

MYSTICS AND MISFITS

Meeting God through St. Francis
and Other Unlikely Saints

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Part I: Simplicity

1. In what ways do you long for simplicity? In what ways do you resist it? Is there a way in which you have idealized simplicity?
2. Christiana describes a lesser-known aspect of St. Francis's life: his spoiled and wanton adolescence (pp. 57–61). How did transformation occur for Francis? With what aspects of his life do you identify?
3. Has there ever been a time when, like St. Francis, you found that something valued by others in your culture strangely stopped holding your interest (p. 76)? How do you navigate such a personal transition? How does it lead you toward inner or maybe outer transformation?
4. "If you're wealthy, you aren't as acquainted with inconvenience" (p. 64). Regardless of where you perceive yourself on the wealth spectrum, this sentence may resonate with you. How do you respond to this idea?
5. Where have you made simplicity only about "stuff" rather than about your heart?
6. How do you find simplicity "both boringly simple and searingly difficult" (p. 85)?
7. How can you move toward simplicity inwardly while seeking it outwardly? How can you move toward simplicity today, in your season of life?

Part II: Hospitality

1. How have you welcomed or resisted awkward hospitality?
2. Christiana describes Dorothy Day as "a woman acquainted with her own brokenness who took in and loved the broken-hearted" (p. 96). In what ways are brokenness and hospitality connected in Day's life? In yours?
3. Reflect on times that being hospitable to others felt uncomfortable or exhausting. How have you accepted or chastised yourself for those emotions?
4. In what ways have you idealized hospitality?
5. How do your instincts and your desire for hospitality conflict with one another (p. 90)?
6. How might welcoming your own inner stranger help you welcome the strangers you meet in everyday life?
7. In what ways might you be at risk of "turning hospitality into something less like relationship and more like charity" (p. 116)? How might you begin to change that?

Part III: Contemplation

1. Is there a place of existential dread in your life, what Christiana calls the “dread that leads you deeper” (p. 124)? How might you acknowledge and sit with that sense of dread, allowing it to lead you deeper?
2. Do you ever face emotional difficulties or anxiety or depression that you long to lead you to encounter to Christ? How do the stories from Christiana’s life and Margery Kempe’s life normalize your experiences?
3. Have you, like Christiana, ever “longed for counsel from a feminine God” (p. 132)? How has this longing changed your prayers?
4. “Experiences that break us apart are the ones which have the potential to really open us up to our true selves,” Christiana writes; such experiences can “rewire our brains toward an openness to God” (p. 134). In what ways have you found this to be true?
5. Which do you find you are drawn toward: being alone with God in prayer, or loving God in what Clare of Assisi calls “the cloister of the world” (p. 146)? How might you more deeply engage with the practice (prayer and contemplation, on the one hand, or loving others and entering into their suffering, on the other) that comes less naturally for you?
6. “Our strength comes when we are barren, naked, suffering, and sad” (p. 155). How have you experienced this? How have you resisted it?

Part IV: Church

1. Christiana describes the way that, through communion with her congregation, “Christ’s body reminded us why we lived together, why we ate together, and why we worshiped” (p. 181). Reflect on a worship experience that has served as such a reminder for you.
2. In her letter to Simone Weil, Christiana writes, “I think you worked so hard to be authentic, to be utterly committed to the cause, and to hold fast to the ideals you saw as emanat-ing from Christ himself that you lost sight of the wisdom and discernment of some of your choices” (p. 186). Have you ever sought to be true to ideals to the extent that it became harmful?
3. How might God be calling you to expanding your notion of who your family is (p. 165)? Explain how this might be a welcomed or unsettling experience for you.
4. Christiana realized at one point that God was revealing to her that she was not unlike her friend Peggy “lost, lonely, and awkward, grieving” (p. 172). Have you had similar moments of seeing yourself in someone at the margins?
5. How might God be calling you toward greater attentiveness in the love of your neighbor (p. 187)?
6. How can we cultivate internal attentiveness? In what ways does being attentive to God augment your ability to truly love those around you?

Part V: Death

1. What current losses are you grieving in your life? Reflect not only on the loss of loved ones but on the loss of places, things, relationships, identity, security, possibilities, and dreams.
2. St. Francis describes the character of God by naming the “suffering love that God feels for the world” (p. 230). In what ways does Christ on the cross connect with suffering in your life or that you observe other people experiencing?
3. Sometimes current sadness unearths grief from long ago. Is there sadness in your life that is bringing up an older loss? How can you welcome the unearthing of old grief?
4. How are you open to the “possibilities for unexpected growth” in this midst of grief (p. 236)? Where have you seen new life come from death in the past?
5. The mystics’ love “was the kind of love that propelled them to the fringes of their societies and their churches,” writes Christiana; it was the “kind of love that made them misfits” (p. 247). Reflect on this kind of love that characterizes mystics and misfits. Where do you see that kind of love today?
6. What thoughts and feelings are you left with as you finish reading *Mystics and Misfits*? What are you being drawn to consider or reflect on? How have you felt God’s presence through the pages of this book?