

STUDY GUIDE

CONVICTIONS: HOW I LEARNED WHAT MATTERS MOST

In reflecting on Marc's last book, [Convictions](#), I suggest making use of the chapter titles for your own conversations. And yes, the Chapters themselves will put you in conversation with what Marcus says. WWMS. But here I suggest using the titles for your own thought process. And I encourage you to share this process with someone else or a small group.

I provide some suggestions. But they are just that. Suggestions. Ignore them if they get in the way and simply look at the titles.

Below is first the title of the book and then the eleven chapter titles.

CHAPTERS

Convictions: How I learned what matters most. Marcus describes experiences, "conversions" or changes of perspective over his lifetime and how they affected his convictions. Do the same. And after all that.....what do you think matters most. A broad question. Take it where you will.

Context Matters: Let me suggest, describe where you are in your life stage; how your upbringing shaped you; where you are living now. How would you describe your "world." An additional thought: what was the literal landscape of your childhood and what does the one you live in now look like? Do those landscapes reflect anything about you? Even your own "inscape" as poet Gerard Manley Hopkins calls it? Is there a story there?

Faith is a Journey: I encourage you to emphasize the image of journey. We start somewhere....we grow, we experience, we are influenced....we don't really end up where we started....(or do we?) How is the image of a journey instructive as you reflect on your life of "faith." Start by thinking about what it is to make a journey. Then see your own life as one was well.

God is Real and Is a Mystery: For Marcus an experience of "God" or "the sacred" was real. What about for you? What is God for you? Is "God" real?? How do you experience God or understand God? Can we "know" God? Consider your childhood understanding and your images of God now? And if we can no longer claim a God of Supernatural Theism (God up there, anthropomorphic, etc.) how shall we envision and language our experiences or concepts of God now?

Salvation Is More About This Life than an Afterlife: I suggest that you don't debate whether this is true. Let the issue of an Afterlife be in a suspense account for now. What if "salvation" is about how we live this life here and now.

What then does “salvation” mean? How does it affect your understanding of Christian “good news.” And what this life is about?

Jesus is the Norm of the Bible: Marcus has a hilarious story about Jesus being the Norm of the Bible. From the perspective of a little boy. (Hint: first name) What does it mean that Jesus is the norm of the Bible (or the New Testament). What must predicate this conversation is Who is Jesus? Then and now?? If Jesus is the norm over and even against the Bible itself what do you make of that?

The Bible Can Be True Without Being Literally True: For those familiar with Marcus’s writings you know he shares Black Elk’s way of speaking about stories about our origins: I don’t know if it happened this way or not but I know that the story is true. (Marcus emphasizes a historical-metaphorical approach for reading the Bible.) How can something be true without being literally true?? Explore this. Can you think of experiences in your own life that would fall under this description? What is required to “see” or understand story (including your own) in this way? (Hint: metaphor.) Does this add to the “validity” of stories or diminish them in your experience? Why?

Jesus’s Death on the Cross Matters – But Not Because He Paid for Our Sins: Marcus (and others) insists that the notion of substitutionary atonement is a category mistake. Without debating that, what if Jesus’s death on the cross was not about a payment for our sins? Then what was it about? Why is Jesus death important? I suggest you consider what his life was about in order to understand why he was executed. Emphasis tends to be placed on Jesus’s death. What about his life? Does that put the cross is a different light?

The Bible is Political: Marcus suggests that our Christian life is both personal and political. And that the Bible is about both transformations. How does this sit with you? What do you make of the assertion that the Bible is political? What makes you uncomfortable about this? Or challenges you? Or makes a critical difference? Or is this something you simple leave off the table at Thanksgiving. Or anytime.

God Is Passionate About Justice and the Poor: What do you make of this succinct and full stop statement. Marcus is describing what he calls “the character” of God. Anthropomorphic, but helpful I think. If God is passionate about justice and the poor how are we doing? Marc suggests we are called to share in God’s passion. What do you think matters to “God?” What matters to you?

Christians Are Called to Peace and Nonviolence: Marc (and others) insists Jesus was nonviolent. And he longed for peace. He was not a Zealot as a recent author suggests. As followers of Jesus, we are called to peace and nonviolence. What do you make of that? How does that square with our nationalism? And our quest for liberty, freedom, peace as a nation. Where do you stand on this? And where do you think majority Christianity stands? How are we doing?

To Love God is to Love Like God: What does this mean? This is somewhat related I think to the “character of God.” But how does this statement strike you? Can you relate to it? What is it for you to “love like God”? To push this, a wonderful author and Christian thinker Richard Holloway talks about a “Godless Morality.” By that he means that we in our own “character” and capacities should (I use that word advisedly) care and love with or without “God.” Does it take “God” to love like God? Or does “God” represent and reflect our best ideals and hopes and loves? Does that idea muddy the waters? If so, return to Marc’s title: To Love God is to Love Like God. Explore, wonder, make it so.

FEEDBACK

We welcome your feedback. Give us suggestions, comments, what was helpful, what was not, so we can provide better study guides. No suggestion is too small. What other resources would be helpful for you? We appreciate your help. We would also like to know how you used these guides, for individual study or groups?

[Provide Feedback](#)