

Questions of Faith Series 4 Study Guide

VHS #2530; DVD #2539

**QUESTIONS OF FAITH SERIES 4
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 16 contemporary Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish thinkers (a complete list with brief biographical information appears on pages 8-11 of this 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 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'S THE NATURE OF HUMAN NATURE?

What does it mean to say that we're made in the image of God? Do you think people are innately good or innately sinful?

Biblical References: Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-25; 3:1-24
Leviticus 11:44; 1 John 4:7-21

WHOSE LIFE IS SACRED?

What does it mean to say human life is sacred? Is ending a life ever justified? What about self defense, war, suicide (self-deliverance) or euthanasia?

Biblical References: Isaiah 2:4; Psalms 8:3-8

WHOSE WORLD IS IT?

What does your faith suggest our attitude should be toward all of nature? How do you weigh the global environmental crisis against global human suffering? What can or should churches or synagogues do about the threat to the environment? What can the individual do?

Biblical References: Genesis 1:1-25; Psalms 24;
Psalms 65:5b-13; Psalms 104

WHAT'S THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Who or what is Holy Spirit? Do you experience the Holy Spirit in your life? Would you say that's being "filled with the Spirit"? How is that different from your experience of the presence of God?

Biblical References: Psalms 104:29; Acts 2:1-41;
John 4:24; Matthew 3:16

WHAT'S RELIGIOUS?

What does it mean to be religious? Is that the same as being spiritual? What can the established religions do to survive into the 21st century?

Biblical Reference: Psalms 133

WHY HOPE?

What is hope? What's the difference between faith and hope? How do you find hope in the face of your own suffering or the suffering you're surrounded with?

Biblical References: Psalms 13; Psalms 22;
Romans 8:24-25; Hebrews 11

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 saying something to stimulate a response.
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 to them.
4. A useful activity might be to list on a newsprint all the definitions or descriptions of human nature (or Holy Spirit or "religious" or "spiritual", etc.) that occur to group members after viewing. List in members' words and reserve comments until the listing is finished.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Rita Nakashima Brock

Rita Nakashima Brock holds an endowed chair in the humanities at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), she has taught theology at Pacific Lutheran University and travels and lectures widely on feminist concerns. In addition to publishing numerous essays, Dr. Brock is the author of Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power.

Walter Brueggemann

Walter Brueggemann is Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. Dr. Brueggemann has devoted his professional career to the exploration of the prophetic imagination and the power of Biblical stories to transform our lives. He is the author of several books, including The Prophetic Imagination and Finally Comes the Poet. Dr. Brueggemann travels extensively teaching and preaching.

James Cone

James Cone is the Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Recognized as a leading voice examine Christian scriptures and traditions from the starting point of the African-American experience. He is the author of numerous books including his most recent, Martin, Malcolm & America.

Virginia Doctor

Virginia Doctor is a Mohawk woman of the Turtle clan who was raised in the Onodago Nation Territory. She is the director of the North American Indian Club in Syracuse, NY. An active Episcopalian, she serves on the Episcopal Council of Indian Ministry, the Committee on the Status of Women, and Women for Social Witness.

Verna Dozier

Verna Dozier is a noted theologian and Episcopal church lay leader. A strong voice in the church for the empowerment of lay ministry, she is the author of The Authority of the Laity. Dr. Dozier is a popular speaker throughout the country. Her most recent book is The Cream of God: A Call To Return.

Virgilio Elizondo

Father Virgilio Elizondo is Rector of the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas and President of the Mexican-American Institute. Active with Cesar Chavez in the farm workers' movement, he has long been an advocate for the poor and the oppressed, in this country and in Latin America. His theological reflection draws on his Mexican American heritage as well as Christian tradition and focuses on issues of peace and justice.

Matthew Fox

Matthew Fox is a Dominican priest, theological and educator who is helping people rediscover a creation-centered spirituality that blends Christian mysticism with social justice, feminist and environmental concerns. Outspoken, provocative and controversial, he was silenced by the Vatican for a year because of his teachings. He is the author of many books and the founding director of the Institute in Culture and Creation Spiritually.

Susan Harriss

Susan Harriss is a writer, educator and Episcopal Priest. Her extensive experiences in Christian education form the basis of her book, Jamie's Way, a collection of devotional stories for families. Ms. Harriss is presently the Chaplain of the Cathedral School of St. John the Divine in New York City where she continues her writing and teaching.

Pui Lan Kwok

Pui Lan Kwok is visiting theologian at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. An active Episcopal laywoman, Dr. Kwok travels extensively lecturing on the “future of feminist theology from an Asian perspective”. Dr. Kwok holds a doctorate in theology from Harvard University and is the author of the forthcoming book, Chinese Women and Christianity.

Sallie McFague

Sallie McFague, Carpenter Professor of Theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School, is well-known for her work on religious language—ways we can talk about God and the world. In her recent widely-used book, Models of God, she began an exploration of theology from an ecological perspective. She is now at work on a new book focusing on the model of the world as God's body.

Rabbi Marshall Meyer

Rabbi Marshall Meyer is Rabbi of Congregation B'Nai Jeshurun, the second oldest synagogue in New York City. A long-time advocate of human rights. Rabbi Meyer lived in Argentina for over twenty years where he established a congregation, a seminary and several religious journals. He was awarded the “Order of the Liberator San Martin”, Argentina's highest decoration for a noncitizen for his work for human rights. He continues his work on behalf of the oppressed and forgotten in New York City.

Henry Okullu

John Henry Okullu is the Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Maseno South in Kenya, Africa. He is an outspoken critic of his government's human rights violations and is recognized as a leader in the struggle for democratic structures. Bishop Okullu faces numerous death threats because of his work. He recently completed a six month sabbatical in the United States. He is the author of Church and State and is currently working on his autobiography.

Chaim Potok

Chaim Potok is the best-selling author of such classics as The Chosen, My Name is Asher Lev and Wanderings, a historical narrative of the history of the Jewish people. Ordained a Rabbi, Potok's most recent novel is The Gift of Asher Lev.

Donald Reeves

Donald Reeves is the Rector of St. James's Church, Piccadilly, London. He is the author of For God's Sake, a passionate defense of the future of Christianity and Making Sense of Religion, a companion text to his popular BBC television series in which he challenges believers to be creative about making religion relevant today.

Richard Selzer

Richard Selzer is the best selling author of Mortal Lessons and Taking the World in for Repairs. A former surgeon and professor of surgery at Yale Medical school, Dr. Selzer retired from the medical profession to pursue a full-time writing career. His short stories probe the mysteries of pain and suffering and the glorious possibility for healing. His latest book is Imagine A Women.

Brian Wren

Brian Wren has been called by a leading authority, "the most successful hymn writer since Charles Wesley." His hymns are included in most of the denominational hymnals published in the United States and Britain in the last decade. He attempts in his lyrics to be faithful to a gospel being reclaimed by the oppressed. As he says, "If the words do their job, they should gently demolish complacency, yet in a way that leads to prayer."

WHAT'S THE NATURE OF HUMAN NATURE?

(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.

- Brock ...God is love...to be made in God's image is to live in that reality
- McFague ...not what separates us from the rest of creation as in our form of reasoning, but
...what unites us...
- Harriss ...we must look like God. Though we don't know what God looks like,
- Cone ...we're supposed to discover what that special purpose and meaning is...
- Okullu ...not made like a pot or a cup and you look like another cup and that is all.
- Meyer ...our capacity to create, not from nothing, but to recreate, rearrange.
- Elizondo God who is the supreme artist has never made a duplicate.
- Selzer I see the flesh as a spirit thickened...
- Kwok ...only me as a woman, reflects the image of God fully, perfectly.
- Brueggemann ...to be able to enter into covenantal relationships that hold the potential of being
transformational.
- Dozier ...Adam and Eve were...had the freedom to make another choice.
- Potok Everybody is searching for his or her own self.
- Fox ...we're still stumbling to find out who we are.
- Brueggemann ...being in the image of God has to do with hosting the ...ambiguities that make
us up...
- Selzer I believe in the goodness of mankind...
- Cone ...I don't see human beings as being created sinful or being created evil.
- Fox God doesn't make anything except good things.
- Dozier ...human beings are innately possible.
- Harriss Why...ritual purifications of a child that has never done anything worse than
wake up his mother in the night?

- Elizondo ...most dangerous place for women to be at night...home with her husband.
- Brock There are a lot of tragic factors in human life that just get handed to us.
- Potok ...[holocaust] is a black hole in the moral system...
- Reeves ...buggeration factor...our tendency to muck everything up all the time...
- Fox ...is preceded by hosts of angels who are singing "Make way; make way; make way for the image of God."
- Wren The light of God is shining bright in every girl (boy) of woman born...

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. What does being made in God's image mean to you?

WHOSE LIFE IS SACRED?

(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.

- Kwok Human life is sacred because human relations are sacred.
- Reeves ...everything we have is sacred because all of it comes from God...
- Doctor I think all life is sacred, not only human life.
- Cone ...all of this just didn't happen by accident.
- Wren If we really meant all human life was sacred, we would be insuring that every child on earth was adequately fed...
- Brock ...human life is probably in many ways the least important and the most damaging to the rest of the world...
- Doctor ...we have experienced suicides and it seems to me that something has called that person to do it.
- Meyer Some people took their lives. Can I condemn them?
- Dozier (poem)...choose to live it only as long as I can honor that sacredness.
- Brueggemann ...when...can no longer participate in community...life is over with...
- Brock ...being utterly helpless...intractable pain...separates you from love and care...three greatest evils in the world...
- Harriss I often think that this question about the sacredness of life is really being discussed on grounds that aren't quite Christian.
- Fox Of course, humans end a life every time we eat.
- Selzer "But it knocked my house down!" And she said, "It was being a moth."
- Okullu I believe that life should not be taken in any way at all.
- Potok I would have terrible misgivings about taking another life, but I would do it.
- Meyer ...I would take arms in self-defense...this position hasn't let to much good...
- Wren ...it (WW II) was a necessary act of evil...to prevent something...worse.

Potok I don't think war is justifiable for purposes of conquest...gray areas...difficult to resolve.

Reeves ...theory (of the just war) no longer works.

McFague I think we have to broaden it to acts of aggression against human beings and other life forms.

Brueggemann ...God values human life as an end and not a means to something else...

Dozier ...human life has the possibility of mediating the divine life.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. How do you approach what Chaim Potok calls the gray areas?

WHOSE WORLD IS IT?

(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.

Meyer	...not here to ruthlessly utilize and butcher our environment.
Harriss	...learn to respond in a more organic and considerate way to the environment.
Dozier	..."Dominion"...misunderstood...I don't think that is a license to ruthlessly, carelessly destroy all other life...
Wren	...if God has place the whole world in our hand, we have to pray differently about it.
Brock	...house of worship...close off the natural world as part of worship...
Fox	...nature itself is a revelation of the divine and we can't live without it.
Doctor	...I am a landless Mohawk woman...
McFague	...comparison between thinking of the planet as our home or a hotel.
Harriss	We can't just go out and buy 50,000 more Styrofoam cups...
McFague	...short-term tension between ecological and justice issues.
Wren	...poverty...racism...sexism...environment...all connected.
Fox	...false dualism to set human suffering against environmental suffering...
Kwok	...deforestation and so many ecological problems...happen in the Third World.
Doctor	...don't think it's third world people who are in conflict with the environment.
Elizondo	...now we're sending the radioactive waste products back to them...
Cone	...we do have enough to sustain the world...don't have enough to sustain privileges...
McFague	...burden...should be on the shoulders of First World people.
Harriss	...state of environment...a call to repentance...
Kwok	...we are not at the center.
McFague	...you only have to sew your own little piece in the quilt...

Elizondo We're all in the Titanic together.

Doctor We talk a lot about the 7th generation...

McFague We can't live any place else. We belong here. Heart, mind and soul.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIONS OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. What can churches, synagogues and individuals do about the environment?

WHAT'S THE HOLY SPIRIT?

(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.

- McFague ...Holy Spirit has had a pretty bad press...
- Harriss ...the Holy Spirit was the secretary.
- Selzer ...we get the light from all three...that's the Holy Trinity.
- Dozier ...limited way...I talk about...God is always for me...with me, and unknown by me...
- Brueggemann ...when people do not take the breath in, they just cease to function.
- Elizondo ...the spirit of the ancestors...life before me and life after me.
- Meyer ...Holy Spirit is that spirit which motivates and sanctifies life and allows the encounter with the divine.
- Kwok For two thousand years we imprisoned the Holy Spirit in the church.
- Fox The Spirit is...transformation...empowerment...surprise.
- McFague I really believe in the incarnation...spirit mediated in the flesh.
- Reeves ...my experiences of God... have always been from people who've been in a mess
- Kwok I experience the holy spirit, when I love, when I laugh, when I try to make relationships...
- Okullu ...this is the work of the Holy Spirit that keep revealing new truths...
- Meyer ...terrible question...Holy Spirit is to be found in the genuine authentic experience of love...
- Brock I experience it even in my own anger when I'm not loved and nurtured.
- Harriss ...when we really get it...the Holy Spirit's work.
- Doctor ...the catalyst of God. (story about land rights speech).
- Cone ...discovered that they were singing slave songs and did not know it...that's the Holy Spirit.

Elizondo He died...with a big beautiful smile...a Spirit-filled moment that I will treasure always.

Meyer ...that's the Holy Spirit that allows perhaps God to come into our lives.

Breueggemann ...the wind of God that blows people beyond what the world accepts.

Fox As long as we still have that breath we can change.

Cone The Holy Spirit is the power of God to be present with us...

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you the most?
2. How have you experience this Holy Spirit?

WHAT'S RELIGIOUS?

(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.

Elizondo	I think the human being by nature is religious
Doctor	When I think of religions, I think of rite...ritual.
Dozier	...I define spiritual as paying attention.
Cone	...a religious person is a person who is practicing a particular faith.
Meyer	...people say that they are very religious, and I don't think they are spiritual in any way.
Harriss	...I think being religious has to do with some sort of steady practice...
Brueggemann	...mystery must be honored but I gotta live me life...religion is exhausting.
Selzer	...my father was a devoted atheist..."find waiting for me easier if they see him hanging around too."
Harriss	religious but not spiritual...can be spiritual without being religious. It makes me sad to see one without the other...
McFague	...it isn't just...talking the talk, but it's walking the walk.
Fox	The answer is not prayer books at all. Let us use our bodies as prayer.
Brock	...traditionally the church has encouraged an enormous amount of passivity...
Fox	...we've lost joy in our civilization and therefore we've lost empowerment.
Reeves	...mainline religions...engage in an enormous process of repentance.
McFague	It is possible to be a prophetic church...when your own survival is at stake.
Elizondo	...what's important is not our religious institutions, but it's the kingdom.
Brueggemann	...as long as we are individually trapped in consumer society, we'll have no energy or credibility.
Reeves	...I think we need in a way to start all over again.
Meyer	...How good, how glorious it is when brothers and sisters can dwell together in harmony.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. If you think it would be useful, list all the definitions of “religious” given.
3. What do you think mainline religion needs to do to survive in the 21st century?

WHY HOPE?

(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.

- McFague ...becoming suspicious of one's own deep suspicion of the determinor of destiny.
- Selzer ...I mean I look around at society and I think it's all coming apart and yet I somehow have hope.
- Harriss ...to me hope is starting over...when you've been sick...
- Kwok ...to say we are hopeful means we affirm love as overcoming death or separation.
- Fox ...difference between optimism and hope. I'm not at all optimistic.
- Cone Faith is the power to struggle. Hope is the knowledge that the struggle is not in vain.
- McFague ...You can either give in... Or, you can side with the victims...
- Brock ...awful lot of good caring people who do their best...
- Kwok ...I see faith and hope when I see those people do not give up hope themselves.
- Elizondo ...not just suffering...struggling to bring about change.
- Meyer We are capable of doing something that is ten times, a thousand times more than that which we do.
- Brock ...isn't it time the public sphere became accountable for...values we know work to nurture life...?
- Doctor I think a lot of the hope comes from the fact that I am still here.
- Wren ...what I try to do as a poet of the church...is to put into words that which sustains us.
- Cone ...they'd rather...go down fighting than give up and be a slave...that's what gives us hope.
- Harriss ...don't want to grab too quick...on the early one that isn't the right one.
- Brueggemann ...the God whom we know to be faithful in the present...will keep the future.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What comment touched you most deeply?
2. What gives you hope--and what do you hope for?