

# Unlocking the Ordinary *Mysteries*

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A Study Guide to "Ordinary Mysteries: Faith, Doubt, and Meaning"

James Hazelwood



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# STUDY GUIDE FOR ORDINARY MYSTERIES

Unlocking the Ordinary Mysteries: A Study Guide to "Ordinary Mysteries: Faith, Doubt, and Meaning"

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# Introduction

Welcome to the journey of exploration and enlightenment as we delve into the pages of "Ordinary Mysteries: Faith, Doubt, and Meaning." Authored by James Hazelwood, this profound work offers a poignant examination of the complex interplay between faith, doubt, and the search for meaning in our everyday lives.

In a world often overshadowed by the extraordinary, "Ordinary Mysteries" reminds us that we find the most profound truths in the mundane. Through captivating prose and thought-provoking insights, the author invites us to embrace the mysteries inherent in our ordinary experiences – the moments of doubt, the flickers of faith, and the relentless quest for significance.

This study guide aims to enhance your understanding and appreciation of the themes woven throughout the book. Whether you're embarking on a solitary journey of self-discovery or engaging in group discussion, this guide serves as a companion to illuminate the key concepts, prompt reflection, and inspire meaningful dialogue.

As we embark on this voyage together, let us approach the exploration of "Ordinary Mysteries" with open minds and receptive hearts. May this guide be a beacon of illumination, guiding us through the labyrinth of uncertainty toward a deeper understanding of faith, doubt, and the profound meaning embedded within our everyday existence?

May this study guide serve as a companion on your quest for understanding, guiding you towards a richer encounter with the ordinary mysteries of life.

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# How to Use This Guide

I've designed this guide for small group discussions and an individual reflection guide. There is no best way; there is only the way you want to make it work in your setting. The group study guide can be utilized in either 6 or 8 sessions. The length depends on the people you gather, their time availability, and their desire. I often find more people are willing to sign up for shorter time frames rather than longer ones. But you know your folks best.

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# SMALL GROUP BEST PRACTICES

**S**tarting a small group is relatively simple. It requires a meeting space, a group of people, and a plan for how to spend the time together. However, attention to detail can enhance the group's potential.

When inviting people to join, aim for 5-8 members (initially invite up to 12 as not everyone will agree to participate). Start with 2-4 people you know well, set a meeting time, and then invite others who might benefit. Make personal, one-on-one invitations. I know you want to post an announcement somewhere, but the reality is that nothing beats a personal invitation.

Choose a quiet, easily accessible meeting location. Consider whether you'll have food and how that affects the location. Set a consistent meeting time and frequency (weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly). Meetings should last about an hour. If you meet via Zoom or other online video conferencing, keep the meeting to one hour.

Structure meetings with a set start and end time. Allow time for settling in, the main content/discussion, and wrap-up/closing ritual. Encourage participation through open-ended questions and guidelines for confidentiality and attendance. It's best to remind people what gets discussed stays in the group.

Between meetings, it helps to stay connected with participants through email, text, or other personal check-ins. This builds trust and enhances the group experience. If you want, and the group seems open to it, consider a social event at some point. Small groups are as much about the relationships as the content.

Effective small group leadership involves preparation, facilitating discussion, acknowledging differences, and encouraging growth.

While leading a small group can be rewarding, it also presents challenges. Best practices include embracing these basic guidelines:

- Start on time and end on time.
- Everyone gets to speak, and everyone gets to listen. (No one dominates)
- What's said in the group stays in the group.
- Call or email people who miss a session.



A helpful outline for each session:

Check-in and Introductions – 5 – 10 minutes

Discussion of Chapters – 40 – 45 minutes

Wrap-Up and Closing – 5 – 10 minutes

Group Study Guide

Your group needs to decide how best to proceed. The book has 26 chapters. If you meet weekly, that will take you 6 months. I'm not sure most groups will find that sustainable. I find most groups do best with a 6-session plan. I suggest the following schedule

Session One – The Introduction plus chapters 1, 2 & 3.

Session Two – Chapters 4, 5 & 6

Session Three – Chapters 7, 8, 9 & 10

Session Four - Chapters 11, 12, 13 & 14

Session Five – Chapters 15, 16, 17, 18 & 19

Session Six – Chapters 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

While this schedule does mean less reading up front and more at the end, I believe the sessions will be more satisfying. If you want to extend to an eight session series, you could divide the readings from session five and six above and fold them into the later sessions.

The reflection questions on the following pages are intended to help the reader apply the essay to their own life. Some people like to journal with the questions, so I've left plenty of white space for notes. In a discussion group you may want to take one question from each chapter as you meet together as a group.

There is no right way to do this work. Have fun and play with it. If a conversation is going well but you don't get to the other chapters, so be it. Enjoy and give thanks for the depth of dialogue.

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# CHAPTER REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

## Chapter 1

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# "WE ARE CITIZENS OF TWO REALMS"

1. The author quotes Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who says, "Citizens of two realms, we all must sustain a dual allegiance..." What do you think Heschel means by the "two realms" he refers to? How do you understand or experience this idea of living in two realms?

2. This chapter explores the shift from a more sacred worldview to a secular scientific worldview in modern times. What are some potential downsides of an overly secular, rational worldview that dismisses the sacred realm? How might regaining a balance between the two realms benefit individuals and society?

3. Carl Jung believed humans could not live meaningless lives without a connection to something larger. There needs to be more than the material world. What experiences or practices have helped you find deeper meaning and connection to the "realm of mystery, wonder, and God," as the author puts it?

4. The author intends to "amplify opportunities to rekindle meaning and connection with God" through exploring story, dreams, the arts, meditation, etc. Which of those potential paths most intrigues or resonates with your spiritual journey? Why?

## Chapter 2

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# “WE NEED SYMBOLIC INTELLIGENCE”

1. The chapter discusses symbolic intelligence as the ability to engage with symbols, metaphors, and sacred texts with an attitude of wonder and openness to being moved emotionally and spiritually. Can you think of a time when you experienced a symbol, work of art, or sacred story in this way? What was that experience like for you?
2. The author contrasts a literal reading of the Adam and Eve story with a symbolic interpretation focused on the garden representing the intersection of the conscious and unconscious realms. What resonates with you about this symbolic interpretation? How might exploring symbolic meanings in sacred stories or myths impact your spiritual life?
3. The chapter suggests that our modern society has become overly dominated by literalism and rational thought at the expense of engaging life's sacred, mystery, and symbolic aspects. Do you agree or disagree? How have you experienced a need for more symbolic thinking or spiritual exploration in your own life?
4. Symbols and metaphors are described as ways to engage our whole being—mind, emotions, senses, imagination. Can you think of a personal symbol or metaphor that resonates deeply within you? What does it evoke or represent?
5. The quote states: "Anything becomes a symbol when it has some hidden quality that moves us in some way." Look around you right now - is there an object or image you see that could be viewed symbolically?
6. This chapter suggests practices like spending time in nature, meditation, and creativity can help rekindle symbolic intelligence. Which of these resonates most with you and why? What is one small step you could take to incorporate more symbolic experience into your life?

## Chapter 3

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# “HOLY CURIOSITY”

1. The author describes different types of curiosity - physical, relational, intellectual, organizational, and spiritual/holy curiosity. Which type(s) of curiosity resonate most with you and why? Can you share an example of how you've experienced or expressed that curiosity?
2. The chapter suggests cultivating "holy curiosity" can lead to a deeper, richer spiritual life. Do you agree? Why or why not? What might a spirituality rooted in curiosity and wonder look like for you?
3. The author wrestles with some theological questions sparked by his holy curiosity, such as God's nature and prayer's purpose. Are there any spiritual/theological questions you've grappled with due to your sense of curiosity? If so, what were they?
4. Jesus is highlighted as modeling holy curiosity by asking questions that invite others to express their needs and desires. When has being curious and asking questions opened up a meaningful connection or insight for you about others? How might practicing this curious questioning influence your relationships and encounters with others?
5. Ultimately, the author imagines becoming "a person who is genuinely curious about others, about life, about the way things work and don't work." What small step could you take to cultivate more curiosity and openness to learning in your daily life? What might be one obstacle to overcome? What might be the benefits of doing so?

## Chapter 4

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# “HOPE AND RESILIENCE”

**1** . The author describes having a transformative experience at the abbey where he could hear familiar Christian prayers and liturgies in a new symbolic, metaphorical way rather than literal. Have you ever had an experience that allowed you to encounter a familiar spiritual truth or practice with fresh eyes? If so, describe what opened you to that new perspective.

2. Rilke's quote about religion being "a natural animation within a being through whom the wind of God blows" resonated deeply with the author. What metaphors or symbolic language around spirituality/faith speaks profoundly to your experience? Why do you think symbolic/metaphoric language can be so powerful?

3. The chapter emphasizes the role of patience in personal growth, healing, and cultivating hope and resilience. Why do you think patience is difficult for many people, including the author? What has been your experience with the slow unfolding of growth processes in your own life?

4. The author was struck by the presenters' vulnerability and honest sharing of personal struggles. When have you encountered that kind of authenticity around life's difficulties in a faith community? How did it impact you? What might allow more vulnerability to open up?

5. At the end, the author reflects on the need to be patient with himself, others, and the natural cycles of life. What is one area of your life where you may need to practice more patience right now? What might help nurture that patience?

## Chapter 5

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# "THE INNER AND OUTER JOURNEY OF REDEMPTION"

1. The author highlights how recent Disney films like Encanto have portrayed villains and "evil" in a more nuanced, complex way rather than as purely one-dimensional bad guys. Why do you think this storytelling shift is happening? How might presenting evil/darkness with more nuance be important?
2. The chapter discusses the Jungian concept of the "shadow" - the repressed or unacknowledged parts of ourselves that we often project onto others. Can you recall recognizing your own "shadow" being projected outwardly? What did you learn from that experience?
3. The author resonated with the metaphor of each person carrying an invisible "backpack" containing wounds, biases, and wildness from their past. What might be weighing you down in your own metaphorical backpack? What could opening it up and examining its contents offer?
4. Martin Luther King Jr.'s quotes about love transforming enemies into friends are shared. When have you witnessed the redemptive, transformative power of love in your own life or the world around you?
5. The author suggests inner healing and outer healing of the world are interconnected. Do you agree? How might doing the inner work of self-examination and shadow integration allow you to show up differently in facing the brokenness and divisions in the outer world?

# "HOWARD THURMAN & CARL JUNG: COMMON THREADS ALONG THE MYSTICAL PATH"

- 1** . The chapter highlights some similarities between Thurman's mystical theology and Jung's depth psychology in their emphases on cultivating self-awareness and connecting with something greater than oneself. Can you think of other wisdom traditions/philosophies that share this focus? How might these different perspectives complement or challenge each other?
2. Thurman speaks of the "inner sanctuary" - a space within each person to connect with the divine. Jung has related ideas about the unconscious. When have you experienced accessing your "inner depths" or unconscious realms? What insights or growth came from that experience?
3. The author suggests both Thurman and Jung saw their work as providing paths toward personal transformation. What does authentic personal growth and transformation mean to you? What attitudes, practices, or realizations tend to catalyze growth in your life?
4. The quote about the "movement of the Spirit" calling people to "act against the spirit of their times" points to transcending cultural norms for a higher purpose. When has being countercultural or swimming against the stream opened you to deeper truths?



## Chapter 7

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# "WHY I AM A TREE HUGGER"

1. Towards the end, Jung cautions that life's biggest problems are "fundamentally insoluble" and must be "outgrown" rather than solved. How might this perspective change your outlook on your difficulties or intractable issues? What might it look like to "outgrow" them?

**1** . The author describes having a profound experience of the sacred while sitting with an oak tree. Can you recall when, in nature, you encountered a sense of the holy or numinous? What was that experience like for you?

2. The passage explores how trees and the natural world are potent symbols across many religious and spiritual traditions. What speaks to you about using tree imagery/metaphors to represent spiritual truths or the mystical path? What other symbols from nature resonate deeply?

3. Jung compared the human soul to a tree, with branches reaching up and roots going deep. Jung connects the creative process to being "implanted in the human psyche" like a living tree. What insights does this metaphor offer about the nature of creativity and the creative life? How might nurturing your own "creative tree" lead to personal growth? How might this metaphor apply to your own spiritual journey or psychological growth? What has "grounded" you or allowed you to transcend?

4. The chapter suggests that our modern, materialist worldview has caused a disconnect from experiences of the sacred in nature. Do you agree? What practices or perceptions shifts might allow for more openness to sacred encounters?

5. The Thai Buddhist monk's practice of ordaining trees stopped deforestation by tapping into cultural values. How might cultivating reverence and spiritual connection to nature impact environmental actions? What values from your tradition could be applied?

## Chapter 8

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# “RECONNECTING WITH THE EARTH”

- 1** . What are the key differences between the ecospirituality and ecopsychology movements? How do they approach the human-nature connection from differing perspectives?
2. The chapter states, “We need a shift from a human-centered worldview to a bio-centered one.” Why is this shift significant, and how could adopting a more bio-centered worldview impact your daily life and choices?
3. The author discusses his early spiritual connection to nature. Reflect on your childhood and life experiences. When have you felt a profound bond with the natural world? What impact did those experiences have on you?
4. The author discusses theologian Sallie McFague’s argument for seeing the Earth as “God’s body.” How might adopting this symbolic, embodied understanding of nature influence one’s spiritual beliefs and practices? How could it shape environmental ethics?
5. Psychologist Theodore Roszak suggests modern society has led to alienation from our “ecological unconscious” - an innate psychological need to bond with nature. Reflect on your own experiences. In what ways have you felt connected or disconnected from the natural world, and what have been the psychological/spiritual impacts?
6. At the end, the author provides some practical suggestions, such as civic engagement, rethinking housing/transportation, spending time in green spaces, and outdoor religious practices. Which of these resonates most with you, and what’s one specific action step you could take to reconnect with nature daily?

## Chapter 9

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# "THE SOUL AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE":

1. The author explores various philosophical and religious perspectives on defining the "soul." How would you describe your understanding or conception of the soul? How has your view been shaped by your spiritual/religious beliefs or personal experiences?
2. The dialogue with ChatGPT raises questions about whether AI can have consciousness, self-awareness, and an essence akin to a human soul. After reading this chapter, what is your perspective? Could AI ever develop something analogous to a soul, or is there an unbridgeable gap between human consciousness and machine intelligence?
3. C.G. Jung expressed caution about technology creating an "imbalance" and estranging humans from their natural instincts. In what ways have you experienced the benefits and downsides of our increasing reliance on technology in modern life? How might you cultivate more "soul" nurturing activities and practices to counterbalance this?
4. The author concludes by suggesting several soulful activities, such as hiking, visiting museums, reading poetry, etc. Which of these resonates most with you and enriches your spiritual growth? What are some of your favorite practices for momentarily unplugging from technology to tap into your soul and essence?

# "OUR INSATIABLE APPETITE FOR CERTAINTY"

1. The author suggests that humans have an innate drive to seek control and predictability and minimize uncertainty in life. Can you reflect on instances where you've experienced this desire for certainty? What were the consequences, positive or negative?
2. The chapter explores how our quest for certainty can sometimes lead us in problematic directions, like doubling down on beliefs despite contradictory evidence (the cult example). When have certitude or rigid belief systems caused difficulties or limitations in your personal growth and perspective?
3. Ancient wisdom traditions like Buddhism, Stoicism, and Jesus' teachings emphasize accepting life's inherent impermanence and focusing energy inwardly. How might practices of non-attachment, going with the flow, and separating outcomes from one's worth allow more peace amid uncertainty?
4. The Rumi poem encourages greeting each new arrival or experience in the "guest house" of life with welcome and gratitude. What spiritual practices or mindsets could you develop to be more open to life's ambiguities as potential guides rather than constantly seeking to control the uncontrollable?

# “HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE VIRGIN BIRTH?”

1. The author contrasts a “literalist” view of scripture with an “inspired” symbolic view. How has your approach to interpreting sacred texts evolved? What are the benefits and potential pitfalls of each perspective?
2. Joseph Campbell highlighted how virgin birth narratives appear across ancient mythological and religious traditions. How might understanding the virgin birth as a symbolic metaphor or archetype enhance or challenge your spiritual understanding of this doctrine?
3. Hans Urs von Balthasar asks, “What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself?” Reflect on how you invite the birthing of the sacred more fully into your own life and era.
4. The Eastern Orthodox conception of Mary as the “Birth-Giver to God” points towards human cooperation and synergy with the divine. How could this symbolic view impact your sense of cocreation and spiritual generativity?
5. Carl Jung saw profound psychological significance in doctrines like the Virgin Birth and Assumption of Mary, reflecting the human longing for wholeness. What spiritual practices or imaginative work might allow you to engage with these symbols and archetypes for your inner integration?

# "AMONG THE DARKEST PLACES"

1. The author shares his experience of stargazing in a dark canyon and relates it to the symbolism of light and darkness in the Advent season. How have you experienced darkness, whether literal or metaphorical, in your own life? In what ways might embracing or exploring darkness lead to a deeper appreciation of light and hope?
2. The chapter discusses the historical context of the December 25th date for Christmas and its relationship to pagan festivals and astronomical events. How does understanding the mythological and symbolic dimensions of religious narratives, rather than reading them as literal history, influence your engagement with these stories? What insights or perspectives does this approach offer for your spiritual journey?
3. The author suggests that hope is a unifying theme of humanity, regardless of one's religious identification. What are some of your deepest hopes—for yourself, your community, and the world? How do these hopes motivate or guide your daily life and spiritual practice?
4. The chapter quotes Meister Eckhart's mystical teaching about God giving birth within the human soul. What does it mean for the divine to be born within an individual? How might cultivating a sense of divine presence or indwelling support personal growth and transformation?
5. The author asks, "What do you hope will be born in you, your community, this world, in the coming year?" Take some time to reflect on this question and consider writing down your responses. What practical steps might you take to nurture these hopes and bring them to fruition? How might connecting with a sense of shared hope in your relationships and your wider community sustain you in this process?

# "JUST AFTER THE DARKEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR"

1. The author discusses the Feast of Holy Innocents, a lesser-known observance during the Christmas season that commemorates King Herod's massacre of young children. Why do you think this disturbing event is included in the biblical narrative? How might reflecting on the reality of suffering and evil, even amidst the joy of Christmas, deepen our understanding of the human condition and the need for spiritual growth?
2. The chapter explores the idea that every person has a "shadow" side, as described by Carl Jung, and that groups and societies also have collective shadows. How have you witnessed the reality of the human capacity for evil in yourself and the world around you? What practices or perspectives help you confront and integrate your own shadow while also working to address evil and injustice in society?
3. The author suggests that unattended sorrow is a significant problem in the modern world and that we need collective ways of processing grief and loss. What rituals or practices, whether religious or secular, have helped you navigate experiences of grief and sorrow? How might cultivating a greater capacity for collective grieving lead to personal and societal healing?
4. The chapter touches on the universal human question of why suffering exists. While acknowledging that there are no easy answers, the author suggests that gaining perspective on the universality of suffering can be helpful. What philosophical, theological, or personal frameworks have helped you make sense of the reality of suffering in your life and the world?
5. The lyrics of the song "My Father's Body" by Over the Rhine are shared at the end of the chapter, expressing themes of loss, surrender, and ongoing connection with a deceased loved one. How do these lyrics resonate with your own experiences of grief and letting go? How might engaging with art, music, or literature and exploring these themes support your grieving and spiritual growth?

# "WRESTLING WITH JESUS CHRIST"

1. The author speaks of being attracted to and repulsed by certain portrayals of Jesus Christ. What aspects of the Christ figure deeply resonate with you, and what depictions trouble or turn you away? How do you discern an authentic spiritual path amidst conflicting representations?
2. The incarnation—the idea of the eternal, divine entering into the temporal human experience—is explored as a profound mystery. How might meditate on this paradox of the infinite becoming finite shape your spiritual perspectives and practices?
3. The ethical teachings and example of Jesus' life move the author. What is one area where you feel challenged to greater compassion, humility, or justice-seeking based on Christ's ethics? What spiritual tools could help you embody those values more fully?
4. The crucifixion is highlighted for its symbolic power and existential encounter with suffering. How have you grappled with the realities of pain, loss, and human anguish in your life? In what ways could the cross serve as a guide or companion on that journey?
5. The resurrection is presented not as rational proof but as a reconnecting of the eternal and temporal after death. How could you open yourself to experiencing that reunion of heaven and Earth, transcendence and immanence, in your daily life? What ritual or practice might give you a taste of resurrection?



## Chapter 15

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# "THE BEATITUDES INSIDE AND OUT"

1. The author notes that while the Beatitudes are well-known ethical teachings, the word "blessed" is often misunderstood in its modern usage. How does exploring the deeper meaning of "Makarios" (extending grace, enlarging mercy) reshape your understanding of these passages? How might you embody and experience that sense of expansiveness?
2. Fritz Kunkel interprets the Beatitudes as challenges to the ego's dominance and calls for inner growth. Can you reflect on one or two of the Beatitudes that particularly rub against your ego's defensiveness or comfort zones? What spiritual work might allow those teachings to permeate your life?
3. The Beatitudes contain paradoxical sayings that can seem "preposterous" from a conventional worldly perspective (e.g., the meek inheriting the Earth). When have you experienced the truth of such sacred paradoxes or witnessed an upending of typical power dynamics? How do these teachings reveal a different order of reality?
4. The chapter highlights how the Beatitudes are not just ethical injunctions but guides for inward transformation and conscious growth. What spiritual practices or relationships could provide a conducive environment for you to metabolize these teachings on a deeper level?
5. The Beatitudes depict an adventure into becoming more fully human. What is your vision of a life embodying the values lauded here - the poverty of Spirit, mourning, meekness, mercy, purity of heart, and peacemaking? What first steps could you take to align yourself more with that ideal?

# "DANCING THE HOLY TRINITY":

1. The author contrasts a literal, historical view of the Trinity doctrine with an imaginative, symbolic approach. How has your perspective on the Trinity evolved? What resonates or challenges you about an imaginative engagement?
2. The Eastern Orthodox notion of perichoresis depicts the Trinity as a divine dance of reciprocal love. How might envisioning God's interior life as an energetic dance impact your image of the sacred and your spiritual practices?
3. Feminist theologians have critiqued masculine God language like "Father" as perpetuating patriarchal views. How does expanding Trinitarian imagery (e.g., Creator/Redeemer/Sanctifier or referring to the Spirit as "She") reshape one's sense of the divine and one's relationship to it?
4. The chapter suggests the Trinity highlights God's dynamic, relational nature over a static, distant deity. How could deeper attunement to the "humming divine energies" catalyze your spiritual aliveness and intimacy with the sacred?
5. One implication raised is that the Trinity models loving communion without loss of distinctiveness. How might reflecting on Trinitarian dynamics inspire new ways of being in a relationship - with others, yourself, and the world around you?

# "WHY DO WE STILL NEED ASH WEDNESDAY?"

1. The author shares the story of John Plummer and Phan Thi Kim Phuc to illustrate deception. How does this story relate to the broader theme of the chapter and the need for self-reflection and confession? How might recognizing our capacity for self-deception lead to personal growth?
2. The chapter draws parallels between the Christian practice of confession and Alcoholics Anonymous's twelve steps. In what ways do these two approaches to self-reflection and accountability complement each other? How might incorporating elements of both enhance one's spiritual journey?
3. The author suggests that Ash Wednesday is a day of honesty and "getting real" with ourselves, our relationships, and the divine. Why is this kind of honest self-reflection essential for personal and spiritual growth? What barriers might prevent us from engaging in this practice, and how can we overcome them?
4. The chapter acknowledges that many people have been hurt by the Christian church's misuse of concepts like sin, confession, and repentance. How can we reclaim these practices in a healthy, constructive way that promotes healing and growth rather than shame and guilt?
5. Imposing ashes on the forehead is central to Ash Wednesday observances. The author notes that we can only see the ashes on our foreheads in a mirror. How does this symbolism relate to the broader theme of self-reflection and facing our human fragility and tendency toward self-deception?

# "HOLY WEEK: WHEN DEATH IS THE GREATEST GIFT"

1. The author shares a story of a teenage girl reading 1 Corinthians 13 at her grandfather's funeral, highlighting the importance of "eulogy virtues" over "résumé virtues." How do you understand the distinction between these two types of virtues? What qualities or characteristics do you hope will define your life and legacy?
2. The chapter suggests that death is a gift because it forces us to face our limits and choose how to spend our time and energy. In what ways has the reality of mortality influenced your priorities and decisions? How might a greater awareness of life's brevity shape your spiritual journey and relationships with others?
3. The author argues that American culture is essentially "death-phobic and grief-illiterate." Have you observed this tendency in your own life or community? What personal or cultural factors might contribute to a reluctance to engage with death and grief in healthy ways?
4. The chapter emphasizes the importance of expressing sorrow and grief, citing Denise Levertov's poem about unexpressed sorrows blocking access to the soul. What practices or rituals have you found helpful for processing and expressing grief? How might create space for collective grieving support individual and communal healing in religious or secular contexts?
5. The author suggests that Holy Week, focusing on death and resurrection, offers a profound message about the interconnectedness of death and life. How do you understand the spiritual or existential significance of this link between mortality and vitality? In what ways might embracing death as a part of life deepen your sense of purpose, gratitude, or connection to the divine?

## Chapter 19

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# "WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN?"

1. The author presents the theology of the cross as one way to understand suffering and evil in the world. How does this perspective, which emphasizes God's solidarity with human suffering, challenge or complement your understanding of God's role in the face of pain and injustice? In what ways might this theology offer comfort or hope in times of personal or collective struggle?
2. In Part 2, the author explores the concept of the "shadow" in Jungian psychology and its relevance to understanding the darker aspects of religion. How do you know the idea of the shadow in individual psychology and religious institutions? Have you observed instances where unacknowledged shadow elements have led to harmful or destructive behaviors in religious contexts?
3. The chapter discusses religious fundamentalism as an extreme manifestation of the shadow side of religion. What factors contribute to the rise of fundamentalist movements across different faith traditions? How might a deeper engagement with religious symbols, myths, and the process of shadow integration help counteract fundamentalism's pull?
4. The author emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and integrating the shadow, individually and collectively, as a path to a more authentic and compassionate expression of faith. What practices or strategies have you found helpful for confronting and integrating your shadow elements? How might religious communities foster a culture of self-reflection and shadow work among their members?
5. The chapter concludes with a quote suggesting that each individual's unacknowledged shadow contributes to the collective evil in the world. How does this idea resonate with your sense of personal responsibility in the face of suffering and injustice? In what ways might your own spiritual growth and shadow work contribute to healing and transformation on a larger scale?

## Chapter 20

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# "A TALE OF TWO TALES"

1. The author presents two contrasting narratives about religion in the United States: one of decline and another of spiritual hunger. How have you observed these two narratives in your community or personal experience? In what ways might acknowledging both stories lead to a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in contemporary society?
2. The chapter highlights several examples of religious communities that effectively address people's yearning for spirituality and connection. What common themes or practices do you notice among these examples? How might these approaches inform your congregation's efforts to foster spiritual growth and communal belonging?
3. The author suggests that spiritual practices such as mindfulness, lament, and service can be powerful ways to connect with God and one another. What spiritual practices have you found most meaningful in your journey? How might incorporating these practices into the life of a religious community deepen its sense of purpose and unity?
4. One example in the chapter describes a couple who turned their experience of loss into a ministry supporting other families affected by gun violence. How does this story illustrate how personal suffering can be transformed into compassionate action? In what ways might your own experiences of hardship or grief inspire you to serve and connect with others?
5. The chapter concludes with an anecdote about a friend who found community and generosity in a local gym. The author suggests that this friend could frame the gym community's actions as an expression of "ancient/future faith." How might this perspective help to bridge the gap between "secular" and "sacred" spaces? In what unexpected places have you encountered spiritual depth or communal care, and how might you intentionally cultivate a sense of the sacred in these contexts?

# "ASKING A BETTER QUESTION"

1. The author presents two contrasting narratives about religion in the United States: one of decline and another of spiritual hunger. How have you observed these two narratives in your community or personal experience? In what ways might acknowledging both stories lead to a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in contemporary society?
2. The author suggests that asking, "Where are you finding grace, peace, or meaning?" is a better approach than inquiring about church attendance or religious affiliation. How might shifting the focus of our questions lead to more authentic and meaningful conversations about spirituality? How can you incorporate this type of questioning to foster deeper connections and understanding in your interactions with others?
3. The chapter presents several examples of people finding grace and meaning in activities such as walking with friends, gardening, volunteering, and participating in small groups. What do these diverse experiences suggest about how individuals can connect with the sacred daily? Reflect on your life and consider where you have found moments of grace, peace, or meaning outside traditional religious settings.
4. The author highlights the original meaning of "religion" as "reconnecting" and suggests a deepening interest in the sacred, even in our secular world. How does this idea of a "post-secular sacred world" resonate with your observations and experiences? How might recognizing this hunger for the sacred in yourself and others shape your approach to spiritual growth and community-building?
5. The chapter emphasizes the importance of "story, song, ritual in community for the sake of the world" as central elements of spiritual practice. How have you experienced the power of these elements in your spiritual journey? What steps can you take to cultivate or deepen your engagement with story, song, ritual, and community, individually and in the context of a spiritual community?
6. The author concludes with a story illustrating the difference between asking "What was said?" and "What happened?" at a religious service, suggesting that our post-secular world is seeking an encounter with the

sacred. How does this distinction between information and experience relate to your spiritual longings and practices? How might focusing on the experiential and transformative aspects of spirituality, rather than just intellectual knowledge, enrich your journey and your ability to connect with others on a deeper level?



## Chapter 22

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# "GIVE IT A REST"

1. The author observes that the typical response to "How are you?" has shifted from "I'm fine" to "I'm so busy." How does this change reflect the increasing busyness and restlessness of contemporary culture? In what ways have you personally experienced the pressure to be constantly productive or active, and how has this affected your sense of well-being and spiritual growth?
2. The chapter highlights the biblical commandment to "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." It suggests this practice is crucial for fostering healthy relationships with God and others. How do you understand the connection between Sabbath rest and the quality of your relationships? What practical steps can you take to prioritize regular periods of rest and renewal in your own life?
3. The author acknowledges that in our modern society, Sabbath-keeping is largely an individual responsibility rather than a culturally reinforced norm. What challenges have you faced in trying to establish a consistent rhythm of rest and reflection in your life? How might seeking the support and accountability of a community or small group help you overcome these challenges?
4. The chapter presents Walter Brueggemann's idea of Sabbath as both an act of resistance against the demands of consumer culture and an alternative way of being rooted in the awareness of God's gifts. How does this understanding of the Sabbath resonate with your experiences and longings? In what ways might embracing a Sabbath practice help you resist the pressures of "the rat race of anxiety" and cultivate a deeper sense of gratitude and receptivity to God's presence?
5. The author shares the story of Tricia Hersey, the "Nap Bishop," who advocates for rest as a form of resistance against the oppressive demands of "Grind Culture." How does the idea of rest as resistance challenge or expand your understanding of the spiritual significance of the Sabbath? What insights or inspiration can you draw from Hersey's message as you seek to incorporate more intentional rest into your own life and spiritual practice?

# THE MEANING OF MONEY

1. The author suggests that money has taken on a sacred or divine quality in modern society, even pointing to architectural examples highlighted by mythologist Joseph Campbell. Reflect on your own attitudes and behaviors—in what ways do you treat money as sacred or imbue it with spiritual significance? How might recognizing this tendency impact your relationship with money?
2. The chapter explores how money connects to psychological complexes, emotional charges, and revelations about our souls.
3. . Can you recall instances where reactions around money exposed deeper psychological or spiritual dynamics within yourself or others? What insights did you gain?
4. Jesus had much to say about money and its potential to captivate the heart in unhealthy ways. How do you balance a healthy, grounded perspective on money while living in a culture that constantly elevates importance? What spiritual practices or mindsets help you keep money in its proper place?
5. The author describes money as dynamic, flowing, and capable of nourishing life when properly channeled. How could adopting this symbolic view of money as a "currency of love and appreciation" reshape your attitudes and practices around giving, spending, and handling finances?

## Chapter 24

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# "COMPASSION AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE"

1. The author distinguishes between empathy (trying to feel what someone else feels) and compassion (coming alongside someone in their suffering). Which resonates more with your understanding? Can you think of a time when you experienced genuine compassion from someone? How did it impact you?
2. The chapter highlights how Jesus was frequently "moved with compassion" in the gospels, leading him to act by feeding, healing, etc. When have you witnessed compassion sparking action to help others? What motivates you to take compassionate action?
3. The author suggests that a "gritty mysticism" needs to be grounded in compassion - connecting spiritual depths to caring for real human needs. Do you see spirituality and compassion as interconnected? Why or why not?
4. Cultivating compassion is presented as crucial for promoting justice, human rights, and positive social change. Where do you see compassion lacking in societal systems/structures today? What might it look like to bring more compassion to those areas?
5. At the end, the author is prompted by a card to consider acts of kindness as a spiritual practice. When did you last perform a simple act of kindness for someone else? What did you experience through that act? What act of compassion could you practice today?

# "THE TURNING OF TIME AND ROSH HASHANAH"

1. The author suggests that religious stories, like dreams, are symbolically encoded messages from the depths of the human soul. How does this perspective on sacred texts influence your reading and interpretation? In what ways might a symbolic, rather than literal, understanding of religious narratives enrich your spiritual journey and knowledge of the human experience?
2. The chapter contrasts linear and cyclical understandings of time, noting that while Western culture primarily embraces a linear view, this perspective emerged from an earlier cyclical conception. How do you personally experience time in your own life? In what ways do you relate to the idea of time as a series of unrepeatable moments, and how does this understanding shape your sense of meaning and purpose?
3. The author highlights Carl Jung's view of time as a multi-layered and deeply personal experience intertwined with our emotions, memories, and inner conflicts. Reflect on your relationship with time and how it has evolved. How have joyful and challenging significant events shaped your perception of time and its role in your personal growth and spiritual development?
4. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious suggests that certain archetypes, symbols, and themes are universally present in human experience, transcending time constraints. Consider the archetypes mentioned in the chapter (the Wise Old Man/Woman, the Child, and the Trickster) and how they manifest in stories, myths, and everyday life. How might recognizing these timeless patterns in your experiences and interactions deepen your understanding of the human condition and your connection to others?
5. The chapter concludes with a quote from Frederick Buechner, urging readers to "listen to your life" and embrace all moments, both painful and joyful, as opportunities to connect with the Holy and experience grace. How can you cultivate a greater sense of presence and attentiveness to the "key moments" in your

life? What practices or rituals help you more fully appreciate the mystery and grace of existence, even amid life's challenges and everyday routines?

## Chapter 26

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# "WE ARE LINKED TO THE INFINITE"

1. The chapter distinguishes between primary religious encounters (direct personal experiences) and secondary religion (teachings about faith or organizational aspects). Reflect on your spiritual journey. Have you had any experiences that you would consider primary religious encounters? How have these experiences influenced your understanding of the divine and spiritual growth?
2. The author shares the story of his friend David, who had a mysterious encounter with a nurse during a crisis. Have you ever had an unexplained or numinous experience that left a lasting impact on you? How did this experience shape your perception of the world and your relationship with the sacred?
3. The chapter suggests that people in our time seek the eternal and yearn for encounters with the infinite to find meaning and purpose. In what ways do you relate to this desire for a connection with mystery, wonder, and the infinite? How might cultivating a sense of openness to the eternal enrich your spiritual practice and daily life?
4. The author presents five ways to connect with the spiritual realm: the arts, relationships, nature, dreams, and prayer/meditation. Which of these avenues resonate most strongly with you, and why? What steps can you take to more intentionally engage with these practices to deepen your spiritual growth and encounter the divine?
5. The chapter concludes with a quote from C.G. Jung, emphasizing the importance of one's relationship to the infinite as a crucial question in life. How would you characterize your relationship to the infinite in your spiritual journey? What insights from this chapter might inspire you to explore or strengthen this relationship, and what practical changes can you make to create more space for encountering the sacred in your life?

# Conclusion

1.

As you conclude your small group, consider a couple of options:

1. Ensure you stay in touch with people in your group so the informal conversations can continue.
2. If you'd like another small group discussion, consider my book, *Everyday Spirituality*. You can find the book and a free study guide on my website at [www.jameshazelwood.net](http://www.jameshazelwood.net)
3. There are other options, and you may be interested in pursuing them for your group.
4. I always want to speak with people individually or in a small group. Now that we are all familiar with Zoom, we can schedule a meeting at your convenience. Just drop me an email at [jim@jameshazelwood.net](mailto:jim@jameshazelwood.net)
5. Lastly, I continue to write a periodic newsletter on many of the themes from this book. You can subscribe for free at [www.jameshazelwood.net/newsletter](http://www.jameshazelwood.net/newsletter)

Still in One Peace

A black and white logo featuring the name "Jim" written in a cursive, handwritten style. The letter "J" is large and loops around, while "i" and "m" are smaller and follow in a fluid, connected script.

*A black and white logo*

*Description automatically  
generated*