different, but not different up or different down.
- Campolo We tend to pick certain sins out-of-Scripture, blow them out of proportion and make crusades out of them.

Ulanov ...in religion, we're not in the business of sanforizing people.

Chittister We're a culture and a people just torn by excess and rigidity and we're having a very difficult time getting this thing in balance.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. What should the church be saying about human sexuality?

WHAT ARE THE MORAL DILEMMAS?

(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.

Church	The stickiest moral issue is always the one that's on our table at the moment.
Kelly	The most pressing moral issue for me today in our society, I think, is racism.
Coffin	No question about it – indifference.
Campolo	The biggest moral concern in my life is integrity
Weems	I have always been amazed, at how much, even among religious people, we hate difference.
Palmer	I think the greatest moral concern I have is a whole class of things that have to do with the oppression, the degradation, the deprivation of other people.
Ulanov	The most problematic moral issue is why we turn away from the presence of God.
Butts	People say, “How can you be pro-choice and anti-abortion?” I say, “Because I can be.”
Chittister	I believe that life is phenomenally important at all ends of the spectrum, but there's a dimension of the simplistic in that answer that makes it both holy and unwholesome.
Kelly	It has not been long that we have had to deal with this question of when to pull the plug.
Church	...paradigm shift...today we are more vulnerable when our enemies are vulnerable than we are when they are strong.
Chittister	Can some of us threaten the entire planet for the sake of a single nation, can we find the event in history that will justify the destruction of the globe?
Coffin	Peace at any price as long as the peace is ours and somebody else pays the price.
Palmer	If we could see that it's possible to reorganize our lives around an assumption of abundance, we would be happier and healthier and a more just society.
Church	Did you, during your lifetime, feed the hungry and clothe the naked and visit those in prison and heal the sick?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. What is the most problematic moral issue for you?
3. How would we go about organizing our lives around “the assumption of abundance”?

REMEMER SIN AND SALVATION?

(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.

Chittister	Sin is the process of destroying life so badly that the effects of that rest on the people around me.
Campolo	I think you sin if you allow yourself to be dehumanized or you participate in the dehumanization of others.
Butts	Sin is when you're not trying really to reach the mark.
Ulanov	Sin is turning away...not taking what's offered.
Weems	...those things that destroy community....You don't just sin, you sin against someone.
Coffin	If nothing counts against you, nothing counts, period.
Keen	Sin roots in the unwillingness to feel the passions of my own life.
L'Engle	If we were not separate from the source, we wouldn't do things like sexual abuse, drug abuse.
Miller	The primary characteristic that I now see sin to have is denial; I cannot see it in myself, but I can see it perfectly in you or in my family.
Kelly	When we sin, we are hurt...in need of healing.
Coffin	Most people don't believe in forgiveness.
Butts	I felt something move through me that made me feel light, like I could float.
Matthews	I think for most of us, it happens over a period of time.
Palmer	I think of salvation not as getting rid of the shadow parts of myself but as facing them.
Campbell	I really believe in unconditional grace and I think we do already have it.
Chung	I don't believe in free salvation...Jesus' life and ministry shows the possibility and we are the ones participating...to make it happen.
Campolo	I need to be saved from those things in me that would cause me to hate myself.

Kelly I don't need to be saved from something as much as I need to be saved to something.

Butts No matter what you've achieved, and no matter who you are...you are no more, ultimately, then someone who needs God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. What do you need to be saved from?

WHAT ABOUT GRACE AND MIRACLES?

(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.

Coffin	Both of us believe life is good when there's somethin' for nothin'.
Kelly	I don't see how we can in any way limit the grace of God...since it is God's grace and not ours.
Butts	We receive grace freely, but it was paid for and that's the marvelous story of Jesus Christ.
Ulanov	Everything there is in life is right here this moment and if you can take it, you're connected right to the center of things.
Church	The world doesn't owe you a living, you owe the world a living—go out and give yourself away.
Chittister	Grace is whatever happens to you, because of which you came out better.
Church	You're connected to something so much more grand and so much more awesome.
Campolo	When the Berlin wall came tumbling down, I saw that as the grace of God.
Ulanov	A miracle is a way God manifests and underline the point.
Palmer	He (Jesus) took the risk of calling people into a community that could feed itself.
Matthews	When things happen that are absolutely out of the ordinary...you want to say, that's a miracle.
Wink	The soldier in charge was whistling "Thine is the Glory"...we know that we were going to get across the border.
Campolo	She wants me to heal the kid...I don't understand how to fit these things in. I don't know how to make sense out of them, but weird things happen that are good.
Kelly	My faith understanding would help me believe in the miracle of healing beyond this life.
Chittister	Grace and miracles--the same thing, maybe—probably—sometimes--often, and who would know...?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. How do you experience grace?
3. Have you ever experienced a miracle?